Being Other:
The Experiences of Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims

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Declaration

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Kavindi Wadumestri

Date: / /
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Abstract

Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have been constructed as problems against a backdrop of ‘moral panics’, which have included events such as the ‘Sydney gang rapes’ (2000-6) and the ‘Cronulla race riots’ (2005). These moral panics drew on long-standing racist discourses that represent these young people as a threat to the Australian ‘mainstream’. In the midst of these moral panics, there was concern that young people who were experiencing any resulting racism might respond to their experiences in illegal or violent ways. I was concerned that youth services and programs aimed at addressing these issues were not sufficiently informed by well-grounded research into how young Australia-Lebanese-Muslims experienced, understood and dealt with racism.

This thesis has attempted to address these concerns by focusing on the experiences of young people of Lebanese and Muslim background, who were born in Australia and live in the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. My study employed a phenomenological conceptual framework. It relied on a number of qualitative research methods, including interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observations and video analysis. These were used to make sense of how these young people experienced ‘Othering’ and their sense of belonging to the ‘national home’.

My research suggests that young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ ‘everyday experiences of racism’ are multi-dimensional and made up of more than just personal encounters with racism. It reveals that mediated and vicariously experienced racism were significant aspects of their experience. I suggest that interviewees’ responses to racism are namely ‘avoidance’, ‘fighting back’ and ‘constructive engagement’. This thesis proposes that one way service providers can support these young people is to build on the pathways of resilience that young people have already been paving.
Introduction

I was born in SriLanka and migrated with my parents to Australia at the age of seven. One of my earliest memories of what being a ‘foreigner’ meant I can recollect happened in primary school, during my first few years in Australia. Onti, who had come to Australia from Timor, and I were two of the few ‘non-white’ children in our primary school. One day a pretty blonde girl in our class approached both of us and asked, ‘Do you know why no-one wants to be friends with you two’? Wanting to know the answer, as Onti and I had often asked this very question ourselves, we replied eagerly, ‘Tell us why’? The girl wearing a self-satisfied smile, turned first to Onti and then to me and said, ‘It is because your skin is the colour of piss, and yours’ is like poo’. She then skipped away happily, having shared her wisdom with us. Onti and I nodded knowingly. The girl’s answer made sense to us at the time. Onti with a shrug said to me, ‘Well, at least it is better to look like piss than poo’. I had to agree. After all Onti had managed to acquire a few more friends than I had done. The pretty blonde girl’s words confirmed my own beliefs developed in the course of several experiences of being teased about my skin colour or my accent. Even at this young age I knew my opportunities in life, including any career opportunities that might open up for me, were likely to depend on my ability, as Hage (Hage 2000, p. 271) put it, to ‘accumulate’ as much ‘Whiteness’ as I could 1. Back then of course

1 I use the notion ‘White’ in the same way Hage (2000) uses it. The notion ‘White’ captures more than the often used concept of ‘Anglo’ and ‘Anglo Celtic’. The term ‘Anglo’ for instance, can not account for the many non-Anglos who relate to and define themselves through the prism of ‘Whiteness,’ which is an ‘imagined’ position of cultural domination born out of the history of European expansion (Hage 2000, pp. 19-20). On discussing the concept of Whiteness (which the concept ‘White’ is linked to) Hage says, ‘Whiteness is an aspiration…. Whiteness and Australianness can be accumulated (up to a certain point) and people can be said to be more of less White and Australian. How White they can be depends on social attributes they possess’ (Hage 2000, p. 20). I use the upper case ‘White’ and Whiteness to indicate reference to more than just white skin colour. ‘White skin colour is certainly a valuable capital in claiming one’s belonging to the nation as a “governmental White Australian”, but it should be remembered that even white skin colour is cumulative… the “White” racial category has expanded to include people previously constructed as non-White’ (Hage 2000, p. 58). I discuss Whiteness and the accumulation of it more in Chapter Three, as well as the related concepts of ‘Governmental’ and ‘National belonging’.
such a sophisticated way of speaking was not then available to me: I would have understood it then as a need to ‘blend in’.

Later, when I was a teenager in the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, African-American music and movies were an important part of everyday life for me and my high school peers. Popular culture was now pumping out a message that being ‘black’ was synonymous with being ‘cool’, funny and sexy. In this context, being ‘exotic’ was envied and anyone who could represent themselves as being more like Afro-Americans (for example, by dressing and talking ‘like them’) was now enjoying the benefit of augmented ‘cultural capital’. The concept of ‘cultural capital’, as people like Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Prudence L. Carter (2003) use it, points to those cultural attributes that allow their possessors to wield power, to confer status, to ‘buy’ them membership into a certain group, or to access certain social and economic opportunities. Bourdieu has shown how certain cultural capital applies to certain ‘fields’ (i.e. it is contextually dependent) (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

As a young Australian of Sri Lankan background, who was and is dark skinned and who could lay claim to certain forms of African-American popular cultural attributes, such as ‘hip-hop’ clothing and music, I would not have had the legitimate and valued cultural capital needed in the context of Australia in the 1950s. However, in the context of Australia in the 1990s, in the ‘field’ of the suburban schoolyard, these same characteristics could now constitute a valued form of cultural capital.

My ‘brown-skinned’ friends and I were even sometimes able to find ways of subverting ‘white’ privilege in this new popular culture. I remember, for example, young ‘white’ boys taunting me and my friends by chanting ‘curry, curry, hot, hot’. This elicited our response, ‘Yeah, we know we are hot, HOT!’ We might even throw in for good measure, a flirtatious wink, knowing that being dark and ‘exotic’
looking were symbols of sexual power\textsuperscript{2}. Academics such as Jensen (2009) would describe such actions taken by my friends and myself as demonstrating ‘sub-cultural agency’. That is to say, instead of trying to embrace or accumulate as much ‘Whiteness’ as possible, we were now embracing, even ‘capitalising on Othering’.

When I reflect back on my experiences of growing up in Australia like this, I think we see the strange interplay of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ elements at work in the experience of ‘identity’ and see these working in an historical way. That is, identity is something that has a ‘duplex’ quality: identity is what other people ascribe to us as much as it is made up of those elements we choose to project out into our social world. Without necessarily knowing why the pretty young blonde girl said what she said, or why some years later elements of popular culture were now valuing all things black and cool, my experience catches some of the shifts in the changing dynamics at work in Australian identity politics, just as it reflects the evolving policies of multiculturalism. As academics on Australian multiculturalism (e.g. Ang & Stratton 1998; Jakubowicz 2002; Joppke 2004) have observed, in the years after 1974 multiculturalism achieved a hegemonic status. During the years of the Hawke-Keating Labor government (1991-1996) multiculturalism was championed strongly by that government (Manne 2004, pp. 5-6). The promotion of multiculturalism during the Keating era provided a certain degree of protection for people like me. The discourse of multiculturalism had helped stigmatise anyone engaging in overtly racist talk or behaviour (Manne 2004, pp. 5-6).

Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll (2006, p. 18) suggest that 1996 represents a symbolic terminus for multiculturalism. This is the year that saw the Howard-led coalition parties form government after a major shift in electoral support away from the Labor Party (Galligan

\textsuperscript{2} I argue in Chapter One that historical western fetishism and sexualisation of the Black or ‘ethnic looking’ Other combine elements of fear \textit{and} fascination (Jensen 2009; Palmer 2003). These symbols of the sexual ‘Other’ (e.g. hip-hop music and clothing) are sometimes capitalised on by those being ‘Othered,’ to claim positive value for their position as Other (Jensen 2009).
& Roberts 2004, p. 94). It was also the year that saw Pauline Hanson and her ‘One Nation’ political movement (McCarthy 1998) explode into Australian politics at the head of a major backlash against multiculturalism. In September 1996, Hanson made her maiden speech in the new parliament in the course of which she lambasted multiculturalism. Hanson got extensive media attention for her clearly stated rejection of multiculturalism, Aboriginal rights and migration (Johnson 1998). Hanson was not silenced by accusations that she was a racist. Indeed she seems to have struck a chord amongst many Australians who, before she came on the scene, felt they were being coerced into lamenting, albeit silently, the ‘good old days’. Her outspokenness in advocating for the ‘everyday Australian’ (meaning the non-elite ‘white’ Australians) enabled those sympathetic to her opinions to also voice their concerns and anger (Manne 2004). Not surprisingly some academics like Ien Ang (2001, p. 100) drew the conclusion that:

The Hanson/Howard ascendancy is a clear indication that more than two decades of official government policy has not led to the generation of a deep and pervasive nation-wide commitment to multiculturalism.

In the years before Hanson and Howard came to power, I had rarely experienced overt forms of racism. I thought, perhaps naively, that multiculturalism had won the battle with various forms of ethnic or racial prejudice. ‘Hansonism’, the term used in public discussion to refer to the period between 1996 and 1998 when Hanson’s views had significant political reach, shattered this belief forever. As I now remember those last months of 1996 and early 1997 it seemed as if all around me the racists were coming out of their closets. In the years after 1996 when ‘Hansonism’ was achieving its early successes I listened to schoolyard discussions about ‘Lebanese gangs’. My friends and acquaintances, many of them migrants themselves, with little or no significant contact with the Lebanese community, claimed that ‘Lebanese culture’ was violent, or that ‘the Lebanese’ held women in low esteem. At the time, I didn’t challenge the claims they were making. I now think that this was because I too
had accepted uncritically what I was reading or hearing through the media about ‘the Lebanese’.

During the Hanson years, and in the years after, I also recollect questioning the extent to which I felt I belonged in Australia. In trying to find ‘my place’, I articulated my ‘Australianness’ more loudly by, for example, looking down on those migrants who ‘stuck to their own’. Yet, not long after, I began to reflect on how easily I had adopted the kinds of public views and discussions flowing around me. Ultimately I became angry at how I had allowed Hansonism and the prejudices I had grown up with to find a place inside me to shape the way I interacted with other Australians, and to influence my perception of my cultural heritage in generally negative terms. At that point my critical response to experiences of the contemporary version of ‘racism’ and to the impact of Hansonism on me personally, was transformed into a passion for fighting racism. I wanted to learn how other young people experienced and coped with racism and how it affected their sense of belonging.

My interest in how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims\(^3\) experienced and coped with racism, and how racism may be affecting their sense

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\(^3\) I understand that it is more grammatically correct to say Lebanese-Australian Muslims (rather than as Australian-Lebanese-Muslims). I have however, chosen to refer to my interviewees as ‘Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ because this is what many of the young people I spoke to prefer to be identified as. That is, to be recognised as having hyphenated identities, with the Australian aspect of themselves put in front of (but in relationship to) the Lebanese and Muslim aspects of their identity.

Hyphenated identities are however mutable, and in certain contexts my interviewees might refer to themselves not as Australian-Lebanese-Muslims but for e.g. as Lebanese-Muslims or as ‘Wogs’. Therefore, while you will see that I have used the term Australian-Lebanese-Muslim(s) most of the time in this thesis, I have on occasion, depending on context, re-arranged the order of the hyphenated identity. For example, I have used the term ‘Lebanese-Australian’ when for example, the interviewee themselves have clearly used this ‘identity arrangement’ or when it seemed to me that they wanted to emphasise their Lebanese cultural identity over their Australianness.

Ashis Sengupta (2008) a writer on the hyphenated identity in Multiethnic America, make a similar argument, to the one I make, on keeping the hyphen. She writes, ‘pairing the ethnic/ancestral by a hyphen’ highlights ‘the fluid-rather-than-fixed’ nature of identity (Sengupta 2008, p. 1). The relationship between two (or more) identities ‘is in a constant state of flux: now the first prioritized over the second, now the second preferred over the first, now a more delicate balance envisioned between the two’ (Sengupta 2008, p. 1).
of belonging, was sparked by the events of 2001. In this year, and
the years following it, there has been a rapid succession of major
events that cast Arab and Muslim communities in Australia as the
pre-eminent ‘folk devils’. First there was a mounting crescendo of
anxiety and alarm about boat loads of mainly Muslim asylum seekers
heading out from Indonesia that lead to the ‘Tampa crisis’ in August
2001. Then the news that ‘Islamic terrorists’ had attacked buildings in
New York and Washington on 2001 September 11 reverberated
throughout the world. On the back of this came the USA-led
invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 as part of a so-
called war on terror, which were interspersed with further terrorist
attacks in Bali, London and Spain. The idea that ‘The West’ was
engaged in a war against the (Boys) Rest (e.g. Lewis 2001; Scruton
2002a, 2002b) provided a commonsense framing of what was
happening. In Australia concern was also being expressed about
young Muslims implicated in ‘ethnic gang rapes’ of ‘white Australian’
women in Sydney. Media coverage of the resulting trials spanned
five years from 2001 to 2006. On 5-7 December 2005 the so-called
‘Cronulla race riots’ took place after a short period of intense media-
sponsored mobilisation of sentiment against Muslims and Lebanese
young people. These events, and public and media reactions to
them, helped create a hostile context for young Muslims and anyone
of ‘Lebanese appearance’ growing up in Australia.

It is not uncommon in the process of doing research to reflect on
My interest in writing this thesis is best understood as an attempt to
better understand my own experience while significantly expanding
the intellectual scale of the sense-making exercise I have embarked
on. Certainly the reader will see how my interest in how young
Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have responded to the intense interest
and public hostility directed at them has a little to do with my own
experience of life as an ethnic-Other in Australia.
Research context

As I have indicated, Australian Muslims became objects of intense media scrutiny and often hostile public commentary following concern about asylum seekers, events such as the terrorist attacks by members of Al-Qaeda in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. In particular Lebanese communities were subjected to a great deal of public criticism in the wake of the Sydney ‘gang rapes’ reportedly by a group of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. A public case was made that these major international instances of terrorism and the local incidents of ‘violence’ were all evidence of a major global conflict between ‘The West’ and ‘The (Islamic) Rest’. This proposition was promoted hard by a number of major international public intellectuals like Bernard Lewis (1990, 1993, 2001) and Roger Scruton (2002a, 2002b). In Australia, public commentators like Andrew Bolt (2002, 2010b) claimed that Australians faced a local version of the ‘Islam against the Rest’ conflict, warning for example that ‘asylum seekers’ arriving on our shores, especially when they had an Islamic or Arab background, threatened our border security. Waxing indignant, journalists such as Charles Miranda (2001) claimed that terrorist sympathisers, many of them born in Australia, lurked in our suburbs. Other media commentators and journalists (e.g. Akermanis 2005; McNamara, Nolan & Wallace 2006; West 2005; Windschuttle, Keith 2005) have helped to resurrect the case that integration or a commitment to ‘core Australian values’ should be emphasised over multiculturalism. They pointed to events such as the ‘Cronulla race riots’ as evidence of resistance to the excesses of multiculturalism.

In such a context I came to wonder how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims made sense of the intense media scrutiny and often overtly hostile discussion about ‘people like them’. Were they, for example, responding in ways as I had done during ‘Hansonism’ when similar arguments about the ‘problems of ethnic minorities’ were being touted? Perhaps they, like I did once upon a time, responded on
occasion to racist taunts (such as ‘curry curry, curry, hot, hot, hot’) by positively affirming difference (‘yes, I know we are hot’)?

Set against a context hostile to young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, I decided to address four basic questions in this thesis. First I ask, how did young (12-25 year old) second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims who live in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians? Second I ask, how have these young people dealt with often challenging and hostile interactions that followed events such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre towers in New York on 11 September 2001 and the ‘Sydney gang rapes’, when racist sentiment was mobilised against Muslims, which included many Lebanese young people? Third I ask what sense of belonging do the young people involved in my research have in respect to the broader ‘Australian society’?

While it is possible to treat these questions as academic I think there are important practical implications that stem from these questions as well. Accordingly my last key question relates to how the findings of this research might be used by community service agencies working with young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims (and perhaps other young people who share similar experiences).

I have not been alone in my interest in establishing how Australian-Lebanese-Muslims interpreted their experiences of racism and/or dealt with these experiences. Researchers, service providers⁴ and governments have been especially interested in how Arab and Muslim young people, including those born and raised in Australia, dealt with the often challenging or hostile responses that followed events such as the September 2001 terrorist attacks and the Sydney gang rapes. There were, for instance, concerns that young people of Arabic speaking backgrounds and young Muslims may be dealing

⁴ Service providers include organisation like the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS), who provide services and welfare programs for Victoria’s Arabic-speaking-background communities, including the needs of young second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims.
with experiences of conflict and tension with other Australians in ways that might be harmful to themselves or to others. Strategies and programs designed to address the marginalisation and disadvantages faced by Australian-Muslims and Arabic-speaking-background communities have also been put in place. These have generally been aimed at promoting these young people’s ‘integration’ into the wider community, as well as encouraging (what policy makers and program designers call) ‘resilience’ and ‘community harmony’ (NAP 2009). An example of such a program is the National Action Plan (NAP) community grants funding program (NAP 2009), which is designed to enhance ‘resilience’ in Muslim communities.

The NAP community grants program provides funding to various agencies, including organisations such as the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS) to deliver programs and projects that promote greater harmony and ‘social inclusion’.

Academics such as Judith Bessant (2007) and Carol Bacchi (1999) have argued that such programs can miss the mark if they do not take into account the experiences of those who are the targets of these programs. Norman Denzin (1989, p. 105) echoes this sentiment:

The perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by applied programs must be grasped, interpreted, and understood if solid, effective, applied programs are to be put in place.

My own experience of doing volunteer and paid work with organisations such as VASS, Australian Lebanese Welfare (ALW) and Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV) tends to reinforce this concern about including the perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by applied programs in the development of such programs.

My research is specifically designed to take into account how Australian-Lebanese-Muslim young people experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians. I want to know how these young people deal with challenging and hostile interactions and experience a sense of belonging to the wider Australian
community. One of the aims of my thesis is to provide insights that can be applied by NAP community grants programs, and other programs, aimed at promoting young people’s resilience, tackling racism, and strengthening young people’s sense of belonging to the wider community.

Research method

Given my focus on elucidating the quality of the experiences of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, I decided after reviewing the research methodologies on offer that the most appropriate research approach would be one that drew on the broadly defined ‘interpretivist’ research tradition, especially those aspects of that tradition which stressed a hermeneutic approach that seeks to trace out the phenomenology of people’s experience and the ways they try to make sense of their experience (Schutz 1967, 1970; Weick et al. 1989). I will discuss in detail what this approach entails in Chapter Two. To put it briefly, this approach makes the understanding or interpretation of human experiences by fusing together the different contexts, interpretations and reflections, of both the researcher and researched, in dialogue with each other (Sharkey 2001). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, pp. 154-155) have observed:

The study of experience is the study of life, for example the study of epiphanies, rituals, metaphors and everyday actions ... experience in this view, is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones.

In keeping with this, I have approached my study of the experience of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims with a view to elucidating the quality of the experience found in the stories people tell. I used a

5 As experience is conceptualised as the stories people live and tell, I will be using the terms ‘story’, ‘narratives’ and ‘experiences’ interchangeably throughout this thesis.
combination of one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions with a total of thirty-one young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. I also used field observations while doing paid and voluntary work with various service provider organisations that work with young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. Finally I also analysed videos created by Australian-Lebanese, Muslim and Arabic-speaking-background young people who were not participating in my interviews or focus groups, having formed the view that this material gave an added and valuable dimension to my research.

It became apparent enough from my earliest encounters with young Lebanese Muslims that they frequently use the language of racism to make sense of their experience. To that extent I was not imposing any particular conceptual schema that was in some sense foreign to their own understandings when I began framing what I was hearing in terms of the vocabulary and theoretical schemes associated with the language of ‘racism’. This has meant that I have needed to discuss some aspects of the large and often controversial social science literature on racism, which I do in Chapter One.

Equally, and to make sure that my own sense-making of what I was hearing was sensitive to the context from which the stories I was hearing came from, I ‘engaged with the life worlds’ of some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim people. I embedded myself in the community, partly also to identify interview and focus group participants. I ‘engaged in their life worlds’ by spending time with Australian-Lebanese-Muslims socially (e.g. attending an engagement party given by one of the young people I spoke with) and participated in several youth programs. At these youth programs I would usually give a brief presentation about my research and ask anyone who was interested in telling their stories to come and speak to me. I should add that partly to acknowledge the time they gave me and partly to thank them for their time in my project I provided lunch and movie tickets to each participant. Some interviewees and focus group
discussion participants were recruited through direct introduction by VASS staff or by people who had already participated in the interviews and/or focus groups. All participants were informed about the usual ethical guidelines and protections they were to be afforded and all participants’ names have been changed, and certain identifiable details edited, to ensure complete anonymity. I discuss my research approach and provide further detail on the steps I took to answer my research questions in Chapter Two.

In this introduction I have identified the four questions that my research addresses. I have also indicated something of the theoretical and practical rationales for engaging in this research. It remains for me to say something about the structure of this thesis.

**Chapter outline**

In Chapter One I identify something of the sense-making framework I will be developing to establish a response to my first research question: how do young (12-25 year old), second-generation, Australian-Lebanese-Muslims who live in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, experience and make sense of their interactions with ‘other Australians’. Answering this question requires paying some attention to the history of Lebanese migration and settlement in Australia, and how that history has helped shape the context in which the people I spoke with live. Drawing on the work of academics such as Batrouney (1985; 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; 1982), Cohen (2002) and Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar (2004) I argue that the lived experience of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims needs to be situated in a history of modern Australia as a ‘settler society’ characterised by racial prejudice and marked by sporadic ‘moral panics’. I also discuss in this chapter key concepts used in the analysis of my empirical material such as
Orientalism (Said 2003), ‘Othering’ (Jensen 2009) and ‘everyday racism’ (Essed 1991).

I discuss my conceptual approach for this research in Chapter Two, in which I say why I have adopted a hermeneutic-phenomenological research approach. I explain how I carried out my research, and how I made certain decisions during the research process, such as my reasons for using a semi-structured interview format. Then I discuss how I drew on the interpretivist tradition to make sense of the research data gathered in the course of a number of one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with the young people I spoke with, along with field notes from my participant observation carried out while I was a volunteer and then a paid worker involved in community projects with Arabic-speaking-background (ASB) communities in Melbourne between 2003 and 2009.

In Chapter Three I begin to answer my first research question, namely how do young (12 to 25 year old) second generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims who live in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians? I also begin to answer my third research question: what sense of belonging do these young people have in relation to the broader Australian society? I argue that the young people’s experiences of interacting with other Australians, and how they made sense of those interactions, are best approached as interpretive processes, informed by the social meanings given to

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6 I use the term Arabic-speaking-background communities (rather than say Arabic-speaking communities or simply Arabs) in order to include those communities (such as the Assyrian-Chaldeans) who do not necessarily identify as Arabs and speak languages other than Arabic (e.g. Assyrian). Assyrians from Iraq, for instance, are educated in the national language (Arabic) but do not necessarily identify as Arabs, and they maintain their language (Assyrian) and connection to Assyrian culture, which predates the Arabization of the Middle East. Organisations such as VASS (Victorian Arabic Social Service) serve not only those who identify as Arabs (e.g. the Iraqi and Lebanese communities in Victoria) but also ASB communities (which include groups such as Assyrian-Chaldeans). Throughout this thesis I will be using the acronym ASB in reference to individuals and communities of Arabic-speaking background.
certain groups of people and particular events\textsuperscript{7}. These social meanings are constituted (and continually reshaped) in the course of more general social processes such as media framing, moral panics and the politics of fear, as well as the more personal and communal processes that constitute the ‘life-world’ of these young people (Schutz 1967, 1970). I propose that Essed’s (1991) concept of ‘everyday racism’ usefully captures some aspects of my interviewees ‘life-world’, and how they interpreted their interactions with other Australians. I suggest that my interviewees’ everyday experiences of racism include racisms that are personally encountered as well as mediated or vicarious experiences. Their encounters with, for example, ‘other’ Australians (who approach them with hostility) are experienced interpretively through the lenses of their ‘general knowledge of racism’. This ‘general knowledge’ includes their understanding of ‘what counts’ as racism and past experiences of interacting with ‘other’ Australians. This ‘general knowledge of racism’ will inform whether something like an incivility experienced is classified as ‘racism’ or as something other than as a racist encounter.

In relation to my research question about belonging, I argue in this chapter that the young people’s sense of wider community belonging is informed by factors such as their personal and vicarious experiences of racism, and their interpretation of what it means to belong to a particular collective such as the wider national community.

In Chapter four I ask how did these young people deal with often challenging and hostile interactions that followed events such as the September 2001 terror attacks and the ‘Sydney gang rapes’ when racist sentiment was mobilised against Muslims and Lebanese young people? I answer this question by saying that my findings reveal that my interviewees respond to racism, generally, in three kinds of ways: ‘avoidance’, ‘fighting back’ and ‘constructive engagement’. To

\textsuperscript{7}I refer to events such as ‘The Sydney Gang Rapes’ which has come to symbolize the contempt of Muslims towards the ‘West.’
develop an understanding of the different responses that fell into one of these three porous categories, I draw on several theories including the theory of ‘moral emotions’ developed by Jack Katz (1988). In this chapter I further develop my answer to my third research question, namely what sense of belonging did they have with respect to the broader Australian community? I argue in relation to this question that interviewees who adopted more often strategies of ‘constructive engagement’ tended also to talk a lot more about feeling a sense of belonging to the wider community.

In Chapter Five I broaden the focus slightly to look at how some other Australian-Lebanese, Muslim, and ASB young people who were not part of the group of young people I had intensively researched, used the interactive technology ‘YouTube’. I argue that these young people used YouTube to ‘fight back and resist racism’, to ‘constructively engage’ with other Australians, and to create new civic spaces that invoke a sense of place and belonging that they may not have in their ‘real life’ communities. These arguments are developed by drawing on research on young people’s use of the internet (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007; Carrie et al. 2009) and theories of ‘resilience’, ‘resistance’, ‘moral emotions’ and ‘capitalising on Othering’, as discussed in previous chapters. I reveal also how internet sites such as YouTube provide a medium for Muslim and ASB young people to engage critically with media-sponsored stereotypes of young Muslims and Arabs (Stephenson 2008).

In Chapter Six I reflect systematically on how the findings of this research might best be used by community service agencies working with young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, and perhaps other ASB Australians who share similar experiences. I use what is now described as a ‘strength based’ or ‘resilience’ approach (Saleebey 2000; Saleebey 2006; Ungar 2004, 2005b) to argue the importance of working with what young people have found ‘works for them’. I suggest that youth workers, in embracing this perspective, can tap into what motivates young people to do things they do, and build on young people’s capacities and strengths. For example, some young
people are motivated to be ‘good Muslims’ and challenge media stereotypes about them; some (like any of us) act on ‘moral emotions’ (Katz 1988); and many of the young people have strengths that youth projects can incorporate such as an ability to engage in creative ways via new technologies such as YouTube. I also argue in this chapter, that service providers have an important role to play in helping young people develop their skills to challenge racism in its various forms, including the skill of critically reflecting on one’s own prejudices and participation in racist practices.

In the conclusion I summarise my key findings.
Chapter One: The Historical and Social Construction of the Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim ‘Problem’

There was a boy... he was about 10 when [the 9/11 attacks happened] ...and his name was Osama... Yeah, his life has changed because of it... he wants to change his name. I didn't even know who Osama Bin Laden was. None of us knew who Osama Bin Laden was until the terrorist attack ... it’s scary to see a ten-year-old child crying to [his] mum scared of terrorism. It is something you don’t really expect to see, especially here in Australia.

Coco, female interviewee

The Lebanese are the largest and longest settled of the Arab-speaking communities in Australia (Batrouney 2006a). According to the 2006 census data, there were at least 150,000 Australians of Lebanese ancestry resident in Australia (see also Jupp 2001, p. 561). Whatever the popular perception of Lebanese as Arabs and ‘therefore’ Muslims, the 2006 census data (see Appendix A) showed that there were then 82,662 Christians of Lebanese ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Most Lebanese-Christians affiliate with one of three Christian sects: Orthodox, Maronite and Melkite (Batrouney & Batrouney 1985; Batrouney 2000). The 2006 census showed that 61,288 of those identifying as Lebanese identified as Muslims (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). The population of Lebanese-Muslims in Australia includes a majority of Sunni and Shi’ite and minority of other Muslim sects such as Alawi

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8 To indicate an interruption to speech or when the interviewee does not finish their sentence, the speech is tailed of using three dots. I have also used dots in quotes taken from interviewees to indicate parts of speech that have been omitted for reasons such as poor audibility during transcription.

I have used square brackets [ ] in the quotes taken from interviews to indicates parts of the interview that are not directly the words of the interviewee(s). This has been done on occasion for the purposes of clarity but more often when the words of my interviewee(s) were not audible when listening back to the tape recordings of the interview. Hence the words in the square brackets are my guesses as to what they were saying and are based on my notes and memory of what the interviewee was saying.
Another 2176 people of Lebanese ancestry identify as Druse\(^9\) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

Yet, as some researchers (Betts & Healy 2006; Topsfield 2006; Yamine 2006) have pointed out, and in spite of the greater number of Christian Australians of Lebanese background living in Australia, most of the recent public discussion and controversy about the Lebanese has focused on Australians of Lebanese-Muslim background. To understand the significance of this we need to account for how the immigration of Lebanese to Australia has taken place. This will also assist in setting up some background knowledge needed to appreciate the often ambiguous and shifting relationships of belonging that some young people of Lebanese-Muslim background experience in relation to the Australian national home. For as the history of Australia suggests, the experience of establishing an ‘Australian identity’ is both rich in paradox and marred by a persistent vein of racism and prejudice which has from time to time impacted negatively on Lebanese and Muslims Australians.

In this chapter, I do several things. First I briefly outline some of the key elements of the historical processes that have seen so many Lebanese leave Lebanon and settle in Australia. One crucial aspect of the more recent history of Lebanese settlement is the succession of moral panics (Cohen 2002) that erupted first in the 1990s and peaked after 2001, which framed the Lebanese-Muslim presence in Australia as a problem. The idea of ‘historical explanations’ has been used to show how and why the ‘Lebanese problem’ is typically conceived of as a ‘Muslim problem’ even though, as I quickly

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\(^9\) The Druse are considered by most writers to be a minority Muslim sect (Azar & Mullet 2001; Inhorn 2008). Other writers state that the Druse’s religious affiliation is said to overlap both Christianity and Islam (Kennedy 2000). As explained by academic James Jupp (2001, p.256), ‘Historically the Druse originated in the eleventh century as a sect among Isma’ili Muslims but are no longer accepted as Muslims, although they see themselves as Muslims. In the collection of ABS statistics, the Druse are counted as a distinct religion and are grouped under ‘other religions’ (as opposed to grouping them under Islam).
indicate, a larger proportion of the Lebanese in Australia actually identify as ‘Christian’. Following a discussion of these moral panics I turn to consider the value of certain frames found in the theoretical work of scholars like Said (2003) and Essed (1991) which I want to draw on as I develop my interpretive framework in this thesis. In this context I discuss some of the theoretical work that has centred on ‘Orientalism’, ‘Othering’ and ‘everyday racism’, and how this makes sense of contemporary debate about who ‘deserves’ to belong in Australia. I do this to show how these discourses have contributed to the framing of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as ‘problems’.

The historical process of settlement and a set of discourses about identity and ‘whiteness’ have shaped the contemporary life experiences of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, including how they experience, understand and deal with experiences of racism, and how they understand ‘belonging’ to the broader ‘Australian society’.

The third wave from Lebanon: The ‘problem with them’

As Trevor Batrouney (2002, p. 39) points out, the Lebanese presence in Australia has been achieved in the course of three successive waves of migration over more than one hundred years. The first wave occurred between the 1880s and the 1920s (Batrouney 2006b, p. 32). The second wave followed between 1947 and 1975, while a third major wave of immigration began in 1976 and continued on to 1990 as a consequence of the civil war in Lebanon (Batrouney 2000, 2001b). As Batrouney writes:

The descendants of the first wave settlers now extend to five and six generations while second-wave Lebanese-Australians include at least three generations. The third wave, which came to Australia during and after the Civil War in Lebanon, typically extends to two generations. A major difference across each of the immigrant waves has been that of size. The pioneer settlers represented a small and alien group within a predominantly Anglo-Celtic community in
Australia. The second wave substantially increased the size of the Lebanese population in Australia. However the most profound changes in terms of size, composition and settlement needs came with the exodus from Lebanon during and after the Civil War. The first two waves were predominantly Christian, while the third wave was predominantly Muslim (Batrouney 2000).

I am primarily interested in the third wave of migrants, because it is the Lebanese-Muslim migrants who came as part of this third wave, and the children born to them (which includes all my interviewees) that have chiefly been represented as ‘problems’ in the public discussion of the problem represented by Arabs and Muslims (Betts & Healy 2006; Humphrey 1998; Topsfield 2006; Yamine 2006).

Betts and Healy (2006), for example, report that Lebanese-Muslims who have settled in Australia, including even those who are second-generation, are economically and socially far worse off than other Australians, including the Lebanese from other faith backgrounds. Betts and Healy (2006) use statistical indicators such as levels of unemployment, education and household income to make the claim that Australian-Lebanese-Muslims are worse off than other Australians (including Australian-Lebanese-Christians). Like Betts and Healy (2006), Humphrey (1984) has also argued that the relative disadvantage Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have experienced needs to be contextualised by the historical circumstances of their arrival and subsequent settlement in Australia. Betts and Healy (2006) suggest that the disparity could be linked to the fact that many Lebanese-Muslims who have now settled in Australia arrived in the course of the Lebanese civil war and that this wave of migrants experienced greater difficulties in settlement and ‘integration’ than those who had arrived in previous decades. Batrouney and Batrouney (1985, p. 101) note that, in many respects those arriving in the third wave:

... were in a worse situation than their predecessors who had migrated in times of peace. In Lebanon the education of many children had been non-existent or disrupted for many years. The whole pattern of their lives was geared to survival in war, yet they had to pick up the pieces of their lives in a strange country with very different ways... It is noteworthy, too, that the Australian government did not accord the Lebanese immigrants refugee status
and the benefits which that entailed. Similarly aid was not forthcoming when it was most needed in the late 1970s.

These ‘quasi-refugees’ did not have the opportunity to plan and prepare for migration as they fled to find a place of refuge, often going to refugee camps in other parts of the world (i.e. Cyprus, Athens, Gulf states) before arriving in Australia. Many of those arriving in the third wave also experienced disruptions to their education and employment during the civil war (Batrouney 2001a, p. 567). Furthermore, as ‘most refugees were from the rural and urban poor of Lebanon few had the cultural capital (especially qualifications and English language) to secure skilled or professional work’ (Humphrey 1998, p. 24). This in turn affected their employability in Australia.

It is surely noteworthy that the Lebanese who arrived in the early 1980s entered Australia at a time when Australia was well in the grip of a major economic recession (Humphrey 1998). Batrouney (2006b, p. 32) writes that, while most of the migrants arriving in the first two waves were upwardly mobile, the third wave of migrants encountered major employment problems. As Batrouney (2006b, p. 32) puts it:

A major discontinuity may be seen in the unemployment problems experienced by significant numbers of the third wave immigrants, which are continuing to have profound effects on the settlement of this group.

Also contributing to the difficulties was the lack of resources and support available to help the third wave of Lebanese migrants to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of Australia. As many have also pointed out, (Batrouney & Batrouney 1985; Batrouney & Blatt 1982, p. 15; Couani 1988, p. 20; Humphrey 1984) the resources of the already established Lebanese churches and community welfare organisations, and the already settled Lebanese families, were unable and (sometimes unwilling) to cope with and cater for the mass influx of migrants arriving in the third wave. Batrouney and Blatt (1982, p. 6) add that the ‘… political conflict in Lebanon, reflected in the expatriate community, exacerbated problems in coping with the sudden influx’. Interviews with Lebanese
settlers who came in the late 1950s and early 1960s revealed that they were concerned that the new arrivals were ‘shattering the image’ that the Lebanese-Christian community had worked hard to build (Batrouney & Batrouney 1985; Batrouney & Blatt 1982). They spoke of a:

...united, Christian respectable, upwardly mobile, propertied, business-orientated community which, through its religious leaders, had developed links with people thought to be influential in government, professional and business circles.

The Civil War shattered that self-image and caused it to be replaced by the power struggles that had reduced Lebanon to chaos, thereby depriving the new arrivals of many of the established leaders and the resources they controlled…(Batrouney & Blatt 1982, p. 6)

Australian-Lebanese-Muslims were not only seen as a problem by the wider Australian community, but they were also looked down on by the other established and predominantly Australian-Lebanese-Christians. Humphrey (2001, p. 567) notes that the Lebanese-Muslims in Australia have been considerably affected by the ongoing experience of discrimination against Arabs and Muslims:

The racism generated by the Gulf War in 1991 towards Arabs and Muslims had a considerable impact on Lebanese-Muslim communities, who found they had to defend their position and rights in multicultural Australia. The Lebanese Muslims were particularly resentful that they should in some way be held responsible for the military actions of the Iraqi government in the Middle East. The growth of racial intolerance in Australia in the 1990s has further reinforced identification with Islam over national and sectarian origins.

In short, the Lebanese who had left as a consequence of the Lebanese civil war faced major economic and social challenges in establishing themselves in Australia and arranging for their children’s education.

These problems experienced by the most recently arrived wave of Lebanese settlers after 1980 provided some commentators with a theme with which to find fault with these migrants.

The story line was relatively simple in the hands of commentators like Henderson (2006) and Franklin (2007). Any problem with the integration of Lebanese Muslims has not had anything to do with the
‘host’ society or with the way Lebanese-Muslim migrants were treated, or even anything to do with how their participation in the wider community was facilitated. Rather the problem had to do with Lebanese-Muslim migrants themselves. As Henderson (2006) saw it:

They were from rural areas, had little education and minimal English language skills…. The problem with Lebanese Muslims was that they were ill equipped to enter the workforce. Also, a number were fundamentalist Islamists’.

IMMIGRATION authorities warned the Fraser government in 1976 it was accepting too many Lebanese Muslim refugees without "the required qualities" for successful integration.

Franklin (2007) too saw fit to comment on the alleged lack of capacity on the part of Lebanese Muslims to integrate:

The Fraser cabinet was also told many of the refugees were unskilled, illiterate and had questionable character and standards of personal hygiene.

The emergence of the documents raises the questions of whether the temporary relaxation might have contributed to contemporary racial tensions in Sydney’s southwest, which exploded a year ago into race-based riots in Cronulla.

It proved convenient also for other commentators (Bolt 2006, 2010a; Jones 2005) when asking why the last wave of Lebanese immigrants, particularly Lebanese-Muslims and the generations born to them, have experienced more problems than the longer established Lebanese-Christians, to say that this is best explained by religious and cultural differences and indeed by the Lebanese-Muslims’ unwillingness to embrace the ‘Australian way of life’.

As Humphrey (1984, p. 2) has pointed out, characterising problems like unemployment as a ‘Lebanese-Muslim problem’,

...fails to differentiate between the circumstances of recent and established Lebanese immigrants and accepts racism, political propaganda, and class antagonism for sociological analysis ... The historical argument states that Lebanese are disadvantaged because they fled from civil war in Lebanon and have remained disadvantaged because of economic recession in Australia. The argument is that because of the inadequate welfare infrastructure and the burden placed on the different Christian and Muslim communities they have not been able to recover from this initial disadvantage.
Whilst it matters that we make arguments about the historical context, it also matters how we do this and what assumptions we rely on when doing so. There are, for instance, some important problems embedded in the arguments advanced by Humphrey (1984) and Betts and Healy (2006), which stress that the disadvantage disproportionately facing contemporary Lebanese-Muslims is best explained by what are ‘historical circumstances’.

One problem of relying on an appeal to historical circumstances occurred to me when I noted that the above mentioned study by Katharine Betts and Ernest Healy (reporting that Lebanese-Muslims were worse off than Lebanese-Christians and other Australians, both migrants and native born) attracted nationwide media coverage (Australian Associated Press 2006; Hobart Mercury 2006; Shanahan 2006; Topsfield 2006; Yamine 2006). It raised the question, why did this study receive this kind of mass-media interest? Also, whose interests were being served by this kind of explanation? These observations and questions in turn raise another problem, namely that these kinds of arguments, often tinged with historical determinism, are perhaps not all that different from other explanations offered in response to the questions, ‘why are Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ experiencing greater disadvantage and why they have not ‘successfully integrated into’ Australia?

Leaving aside the highly problematic assumptions being relied on in framing these questions, the most usual explanation has been to point to certain inherent ‘characteristics’ alleged to define the identity of Lebanese-Muslims and/or to point to problems in their environment. It has often been said that it is the inherent deficiencies and/or defects in the social milieu that explain the conflicts between Australian-Lebanese-Muslims and ‘mainstream Australians’ (as brought to the foreground by events such as the Cronulla riots). As can be seen in the following diatribe from the popular talk-back radio host Alan Jones (2005), media shock jocks can help to fuel the popular idea that any conflicts between Lebanese-Muslim
communities and the wider community, is best understood by pointing the finger at the culture and religion of Lebanese-Muslims:

The pack-mentality of some cultures, the attitude of disrespect, the mind-numbing gangster rap music and the semi-automatic weapons are all here. And as is the case with the United States, the gangs are virtually all drawn along ethnic lines. In the USA the strongest of these are the Hispanics. Here it is the Middle-East persuasion and it doesn’t take a psychologist to work out that the mentality between these two cultures is very similar. …

We don’t have Anglo-Saxon kids out there raping women in Western Sydney… I don’t hear people complaining about Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans, I'm sorry, but there is a religious element in all of this and we've got to make sure we welcome people into our community but we welcome them in on certain terms and certain standards and those standards are not being met... All across Sydney there is a universal concern that there are gangs, the gangs are of one ethnic composition…

The notion that it is Lebanese culture or an ‘Islamic mentality’ that is to blame for the altercations between Lebanese-Muslim and Anglo-Saxon Australians were themes repeatedly drawn on by Jones throughout his radio broadcast and reinforced by his radio talk-back callers (Jones 2005). The same kind of explanation has been offered in rationalising the various disadvantages being experienced by ‘these people’, such as the disproportionate levels of unemployment amongst Australian-Lebanese-Muslims when compared to other Australians. High-profile conservative journalist Andrew Bolt (2010a) has also used a ‘culturalist’ rationalisation when explaining the relative disadvantage facing Australia’s Muslim communities (in particular Lebanese-Muslims):

Only one reason is given for high Muslim unemployment - "underlying discrimination and prejudice towards non-Europeans in Australia".

So why have Lebanese from Christian backgrounds done so much better here on almost every measure, even providing Victoria with a premier and NSW with a Governor?

Is the difference really nothing to do with Islam, the faith of so many poor nations? Is Muslim poverty, terrorism and crime really just the fault of our miserable society?

Or is our real fault to have apologised too much for what we are, and to have failed to protect this great society from newcomers too disposed by their culture to reject our own?
Bolt is arguing that indications of disadvantage, such as the high levels of unemployment amongst Muslim communities, reflects the backwardness and limitations of Muslim communities themselves (that is, the deficiencies inherent in their religious beliefs and culture), and lead them to reject ‘our’ culture and religion. He argues that Lebanese people of Christian backgrounds do not face the kinds of problems that plague Lebanese-Muslims, insinuating that perhaps religion has something to do with the relative disadvantages faced by Lebanese-Muslims. If Muslim communities’ marginalisation might in someway be related to the wider community, then perhaps it is only insofar as non-Muslim Australians being too apologetic and accommodating of the kinds of people who should not be included in the national family.

This interpretative framework seems to have played a major role in the succession of ‘moral panics’ that began to target Lebanese Muslims in the early 1990s and then after 2001 as a major problem.

Moral panics and constructing the young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim ‘folk devil’

The concept of a ‘moral panic’ owes much to the pioneering work of Stanley Cohen (2002). Cohen’s work seems especially relevant to understanding the heightened preoccupation with and fear of Arabs and Muslims in Australia, which began in the early 1990s and peaked after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in America as well as more local events. According to Cohen (2002, p.9), the idea of a ‘moral panic’ can be used to describe the circumstances that follow when:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the conditions then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes
the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long term repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal or social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.

Cohen argues that,

Calling something a ‘moral panic’ does not imply that this something does not exists or happened at all and the reaction is based on fantasy, hysteria, delusion and illusion or being duped by the powerful (Cohen 2002, p. viii).

Several criticisms have arisen since Cohen’s, now classic text, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* was first published in 1972. One criticism is that Cohen’s model implies:

...the nature of the reaction (the “panic”) is disproportionate, that is, more severe than the condition (event, threat, behaviour, risk) warrants... And hence, that the reaction is exaggerated, irrational or (above all) unjustified (Cohen 1999, p. 587)

In response to this criticism, Cohen argues that we can and should evaluate whether a particular moral panic is justified, and make judgements as to whether or what is happening deservedly constitutes a moral panic (Cohen 2002, p. 2). I would suggest that it is reasonable to make judgements about whether, for example, moral panics like that whipped up by the former politician Pauline Hanson about Australia being swamped by Muslims (McKnight 2010) is based on an irrational fear and hype or not. Typically such assessments can be done quite simply by observing what happened and by considering the evidence; in this case, it could be judged as irrational given the fact that Muslims constitute less than 2% of the Australian population (IDA 2007, p. 34).

Cohen also points out that it is the role of sociologists to think critically and to expose over-reaction and exaggeration (hysteria, prejudice and panic) about such claims, to consider their political intent and how they influence the ways we see, think and act. He also says that the job of sociologists is to identify under-reaction. When people are apathetic, engage in denial, and when they are indifferent to important social issues, it matters because those kinds
of responses prevent us from acknowledging what is happening. Without acknowledgement that wrong-doing is taking place (such as torture, political massacres or social suffering) there can be no action to stop it, and there can be no remedial action (Cohen 2002). Thus, it follows, considering whether or not a series of events is a ‘moral panic’ is important if we are to assume responsibility and have the capacity to respond to wrong doings.

Another critique of Cohen’s model is that it portrays ‘folk devils’ as powerless victims in the face of media distortion and public outrage. McRobbie and Thornton (1995) however point out that moral panics can also work to empower ‘folk devils’ and that ‘folk devils’ are often active agents in the construction of moral panics. They propose that moral panics can be

... seen as a culmination and fulfilment of youth cultural agenda in so far as negative news coverage baptizes transgression. What better way to turn difference into defiance, lifestyle into social upheaval, leisure into revolt? ...

For, in turning youth into news, mass media both frame sub-cultures as major events and disseminate them... Sociologists might rightly see this as ‘deviancy amplification’, but youth have their own discourse which see the process as one in which a ‘scene’ is transformed into a ‘movement’.

That is to say, some ‘folk devils’, for example young people who are labelled in the media as dangerous ‘gangs’ members or variously constructed as ‘objects’ of fear, can themselves exploit the ‘moral panics’ that are generated. They can use a moral panic to meet their own needs and desires by, for example, drawing on what is being presented to develop powerful self identities and to gain respect and status in the eyes of their peers.

McRobbie and Thornton also critique Cohen because they say he assumes ‘the public’ will react in a uniform way and that reaction is directly and exclusively caused by the media’s reporting. McRobbie and Thornton point out how different sections of ‘the public’ respond to media coverage in a variety of ways.

Furthermore, the moral panic thesis has become so successful in contemporary discourses that it has been appropriated and
incorporated by the individuals and institutions conventionally seen to be the drivers and targets of moral panics. For example, journalists will often accuse politicians of ‘whipping up moral panics’ in order to divert attention away from other more pressing problems (McRobbie & Thornton 1995, p. 266). Other agents of ‘social control’, such as the police, are aware of the dangers of over-reaction and hence it is not uncommon to hear that the police are interested in improving public perceptions of public safety, indicating that they are aware and concerned that people’s fear of crime is disproportionate to the actual incidences of crime.

Whilst I agree that ‘moral panics’ are (and always were) used and shaped by various players, and that various actors in the process (e.g. ‘the folk devils, the media, ‘the public’) are all active agents in the process, I disagree with the suggestion that the ‘mass media’ no longer play a dominant role in the construction of ‘folk devils’ and in framing social problems. ‘Folk devils’ also can and do ‘fight back’ (McRobbie & Thornton 1995) but they don’t have the same power as the mass media in transmitting moral panics and in reproducing and sustaining dominant ideologies (Cohen 2002, p. xxix). Having said that, it is worth noting the role of digital technology and the way that provides opportunities for people to contribute to or counter the narratives published by the mainstream media.

While acknowledging its limitations, Cohen’s conceptualisation of moral panics does offer a useful theoretical tool for identifying and conceptualising how power is exercised, and how we are influenced to see certain events and people (Cohen 2002, p. xxxv). His thesis has been particularly helpful in tracking and understanding how young Lebanese-Muslims in Australia have been constructed as ‘problems’, and how various sectors in the community have responded to the moral panics about them.

As Cohen pointed out, the negative media images of the folk devils around whom the moral panics circle can help to mobilise a public outcry, which can then be used to justify harsh and oppressive treatment of the ‘folk devil’ (Simpson 1997, p. 9). While the
crackdown on the folk devils can be directed by the state, it can also be taken up spontaneously by members of the public who feel they have the right to deal with the ‘folk devils’ by taking direct vigilante action (Simpson 1997, p. 9). Members of the public may feel especially justified in taking matters into their own hands if they feel that the government is not intervening quickly, decisively or simply not forcefully enough in relation to the perceived threat.

The years 1990 to 1991, during which the Gulf War raged, saw one of the first serious moral panics directed at Australians of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ and at those who observed the Islamic faith (Poynting, Noble & Tabar 2001; Wakim 1998). There were many reported incidents of people in Islamic dress or of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ being spat at, harassed and/or assaulted. There were also incidents of arson and vandalism directed at property owned by people identified as Arabs or Muslims (Hage 1991, p. 8). As revealed during the Gulf War, ‘moral panics’ can lead to harsh and oppressive treatment directed at perceived ‘folk devils’ and ‘the manning of the moral barricades’. Gradually the intensity of racist hate towards Arabs and Muslims that peaked during the Gulf war died down, at least until the next moral panic about Lebanese gangs (Collins et al. 2000).

As is often the case with moral panics, such as the one that emerged in 2001 about ‘Lebanese gangs’, each threat is presented as entirely new, unprecedented even, or as the ‘worst threat’ ever encountered (Cohen 2002). Moral panics, however novel they may appear, are never that. In defining or describing the folk devil, all moral panics draw on long-standing ideas and metaphors such as those about the dangers of the Other and the adolescent as delinquent or deviant. Research like Cohen’s (2002) on young ‘delinquents’ reveals the ‘folk devil’ is again and again selected from those who have been deemed the underclass, the marginalised and oppressed, those groups never fully embraced as part of the community. The moral panic about ‘ethnic’ and ‘Lebanese youth gangs’, which has resurfaced several times in the past two decades in Australia, is an example of the
intermeshing of two age-old narratives. One is an ‘Orientalist’ story about the Arab-Muslim ‘Other’ (Said 1981, 2003) and the other is the long-told story about young people as inherently delinquent (Bessant, Sercombe & Watts 1998; Pearson 1984).

A reading of Geoffrey Pearson’s (1984) study of the idea of ‘hooligans’ reveals that the fear of young people has a long history pointing to some persistent assumptions or myths that the enduring fear of young people is based on. Those myths include the idea that they are very ‘different’ to the rest of us, and that their ability to judge what is good and bad or right and wrong is either weak or non-existent because they are more like animals than human or because their hormones have taken over (Palmer 2003). There is also the idea that they are more prone to bow to ‘peer pressure’ (Bessant 1994; Bessant, Sercombe & Watts 1998; Wyn & White 1997). Such ‘commonsense’ beliefs are instrumental in the process of categorising and defining certain types of young people as delinquent, deviant or criminal, and therefore requiring especially rigorous intervention and policing (Bessant 1995; Kelly 2000b). Young people who are routinely subject to policing and interventionist practices, and deemed as particularly problematic, are those young people who are represented as being part of the ‘underclass’, or otherwise coded as ‘disadvantaged’, ‘marginalised’, ‘excluded’ or ‘at risk’ (Kelly 2000a, 2000b, 2009).

In countries like Australia, where there is a significant degree of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, the moral panics relating to young people also tend, as Rob White (2007a) has pointed out, to rest on ideas of ‘cultural differences’ – the lynchpin of ‘new racism’. This is why young people who are from a minority ethnic, linguistic or religious background, who are seen as very different to that of the ‘mainstream’ Anglo-Celtic, Christian Australian population, are represented as ‘ethnic youth gangs’ that threaten community safety, particularly when they also appear to be ‘socio-economically marginalised’ and frequent public spaces in large numbers. In this way, as many scholars in youth studies have shown (Lygo 2004, pp.
129-135; Pe-Pua 1996; Perrone & White 2000), ‘ethnic youth gangs’ become regular fodder for media-fuelled ‘moral panics’.

The story of moral panics about Lebanese ‘gangs’ has developed over several years of media reportage about ‘ethnic youth gangs’. During the mid-1990s, Vietnamese young people became synonymous with youth gangs, courtesy of the way elements of the media represented them (Quek 1997). Soo-Lin Quek (1997) pointed out that during one of the moral panics about Vietnamese youth gangs in 1994, O’Loughlain (the Assistant Commissioner for Crime at the time) helped to create a binary opposition between ‘young Australians of Vietnamese background’ and ‘other Australians’. He did this by promoting the view that Vietnamese youth gangs were a problem because they ‘can’t assimilate… with White Australia’ (Quek 1997, p. 179). According to Quek (1997, p. 181):

O’Loughlain’s words also seem to signify a view that “white Australia” needed ethnic minority groups to “assimilate”. “They” (Vietnamese young people), have to assimilate to “our” (white Australia) culture and material world. In so doing, the Assistant Commissioner of Crime had established a binary opposition between us/them where white Australia becomes the leading positive term and the Vietnamese community is the contrasted derivative.

Indigenous youth have also been negatively stereotyped regularly by the media (Sercombe 1995, 1997). Howard Sercombe (1995, p. 83) found that 64 per cent of all articles in the West Australian, a Perth-based newspaper that he had analysed, linked youth to crime. Along with this kind of media reportage, there have been many calls for a ‘war’ or crackdown on the violence and crime associated with ‘ethnic youth’ (Collins et al. 2004, pp. 55-56).

There were certain key events that academics such as Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar (2000) have identified as triggering a moral panic about Lebanese youth gangs. One of the first moral panics about ‘Lebanese youth gangs’ was triggered in 1998 when Edward Lee, a 14-year-old schoolboy of Korean background who was mortally stabbed by a group of young men of Lebanese background (Collins et al. 2000, p. 1). It was reported by journalists
such as Andrew Clennell and Les Kennedy (1998) that Lee was stabbed during a fight which ‘had started when the group of five, all Asians, got out of the car and a group of Lebanese men who were on the road at the time decided they did not like the group’. A ‘zero tolerance’ police crackdown against Lebanese youth followed this incident (Collins et al. 2004, p. 90).

The second major moral panic over ‘Lebanese youth gangs’ took place in August 2001 during the trial of a group of young Australian-Lebanese men who in 2000 had gang-raped young women in western Sydney (Dagistanli 2007; Manning 2004; Warner 2004). There was another series of ‘ethnic gang rapes’ in 2002, which also caught media attention. This time the perpetrators were four young people from a Pakistani-Muslim background and one non-Muslim of Nepalese background (Aslan 2009, p. 89).

There are various interconnected themes woven through the ‘ethnic gang rape’ moral panics. As Collins, Noble, Poyting and Tabar (Collins et al. 2004, pp. 116-117) pointed out:

... contradictory racist themes include: Lebanese/Muslim men’s purported disrespect of women in general; Lebanese/Muslim men being allegedly brought up to regard ‘White’, ‘Western’, ‘Caucasian’, women as ‘sluts’ and thus ‘fair game’ as distinct from their own women who are respected or at least valued as property; ‘ethnic gang rape’ as an expression of anti-‘Aussie,’ anti-White, anti-Western hatred which is supposedly encouraged in Muslim communities at large; Muslim and ‘Third-World’ cultures as barbaric, uncivilised, violent and misogynistic in their law and their morality; condemnation of laxity and indulgence in the Australian legal and political system towards transgressors and calls to mete out ‘their own medicine’.

Another theme that emerged in each of these moral panics was the supposed failure of Lebanese youth (even those born in Australia) to integrate into ‘White’ Australia and accept ‘Australian values’ – a theme concurrent with the culture-conflict thesis (McNamara, Nolan & Wallace 2006). A further linked theme involved correlating violent ‘ethnic behaviour’ with the alleged failure of multiculturalism. This could segue into implicit and sometimes explicit calls to return to the glorious past when assimilation had been the policy (Hage 2003; Windschuttle, K 2005).
These themes were played out in other moral panics centring on Arabs and Muslims in Australia. For instance, media reporting of the earlier moral panic over ‘Lebanese-gangs’ in the late 1990s also causally linked the outburst of violence to culture and the alleged failure of Lebanese youth to ‘integrate’ and to accept ‘Australian values’ (Collins et al. 2000).

The political benefit of this succession of moral panics, played out in the course of several years of media reportage on Lebanese youth gangs, was reaped by the federal coalition government. In this respect, the broader context in which young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims were seeking to find their place in Australia was never likely to be supportive. The arrival of asylum seekers described variously as Muslims or as ‘Middle Eastern’ evoked a near constant backdrop of anxiety and fear.

On 16 December 2000, 16 January 2001 and 6 and 14 June 2001, asylum seekers described as ‘Middle Eastern’ arrived on Australian shores (Collins et al. 2004, p. 23). During this period the coalition government harnessed people’s fears of ‘terrorists’ arriving in leaky boats and the ‘importation’ of crime and violence, and this, as argued by some, helped the Howard coalition government to win the 2001 election (Collins et al. 2004; Furedi 2005; Wright-Neville 2006).

Almost certainly the moral panic about terrorism and the related mobilisation of public anxiety and antipathy towards Arabs and Muslims benefited those political parties who were best able to harness these fears. In order for any government to sell such policy solutions to the voting public, the public needs to feel threatened in the first place. In an environment of fear and anxiety, the more likely it is that voters will support a government that promises to reduce this anxiety (McCulloch 2004). The ‘politics of fear’ was the dominant strategy used by the Howard Coalition government again in the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. This event, which colloquially came to be referred to as 9/11, had major ramifications worldwide.
The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon were defined as an ‘act of war’ against the United States of America and its allies (which includes countries such as Australia). The 2003 US National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (White House 2006, p. 14 cited in Reese & Lewis 2009) defined the attacks on 11 September as an attack on:

‘... the very idea of civilized society’. It identified the enemy as terrorism, an ‘evil’ threatening our ‘freedoms and our way of life’ (p. 1). The related National Security Strategy of the United States of America (White House, 2006) clearly divides ‘us’ from ‘them’, linking terrorism to rogue states that ‘hate the United States and everything for which it stands’ (p. 14).

This framing was instrumental in bringing together America, Australia and other state allies to form the ‘Coalition of the Willing’. Within months US-led forces would invade Afghanistan and later Iraq, as part of the so-called ‘war against terrorism’. Joseph Siracusa (2006, p. 42) notes that:

...while many countries abstained from committing troops to the cause, Australia augmented its original commitments to U.S. operations, pledging navy frigates, long-range maritime aircrafts, tanker aircrafts, FA-18 fighters, and 150 Special Air Service troops to the coalition.

Howard’s hard line on terrorism and regional security resonated with the Australian electorate in the subsequent national elections. The Howard government was elected for a third successive term in November 2001 with a ten-seat majority in Parliament. Two issues dominated the election campaign:

Australia’s handling of refugees and asylum-seekers, and the Australian response to the terrorist attacks on the United States. Following September 11, large swings in opinion polls in Western countries favored incumbent leaders and governments. In accordance with this pattern, the majority of the Australian electorate reacted positively to Howard’s posturing.

In such a context the politics of fear did not abate as terrorist attacks continued to attract worldwide attention. This included the terrorist attacks which has come to be known as the ‘Bali bombings’ referring to terrorist attacks on the Sari nightclub and Paddy’s Irish pub in Bali on 12 October 2002. These were venues frequented by many ‘western’ tourists, and especially by Australians. The ‘Bali bombings’, and the later bombing of the London underground railway and a bus in July 2005 were represented in the Australian media as further
evidence that a ‘clash of civilisations’ was well under way (Humphrey 2007; Lewis & de Masi 2007).

The Australian Government introduced a wide range of ‘counter-terrorist measures’. Well-publicised arrests and police surveillance were aspects of these measures. The homes of Australian-Muslims suspected of having terrorist links were raided at the end of October 2002, soon after the Bali bombings, and in a series of raids in July 2005 (Poynting & Perry 2007). Other than raiding people’s homes, the counter-terrorism measures adopted in Australia included an anti-terrorism advertising campaign sponsored by the government. Designed to justify tough security measures, the advertising campaign also invited members of the public to assist in identifying potential terrorist threats. As argued by Stephanie Younane (2006), the high-profile advertising campaigns mostly served to whip up public fear and anxiety about Arabs and Muslims in Australia by representing them as outsiders positioned beyond the boundaries of national identity. Yet the heightened level of public anxiety was not just about the threat of terrorism in Australia.

Some of this public anxiety had deeper antecedents arguably established across decades of white colonialism. Academics such as Hage (2003, pp. 48-68) and McCulloch (2004, p. 89) suggested that the primal seizure of land from Indigenous Australians left the colonisers (and their descendents) with a permanent anxiety that they too one day might be subjected to an equivalent dispossession. During periods like the gold rushes of the 1850s and the 1990s (following the rise of Pauline Hanson) there was much public anxiety about Asians ‘taking over’ Australia (Hage 2000).

Something of this anxiety seemed also to be on display in what has come to be referred to as the ‘Cronulla race riots’. Fears about Arabs and Muslims ‘taking over’, were promoted in the lead-up to and following the Cronulla riots. These riots were also an important point of reference for many of the young people I interviewed. Cronulla is a predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant a beach-side suburb in Sydney, and lies within an electorate held by the
Liberal Party. Former prime minister John Howard once described the area as ‘a part of Sydney which has always represented to me what middle Australia is all about’ (O'Riordan 2005). On 11 December 2005 around five thousand people, many carrying Australian flags gathered at Cronulla. Ryan Barclay (Barclay & West 2006, p. 79) claimed that Cronulla residents had gathered:

…to celebrate Australian beach culture in defiance of the years of sporadic and increasing intimidation from ethnic male youths who were seen to threaten the values and the way of life enjoyed by beach goers. For a small minority of locals and other old Australians, it may have been seen as an opportunity to exact revenge and express their racist views publicly.

According to those who were part of the rally (with evidence that some of those involved belonged to far-right white-supremacist group the Cronulla protest was ostensibly aimed at ‘reclaiming the beach’ (Poynting 2006b, p. 87).

Folklore had circulated for years about how, for years, young ‘Aussie’ women had been offended and insulted and made to feel unsafe on the beach by young men of an essentially misogynistic and un-Australian culture. According to this story, the locals of Sutherland Shire had for years been ‘putting up with’ immigrant outsiders from the working-class western suburbs who, in addition to affronting ‘our women,’ were exclusively responsible for littering the parks and beaches, uniquely involved in boisterousness and sky-larking, played football on the sand, and dressed inappropriately for the beach by wearing too many clothes.

The proximate source of the protest-cum-celebration had been the bashing of two lifeguards the weekend before the rally by a group of young men of Lebanese background (Barclay & West 2006, p. 78). The lifesavers had apparently attempted to stop a game of soccer being played on the beach by the Lebanese youth, and insulted them with ‘Lebs can’t swim’ (Ang 2006, p. 34). The lifesavers were then physically attacked as the verbal contestation became physical (Barclay & West 2006, p. 27). The event was perceived as ‘the last straw’ for some of the Sutherland Shire residents, possibly because of the powerful symbolism that this incident could be seen as representing. Australian-Lebanese-Muslim young men were positioned as not belonging to the community which had a ‘rightful’
claim to the beach. According to Jock Collins and Carol Reid (2009, p. 384) this was because:

The beach is a symbolically sacred-site of white Australian youth masculinity, with lifesavers an iconographic image of (white) Australian male identity.

Symbolically, the bashing of the lifesavers by the young Lebanese men, could be seen as affront to the idealised icons of Australian masculinity that lifesavers have historically come to signify in Australia (Saunders 1998). The game of soccer being played on the beach, which could be treated as a ‘foreign’ sport (as opposed to say surfing), could be seen as an attempt by ‘non-White Australians’ to colonise ‘White space’ (the beach). And, finally, the refusal by the Lebanese youth to stop playing on the beach when requested by the lifeguards symbolically represents the refusal by groups like the Lebanese to assimilate quietly into the Australian way of life.

Though the Cronulla residents may have gathered in celebration (as Barclay claims) there were certainly a number of attendees focused on demonstrating that Arabs, Muslims and Lebanese people were not welcome. The attendees were mostly young Anglo-Australians, some of who received the following rally call: ‘This Sunday every Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and Wog bashing day … Bring your mates and let’s show them this is our beach and they are never welcome… let’s kill these boys’ (cited in Poynting 2006b, pp. 86-87).

Some attending the rally waved and wrapped themselves in Aussie flags; sang Waltzing Matilda; and traced the words ‘100% Aussie Pride’ in the sand (Poynting 2006b). More disturbingly, a few others went further and sang racist chants such as “Go Nulla, Fuck Allah” (Quayle & Sonn 2009). Some proudly displayed slogans such as ‘Fuck off Lebs’, ‘ethnic cleansing unit’ and ‘Aussies fighting back’ on T-shirts and placards and even scrawled on skin (Mitropoulous 2006; Poynting 2006b). Fuelled by excessive amounts of alcohol they went about bashing anyone who appeared to be Lebanese, including a Jewish man and woman of Greek ancestry (Mitropoulous 2006).
In the days following the rally there were retaliation attacks. One of the calls to hit back declared (Mitropoulous 2006, p. 37):

Our parents came to this country and worked hard for their families. We helped build this country and now these racists want us out... time to show these people stuck in the 1950s that times have changed. WE are the new Australians. They are just the white thieves who took land from the aboriginals and their time is up.

Christine Inglis (2006) claims that on the following day (12 December) a large group of Lebanese young men assembled outside a major Lebanese mosque before making their way to Cronulla to take their revenge. In Cronulla, and in the surrounding suburbs, cars were destroyed and some white Australians were bashed. ‘An arson attack on a church hall in a distant suburb with a sizable population of [people from a] Middle Eastern background also was alleged to be part of the tit-for-tat retaliations’ (Inglis 2006).

There have been many explanations offered about both the immediate and the more long term causes of the Cronulla riots (Clements 2006; Collins 2006; Poynting 2006a; Smith 2006). One theory is that the riots were a manifestation of ‘White Australian’ anxiety massaged by the mass media and politicians. According to this theory, the race politics played out in relation to a series of moral panics over Arabs and Muslims (such as the ‘ethnic gang rapes’ and 9/11 attacks) have merged to create the pre-eminent folk devil in contemporary Australian society – young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims (Poynting 2006a).

Whatever the range of explanations one thing is clear: the succession of moral panics helped to make young Lebanese Muslims a key ‘folk devil’. As Carol Bacchi (2009) has insisted, how a given ‘social problem’ gets represented and how the framing of the ‘problem’ takes place matters deeply even if, or perhaps especially when, the representation of the problem is essentially false. According to Bacchi (1999) there are all sorts of consequences that flow from the way in which a social issue is framed, including how you respond to or deal with ‘the issue’. She also says that it is important to note what is missing from the frame. For instance, if the
issue is constructed as the ‘problem’ of the disadvantages experienced by Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, and the tensions between them and other Australians (often illustrated by reference to events such as the ‘Cronulla riots’) then what are the implications that flow from the way in which ‘this problem’ has been constructed? The consequences include the likelihood that the problem-framing places the blame on Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, and those who ‘allowed’ them into the country. It also takes the focus away from critical questions such as: who exactly are Australian-Lebanese-Muslims a ‘problem’ for? It would seem that they ‘are a problem to those of us who are outside the boundaries of what we have defined as the problem’ (Ryan 1976, p. 12). More importantly, could ‘the problem’ be constructed differently? Furthermore, whose interests are served in framing ‘the problem’ in this way? The answer usually is that it serves the interests of those who blame the victim (Ryan 1976, p. 12).

The reasoning used by public commentators such as Andrew Bolt and Alan Jones about the alleged lack of integration by Lebanese Muslims into Australia relies on what William Ryan (1976) has called the logic of ‘blaming the victim’. According to Ryan, blaming the victim is a mystifying process that serves a specific (albeit unintentional) function of maintaining the status quo, for example by privileging the interests of one group at the expense of other groups (Ryan 1976, pp. 10 - 11). This process works by explaining what’s wrong with the victims, by pointing to differences, real or imagined, between the ‘victim’ group and the rest of the ‘normal’ population. Through the victim-blaming account, wide-scale social problems (such as unemployment and crime) are explained as peculiar to a particular population in the community, who are constructed as very different to the ‘normal’ or ‘mainstream’ group.

‘The poverty cycle’ theory, for instance, is a popular way of explaining away the predicament of people living in poverty, by pointing to these people’s personal deficiencies. ‘These people’ are constructed as very different to ‘us’ (i.e. those of ‘us’ in the middle
class) because they are seen to lack a sense of personal responsibility, and commitment to hard work and good morals. Academics Bonnie Thornton Dill, Maxine Baca Zinn and Sandra Patton (1999, p. 271) write:

The predominant explanatory system among conservatives and centrist correlates lack of strong work ethic, laziness, and the prevalence of single-mother families with a 'culture of poverty' that perpetuates an endless cycle of intergenerational poverty. Such spurious explanations are offered to avoid taking action on systemic problems, which are largely outside the control of those being blamed. Taking such action would however upset the status quo or work against the interests of privileged groups (Ryan 1976).

It also diverts attention away from other possible factors, like the interpretative frameworks used by people already resident in Australia who may have found it easy and convenient to drop these frameworks onto newly arrived migrants, with negative consequences.

In short, while we can make some use of the historical context in which Lebanese immigration has taken place, we need to do so carefully. Some of the disadvantages faced by second generation Lebanese-Muslims can certainly be related to the history of Lebanese migration and settlement in Australia, but we need to question whose and what interests are served in using particular historical frames. As I have suggested, the Lebanese-Muslim migrants who came to Australia after 1975 were constructed as very different and deficient in relation to ‘us’, and it was decided that most were unable/unwilling to ‘assimilate’ into ‘mainstream Australia’. This understanding was based on ‘facts’ like the claim that many Lebanese-Muslims entered Australia as ‘quasi-refugees’, that they came from rural and urban poor backgrounds and that many had low level English language proficiency (Franklin 2007; Henderson 2006). More importantly perhaps, most were also thought to have brought with them their ‘Muslim extremists’ ways of thinking and behaving (Franklin 2007; Henderson 2006). As Ryan has argued more generally, by defining certain out-groups as radically different to ‘us’,
it then becomes possible for us to divert attention away from other explanations and point to the supposed deficiencies of those people most affected by the imbalances in power, wealth and opportunity (Ryan 1976). More importantly, it allows us to wash ‘our’ own hands of the idea that certain privileged groups may be part of the problem that is seen as peculiar to these ‘Other’ groups. It obfuscates the possible recognition of complicity in the discourses that allow Lebanese-Muslims to be seen and treated as very different to us.

Yet as Pearson (1984) and Cohen (2002) have acknowledged, moral panics do not spring up from nowhere. Typically there is a long history of negative representations of particular out-groups. I now turn to that proposition. For it seemed apparent to many Australian observers in the 1990’s (e.g. Collins et al. 2000; Collins et al. 2004) and the 2000s (e.g. Poynting 2002; Poynting & Perry 2007) as well as many of the young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I spoke with (from 2003 to 2009) that the social construction of Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as a problem for the wider community owed a good deal to certain old habits of mind.

One way of making sense of these discursive strategies was pointed out by Edward Said (2003) in his very influential account of what he called ‘Orientalism’.

Orientalism and the ‘Other’

Although my interviewees did not draw on Edward Said’s vocabulary or conceptual framework when talking about their experiences, the theoretical insight provided by his thesis on Orientalism is clearly relevant for making sense of what Essed (1991, p.288) has called ‘everyday racism’ — the kind of racism I argue has been experienced by many young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. This is because their experiences seem to point to the way Anglo-Australians have long
understood Arab-Muslims as Other (Said 1981, 2003). I will begin by discussing Said’s work before turning to the rather more Protean idea of racism.

As is now understood, Said’s (1981, 2003) account of ‘Orientalism’ proposes that the ‘West’ has long held a skewed view of Arabs and the Islamic world. Orientalism can mean several things according to Said (2003, p. 2) because as he puts it:

The most readily acceptable designation for Orientalism is an academic one... Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient... is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism... A more general meaning for Orientalism... is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”.

Said argues that, from the specialised academic fields of Oriental studies, Orientalism filtered through into all aspects of social and political life and became established as ‘common sense’ ways of representing the very diverse peoples and cultures that were packaged as non-Westerners. I use the concept ‘common sense’ in the way Antonio Gramsci (2005) uses it. ‘Common sense’, as he understands it, are those ‘folkloric’ truths or taken-for-granted assumptions that have been disseminated from powerful groups in society to the masses. Thus, ‘common-sense truths’ are historically and socially constructed ‘truths’ or folkloric ideas that have ‘spread beyond the confines of intellectual groups’. Common-sense truths often serve the interests of the powerful in society and are, therefore, rarely critically examined (Gramsci 2005, p. 423).

The ‘common sense’ of Orientalist ‘truths’ have spread through media such as government policies and popular culture. (See Appendix B for a discussion of how Hollywood movies have contributed to the ‘Othering’ of Arabs and Muslims). A construction of the Islamic and ‘Middle-Eastern Other’ that continues to have currency is the notion that the world of the Islamic East – notwithstanding its varied histories, societies and languages – is still mired by religion, primitivity andbackwardness (Said 1981, p. 10). It might almost go without saying that events such as the attacks on

While the argument presented by Said may seem deterministic and give little capacity for people to critique or think beyond or outside of Orientalist discourses, Said’s intention is not to dismiss the possibility of contesting Orientalist ideas. Instead Said (2003, p. 325) wanted to describe a particular system of ideas and to raise questions such as:

How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)? [Emphasis in original.]

I understand Said to be arguing that it is only by asking such questions, and by being responsive to the complex of embodied, sensuous, multilayered qualities of human experience, and not relying on simplistic essentialist stereotypes, that it is possible to be properly sensitive to what is involved in representing and studying the ‘Other’ (Said 2003, p. 327). This is how it might be possible to free oneself from the constraints of Orientalism. It is precisely this kind of reflexivity that I tried to practise throughout the research process, from the drafting of my research questions through to the writing up of the thesis. Furthermore, by asking questions like the ones Said has proposed, we can be attentive to processes of ‘Othering’.

The concept of the ‘Other’ is central to Said’s (2003) Orientalism. The ‘Other’ is the ‘Oriental’, a people who reside in the East and who are socially and historically constructed as both strange and different, in an irreducibly oppositional relationship to the people of the Occident. That is to say they are the opposite of the European in the ‘progressive’ Western world.

The ‘Other’ is a concept not only used by Said, but also by several other academic in various fields, including feminist intellectual Simone de Beauvoir (1972). Stephen Harold Riggins (1997, p. 3) argues that the concept of Other has an ancient history in philosophy.
and can be traced back to Plato, who used the term to represent the relationship between an observer (the Self) and an observed (the Other):

   In the modern social sciences, the “external other” or the “social Other” is commonly used, in a more restricted sense that that of Plato, to refer to all people the Self perceives as mildly or radically different.

In cultural studies the Other is often used in reference to those constituted as inferior, devalued and diminished, but at the same time eroticised and envied by the more powerful group (Said 1981, 2003). For the Europeans/the West, the ‘Other’ constitutes the people who represent everything they are not. ‘They’ are the Oriental, out there in the East – they are ‘our’ Other. They become mirrors to which the Self is refracted and known.

The discursive process and strategies by which the Other is constructed and labelled as different to ‘us’ is called Othering. Othering, however, is not only done by the more powerful and privileged or those in the majority. It certainly is not only deployed by those in the West. As Riggens (1997, p. 6) puts it:

   Discourses of Otherness are articulated by both dominant majorities and subordinate minorities. Others are not just groups that are devalued, marginalised, or silenced by dominant majorities… However, for understandable political reasons, most research concentrates on the discourses of Othering by majority populations.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that those being positioned as ‘Other’ are not passive subjects, who simply submit to the dominant imposition, by passively accepting the construction of themselves as ‘Other’. Bell hooks (1990) and Edward Soja (1996) have argued, for example, that people, who may be marginal in real and imagined spaces and places, can nevertheless claim the right to author their own identities. Those people constructed or positioned as ‘Other’ are as much active participants in the social construction of identities as those doing the Othering.

Soja (1996) has suggested identity formation does not have to be grasped in the dichotomous relation between Self/first and Other. Some strategies can be employed to inhabit a ‘Third Space’, a space
of resistance. This space can be ‘central and marginal and purely neither at the same time’ (Soja 1996, p. 97). While this notion of a romanticised utopian space can be critiqued,\textsuperscript{10} Soja’s (1996) and Hook’s (1990) recognition that ‘Others’ can resist, embrace and reject the ways in which they have been constructed, does have some value.

Drawing on the work of Soja (1996) and others (Carrington & Wilson 2004; Skeggs 2004), Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2009, pp. 25-26) observes that:

\begin{quote}
... othering is not a straightforward process of individuals or groups being interpellated to occupy specific subordinate positions. On the contrary, agency is at play, and people far from always accept becoming the other self. Othering can be embraced, capitalised, resisted or disidentified from.... Elements of othering discourses may be appropriated, because such elements can be given local value as part of a subcultural style. This is possible because the specific discourses of othering relevant here are not only fixing and pathologising; they are perhaps also, at a deeper level, ambivalent in their gaze upon the other, as they also contain implicit exoticism and fascination of the other. The other can, as Riggens has pointed out, at one and the same time be devalued and reduced and be the object of more or less conscious desire, eroticization and envy of the powerful majority (Riggens 1997: 5).
\end{quote}

I use Jensen’s agential approach to ‘Othering’ throughout this thesis, but particularly in Chapter Five, to argue that one way young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims deal with those more negative experiences by both embracing and in effect capitalising on the ‘Othering’ that they are experiencing.

I have already raised the idea that the experiences young Muslim Lebanese have had of late can be understood in some fashion as a consequence of what Essed (1991, p.288) has called ‘everyday racism’. Since this idea is central to my research I want to outline something of the particular understanding of racism that I have adopted for this study and my reasons for doing so.

\textbf{Everyday racism}

\textsuperscript{10} For a critique of the ‘Third Space’ refer to Ien Ang’s work (2001, pp. 163-176).
The concepts of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ remain among the most contested of categories in modern social sciences. Jakubowicz et al. (1994, p. 27) write:

Racism can be understood as the set of values and behaviours associated with groups of people in conflict over physical appearance, genealogy, or cultural differences. It contains an intellectual/ideological framework of explanation, a negative orientation towards ‘the Other,’ and a commitment to set of actions that put these values into practice.

Laksiri Jayasuriya (1999, p. 2) argues that in the Australian context there are at least ‘two logics of racism’: there is the ‘old racism’ characterising the formative period of Australian racism in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by the ‘new racism’ of the twentieth century. Old racism is primarily based on pseudo-scientific biological theory in which the world’s population can be categorised into different races. Bereson and Matheson (1993, p. 5) explain that a:

... commonly accepted definition of race relates to a people who have, or are supposed to have, common ancestors. It also relates to those with similar distinguishing features, such as skin colour and physiognomy, common social or community heritage, and similar religious practices.

Importantly, these categories of people could be hierarchically ordered and ranked in terms of a scale of superiority/inferiority. The theory empowered those deemed as superior to develop paternalistic policies, and practices of domination over ‘inferior races’. Over the years the concept of race has become a lot more fragile and understood as more of a social construct than a scientific ‘fact’ (Jayasuriya 1999, p. 3). The available biological and psychological science reveals that there is:

... no basis for believing that the groups of mankind [sic] differ in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development. The biological differences between human beings within single races may be great as the biological differences between races (UNESCO 1951).

Social Darwinism, implying superiority by ‘an aristocracy of nature’, has clearly lost ground in most contemporary societies. The notion of cultural differences between different groups has, however, come to replace biological differences in ‘everyday racist’ practices. The new
form of racism emerging from the late twentieth century is not only colour blind, serving the interests of liberal ideologies and class interests, but it also serves other needs and desires. According to Jayasuriya (1999, p. 25) this shift from old to new racism indicates a new level of racist ideologies. No longer is the ‘Other’ (for example, the Lebanese-Muslim) marginalised on the basis of their racial inferiority or other shortcomings, but rather they are now defined as a threat to national integrity, economic viability and the social peace of the nation (Jayasuriya 1999, p. 25). This new form of racism arises in the context of global migration, to fulfil the need to legitimise and maintain the power of the White majority in nations where ethnic minorities are agitating for a share in power and resources, and inclusion in the national space (Jayasuriya, Walker & Gothard 2003).


The ideology of color-blind racism works to defend and justify the contemporary racial order... [it] rationalizes the status of minorities as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and their alleged cultural deficiencies’ (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2011, pp. 190-191).

According to Bonilla-Silva, ‘color-blind racism’ highlights cultural difference and liberalism while overlooking the influence of structural inequalities. It focuses on the idea of the individual and their deficits or attributes, to explain and justify inequitable power relations, as well as social, economic and political differences between ethnic groups.

‘Cultural racism’ is one form of colour blind racism whereby presumed cultural practices are used to explain and justify racial inequality. It enables those using this frame to ‘blame the victim’ and to explain and justify inequalities (e.g. the high numbers of Lebanese-Muslims who are unemployed and in low-paid jobs) by attributing the disadvantages they face to personal deficiencies such as a lack of motivation, poor work ethic and self-discipline – which are presumably reflective of their cultural upbringing.

A good illustration of how the ideology of ‘cultural differences’ is played out in racist practices within the Australian context, is the
infamous ‘children overboard’ saga of 2001 (see Appendix F). The ‘children overboard’ saga represents the operation of a new racism based on ideas such as cultural difference (as opposed to the older biologically inflected form of racism).

Bonilla-Silva (Bonilla-Silva 2003) identifies four frames of color-blind racism (namely, abstract liberalism, cultural racism, naturalization and minimization of racism\textsuperscript{11}). ‘Abstract liberalism he says is the most important, as it constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology’ (Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 26). This he argues overlaps with ‘cultural racism’, and incorporates elements of political and economic liberalism. It’s a framing that allows socio-economic inequalities (eg, the high concentration of people of Lebanese-Muslim background living in poorer suburbs such as Broadmeadows, or the observation that lots of Indian students occupy high-risk jobs such as taxi-driving) to be explained by factors such as ‘market-mechanics’ or ‘consumer choices’.

Bonilla Silva (2003) like others who write on new forms of racism, such as Philomena Essed (1991) and Jane Hill (2008), make the same point:

Racism is not rooted in the cognitive make-up of the individual, but produced and reproduced through language and culture, through the hidden assumptions and presuppositions on race, ethnicity or nationality (Tileaga 2009, p. 689).

According to Essed the concept of ‘everyday racism’ helps us to:

\begin{itemize}
    \item \ldots cross the boundary between structural and interactional approaches to racism and to link details of micro experiences to the structural and ideological context in which they are shaped (Essed 1991, p. 288).
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomenon by suggesting that they are natural occurrences’ (Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 28). For example, claims can be made that it is ‘natural’ that particular organisations and suburbs are dominated by a particular ethnic group because it is ‘natural’ that people gravitate towards likeness.

‘Minimization of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities life chances (“It’s better now than in the past” or “there is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there”) (Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 29).
She explains that

... everyday racism does not exist as single events but as cumulative practices. Specific instances acquire meaning only in relation to the sum total of other experiences of everyday racism... (Essed 1991, p. 288) ... new experiences are interpreted and evaluated against the background of earlier personal experiences, vicarious experiences and general knowledge of racism in society (Essed 1991, p. 8).

Racism is also reproduced ‘through the formulation and application of rules, laws and regulations and through access to and allocation of resources’ (Essed 1991, p. 44). Racism can be seen as a process which comes to be seen as ‘normal’ by the dominant group: ‘Analogous to everyday life, everyday racism is heterogeneous in its manifestations but at the same time unified by repetition of similar practices’ (Essed 1991, p. 288).

Everyday racism can be experienced in seemingly benign and insignificant ways, but cumulatively it can have a powerful impact. Everyday racism, for example, includes instances where ‘ethnic Others’ are stared at because they look ‘different’. It is reflected in comments such as “Where do you come from?” and “You speak English surprisingly well”. It can be seen in policing practices that target young men in public spaces because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background.

Not all forms of racism however can be counted as ‘everyday racism’. I refer, for example, to racism that is more overt and not coded – like the events discussed earlier which took place in the ‘Cronulla Riots that saw people who ‘looked Lebanese’ physically abused.

It could be argued that insights provided by Essed have little relevance to the Australian context, given that the concept of ‘everyday racism’ was developed based on Essed’s research conducted in the Netherlands and the United States. Many academics (Mellor 2004a; Mellor et al. 2001; Noble 2010) who have researched racism in Australia however find this concept of ‘everyday racism’ helpful for analysing and understanding the local experience.
I agree it is a concept that can be applied to the contemporary Australian context and is valuable for appreciating my interviewees’ stories.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained why young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, and Arabs and Muslims in Australia more generally, have come to be constructed as problems, and why their claims to belong in Australia have been routinely challenged. I have argued here that the young people I interviewed experienced and made sense of their interactions with other Australians in all sorts of ways, but always did so in a context, constituted out of historical experience, and multiple discourses – many of them relying on deeply prejudicial representations of ‘Arabs’ and ‘Muslims’.

I argued that one of the ways young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have been framed as a problem has been by referring to the historical circumstances of these young people’s parents’ arrival and ‘integration’ into ‘mainstream’ Australia. The Lebanese-Muslim migrants who came to Australia during the civil war in Lebanon (1976-1990) were constructed as very different and strange to ‘the average Australian’ because, as the argument goes, they were refugees, Muslim ‘extremists’, from rural and urban-poor backgrounds, and had little English-language proficiency (Franklin 2007; Henderson 2006). The young people born to these parents were also constructed as very different to the rest of us, and this was done by referring to the deficiencies of their parents – reminiscent of the ‘cycle of poverty’ argument. The strategy of ‘blaming the victim’ has allowed people with the power of definition, including politicians, policy makers and experts, to explain the problem in terms of the deficits of the ‘victim group’ rather than by referring to the way important political, cultural,
social and economic resources are distributed (Ryan 1976). The strategy of ‘blaming the victim’ has also allowed government, and even whole communities, to absolve themselves from taking responsibility to address the actual problems, especially if the explanation points to the idea that ‘we’ are part of the problem.

Apart from the strategy of ‘blaming the victim’, I argued that ‘colour blind racism’, ‘Orientalism’ and other discourse such as neoliberalism, have all been at play in the construction of ‘Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ as a problem for the wider community. Sustained public narratives about who ‘deserves’ to belong to the national home, and ideas about young people, especially those who are ‘ethnic’ and ‘marginalised’, have also contributed to a politics of fear about young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. In Melbourne, the concern has focused mainly on those living in socio-economically marginalised areas, such as the northern and western suburbs. Such ‘Othering’ narratives would all play their parts in the representation of certain events such as the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the ‘Sydney gang rapes’ and the ‘Cronulla race riots’.

The representation of these events within particular frames serves particular interests and power relations. Older well-established Anglo-Australians, for instance, reap a lot of benefit from ‘colour-blind racism’. I have argued that the framing of events, and the social construction of Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as a problem, has shaped how other Australians understand and act towards young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims.

The framing of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as problematic ‘Others’ has also informed how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians; how they deal with the hostile and challenging situations that emerged following the various ‘moral panics’ about ‘Australian-Lebanese-Muslim youth’ (and Arabs and Muslims more generally); and their sense of belonging to the wider community.
I also suggested in this chapter that new forms of racism, anchored in ‘color-blind racism’, and reproduced through ‘everyday racist practices’, is what characterises some of the new forms of racism that young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims find themselves subject to. It is in this context that I interpret my interviews, focus group discussions, online videos and field notes.

I now turn to the next chapter which explains how I collected and interpreted my research ‘data’.
Chapter Two: Gaining Insights from Others

Basically to me it’s like a lack of knowledge. Like some people, because they’re afraid or they just don’t know maybe something about the culture maybe retaliate because they don’t understand it. That’s pretty much racism to me.

Mia, a young female interviewee, speaking to me in 2007 about what racism means to her.

When Martha Nussbaum (2010) referred recently to the work of Mahatma Gandhi, she reminded readers that the kind of political struggle for freedom and equality that Gandhi waged must first of all be a struggle within each person because ‘compassion and respect contend against fear, greed, and narcissistic aggression’. Nussbaum argues that this internal conflict can be observed in the discussions and conflict about inclusion and equality that take place in modern societies. This internal conflict is evidenced in debates, for example, about immigration, gender equality, sexual orientation or affirmative action. She says that one explanation for the fierceness of these debates in places like Europe, America and Australia is a lack of sympathetic understanding of the plight of the victims of widespread prejudice or xenophobia, often set loose by those who seek advantage in these debates by mobilizing fear, greed and aggression.

One way of addressing this problem, she says, is to cultivate a greater capacity for sympathetic understanding. Pointing to the research of Batson (1991), Nussbaum (2010, p. 37) observes that:

... children who develop a capacity for sympathy or compassion – often through empathetic perspectival experience – understand what their aggression has done to another separate person ... Empathy is not morality but it can supply crucial ingredients of morality.

These remarks suggest the positive value of any research process that is trying to make sense of the lives of people like young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, who have been systematically represented as ‘Other’ or as threatening the lifestyle, wellbeing or
values of the wider community, and does so by means of a determined exercise in understanding.

Understanding the lives of others is never easy. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical framework used to understand the lived experiences of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, and the ways they have dealt with sometimes hostile interactions. This chapter also aims to describe some of the practical issues involved in shaping and carrying out my research.

I begin by discussing the interpretivist tradition, which has informed my thinking about the methods that might best help me gain access to the life-worlds and the lived experiences of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. I provide a rationale for opting for the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, used throughout my research project, and then move on to describe how I went about gathering research material. I explain how the research approach adopted has not only helped with interpreting empirical material, but also assisted in dealing with some ethical concerns I faced during the early stages of my research. Consideration is then given to how ideas derived from the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, like the ‘hermeneutic circle’ and ‘symbolic interactionism’, were used to analyse the interview and focus group transcripts, field notes and YouTube video footage.

**The Interpretivist Tradition**

Whenever I have talked about my research I have often been asked about my research method. On hearing that I had interviewed ‘only’ a small number of young people for my study, a common response was, ‘Well … how can you make generalisations about young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims from just a small number of interviews’? I have usually responded by saying that my research
was not intended to enable me to make generalisations about a group of people, and that it was instead aimed at learning from the experiences of the people I was working with.

It may well be that those concerned about the way I have undertaken my research have preconceived ideas about what ‘proper’ social research is or should be. Certainly there is a well-established view that credible social research should adopt some kind of gold standard represented by large-scale social surveys of large and or representative samples of the population under study (Lee 1989), where the data are subsequently worked over by various kinds of inferential statistical techniques.

Modern social-science research is conventionally understood to fall into two broad schools or traditions. As Wilding and Whiteford (2005) argue, the respective philosophical or epistemological underpinnings of the traditions in contention, namely the broad-church positivist tradition and the equally broad-church interpretivist or symbolic interactionist tradition, are very different.

Researchers who subscribe to the positivist tradition argue, for example, that the phenomena studied by the social sciences are like those studied by natural scientists: observable, objective and persistently real. These qualities render the social events, social facts or phenomena measurable, and if approached with the right method (i.e. the scientific method) then these phenomena can be known objectively and as they actually are. This means they can be known in ways that are free from the researcher's 'biases' (Shepard et al. 1993). They aim to discover a single, objective universal truth/reality (Savin-Baden & Major 2010, p. 1). Even better, and again if scientific method is applied, it will be discovered that the phenomena are both measurable and predictable and therefore explicable by reference to a nomothetic law, which means phenomena can be both explained and predicted. Indeed, the mark of the successful explanation is that it also works as a prediction. These explanations involve first the collection of aggregate data designed to identify those antecedent causal factors that may explain why a particular kind of behaviour
like, for example, criminal behaviour or school non-attendance has taken place. If done right the expectation is that the researcher may then discover some covering law or generalisation and apply this to the phenomena in question. In this tradition a ‘theory’ is the law or generalisation that explains and predicts phenomena.

Without for a moment denying the value of this kind of method for addressing certain problems, I was aware of criticism by other social scientists who argued that neither human behaviour nor thought can be objectively known, nor the ‘causes’ of behaviour identified in the way the positivist tradition has long held to be possible (Shepard et al. 1993). This view has been made strongly by those affiliated with the interpretivist tradition. It was also clear that when looking at the way those associated with this tradition propose to do research, this approach seemed more likely to assist in developing the sorts of insights I was after, that is, insights into how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims living in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne both experienced and made sense of their interactions with other Australians. Donald Campbell (1975, p. 179) has argued typically that the only route to gain knowledge into the life-worlds of people, ‘noisy, fallible, and biased though they be’, is by observing and studying human interactions. The ‘interpretivist’ or ‘symbolic interactionist’ tradition is based on the insight that our social reality is created both out of and through human interaction (Earthy & Cronin 2008, p. 426). My choice of study was guided by a strong sense of wanting to promote a ‘sympathetic understanding’, which Nussbaum (2010) has argued needs to be cultivated as a key civic value and practice. This is a value attached to the broad tradition Weber (1978) refers to as ‘interpretivist sociology’, which insists on the need to engage in the difficult project of understanding the lives, beliefs and actions of people. As Trevor Batrouney and John Goldlust (2005, p. 5) point out:

... one of the more effective ways of understanding the social world is by examining how individuals respond to and reflect upon their experiences and, in particular, the manner in which they construct their own meanings of such experiences. Such an approach often tends to favour qualitative rather than quantitative techniques of
data gathering and often reports its findings by citing the words of respondents rather than by the accumulation, categorization and numerical qualification of survey or interview data.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach

The symbolic interactionist tradition offers a ‘relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct’ (Blumer 1968, p. 1). It provides me with a framework to explore how young Australian-Lebanese Muslims made sense of their interactions with other Australians. In using this approach I drew on the work of a long line of scholars that include George Herbert Mead (1946), Erving Goffman (1959, 1986) and Herbert Blumer (1968). From within the diverse ‘interpretivist’ tradition, I drew especially on what can be called a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. Primarily because it aligns with the key aim of this research, which is to better understand the life-worlds of young, second-generation, Australian-Lebanese-Muslims living in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is one of the central forms of modern qualitative and interpretivist research. The classical phenomenological approach was developed initially by Edmund Husserl (1967) as a highly sophisticated epistemological strategy designed to address some deeply puzzling aspects of philosopher Immanuel Kant’s (2008) transcendental critique of knowledge. In particular, twentieth century phenomenology took off from Kant’s (2008, p. 69) claim that we can never know ‘things in themselves’, but only as they appear to us, since all knowledge is gained through the lenses of human construction. Husserl’s phenomenological approach was developed in the process of formulating an answer to the question: how can we ever come to know ‘things’, including other people’s experiences, as they are in reality experienced by them?
Husserl’s phenomenology understood as the study of human experience was subsequently given an existential twist by one of his students, namely Martin Heidegger (1993, 2004), and later Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004), a student of Heidegger’s. They extended and modified Husserl’s work to produce what is now known as the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. It was also given a sociological twist by other students of Husserl like Alfred Schutz (1967, 1970) who did much to develop a framework subsequently embellished by Herbert Blumer (1968) and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966).

The key differences between the earlier pure phenomenological approach, and the later ‘hermeneutic-phenomenological’ approach, can be identified by discussing the differences between Husserl and Heidegger’s ideas on how we can come to uncover the life-worlds of human experience. Both Husserl and Heidegger sought to uncover life worlds or human experience as it is lived, but there were some significant differences in their ideas (Laverty 2003, p. 11). One difference was that Husserl believed it was possible to understand human experiences through a contemplative or rational process in which the philosopher identifies and overcomes their own assumptions so that the researcher can truly come to terms with another’s experience (Husserl 1967). He proposed that human experiences can and should be taken completely ‘free from all theory’, just as it is in reality experienced (Husserl 1967, p. 111). That is to say, Husserl believed that the influence of the researcher’s values and personal history could and should be recognised and countered so they do not overly interfere with the research process.

Heidegger on the other hand believed that Husserl had continued the long western tradition of treating the problems he was addressing as if a narrowly rational or contemplative process could solve the epistemological problems. Heidegger insisted that this ignored the deeply grounded and situated nature of people’s ideas in relation to the ways they lived (their life-world) and did things – or their practice. In terms emulated by many later theorists, Heidegger directed us to
pay attention to the daily practices and sense-making schemes we rely on as we live and do things. Furthermore, Heidegger argued that we cannot ‘bracket’ off our own experiences and assumptions (Heidegger 1993). He said it was unavoidable that the interests, experiences and life-worlds of the researcher will shape how the researcher understands the life-worlds and experiences of those being researched. The researcher therefore needs to be reflective, and is:

... obligated to understand the context under which the text or dialogue was being produced and to bring forth interpretations of meaning. These interpretations arose through a fusion of the text and its context, as well as the participants, the researcher, and their contexts based on an ontology that is subjectivist (Laverty 2003, p. 21)

It is an approach that can present the researcher with both dilemmas as well as opportunities. In speaking about her own experience in using this tradition, Lisa Whitehead (2004, p. 518) observed how,

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy and not a methodology, and the researcher is required to read and extract the principles of this and apply them to the study. This leaves the researcher open to criticism that the process of translating philosophy into practice involves the researcher’s interpretation. In seeking to make the decision trail clear to others, the researcher must distil the philosophical principles which are necessarily subjective and set these out in a way that is accessible and open to scrutiny (Whitehead 2004, p. 518).

I too attempted to ‘distil the philosophical principles’ of hermeneutic-phenomenological into my research. I did this by setting out how I applied these principles in ways that are accessible and open to scrutiny. I will speak more about the challenges in doing this, later in this chapter.

I turn now to discuss how I went about gathering the ‘data’ that would ultimately help answer my research questions.
Getting the Research Material

Because my study aimed to understand how young second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims both experienced and made sense of their interactions with other Australians, I strategically selected a number of young people who fitted my selection criteria, which included things like: they were Australian-born, self-identified as Muslim, claimed Lebanese ancestry and lived in the northern and western suburbs\textsuperscript{12} of Melbourne. This strategic and selective selection of young people I judged to be more likely to achieve my research aims, rather than any other way of selecting research participants – like for example, a random sample of the Australian-Lebanese population. This has meant that, while my findings may not be relevant to, say, the young Australian-Lebanese-Christian population living in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, it certainly does provide the material needed to answer my research questions and to meet the research aims.

Some questions might be raised about my sampling method, such as, was there a problem with the way I recruited participants with the help of the Victorian Arabic Speaking Service (VASS)? And, did this method of recruiting exclude those young Lebanese Muslims who were so marginalised that they were not part of the VASS network? While this is a possible problem, my status as an outsider to the community meant there was no other way for me to build relationships of trust and secure interviewees other than through the

\textsuperscript{12} The social class aspects of selecting young second generation Lebanese-Muslims from the northern and western suburbs such as Broadmeadows, Coburg and Newport is worth mentioning here. Typically, both Lebanese Muslims and Lebanese Christians in the south eastern and eastern suburbs (such as Brighton and Doncaster) are socio-economically better off than those living in the northern and western suburbs (such as Broadmeadows and Newport) and enjoy a more privileged class status (Baum 2008). Further research could look more explicitly into the complex intersections of class and the experiences of Lebanese-Muslims. Unfortunately an examination of class, as well as other key frames that shape our lived experience such as gender, was not within the scope of this PhD research.
networks created through my volunteer and paid work at organisations such as VASS.

Given the aims of my research it also made sense for me to use research techniques like the one to two hour interview and/or focus group discussions supplemented by intensive ethnographic fieldwork. Such qualitative methods were chosen over quantitative methods (such as mass distributed surveys) that might perhaps have given me greater breadth but not as much depth of insight into the young people’s lives.

A total of thirty-one young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims participated in my research. Of these, nineteen were young men and twelve young females. They participated in either a one-to-one interview (lasting between one to two hours) or in a focus-group discussion (which usually ran for a little over two hours). As you can see in the table provided on the next page, a small number took part in both an interview and a focus group session and some opted for two interviews or two focus groups.

Plain language statements were given to participants in both English and Arabic. All interviewees completed a ‘Background Details of Participant Form’ (see Appendix G), which was used to document the participant’s contact information and to collect demographic details such as participant’s age and the suburb they lived in. These forms, along with consent forms, audio recordings on tapes and mini-discs were kept in lockers in the RMIT University postgraduate study space, according with ethics requirements. Unfortunately these lockers and all their contents were destroyed accidentally by the university in the course of a process of refurbishment. Fortunately I had managed to transcribe most of the interview recordings before the materials in the lockers were destroyed. Unfortunately other materials such as the forms detailing participant’s background

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13 I had both the plain language statement and the ‘Background Details of Participant Form’ translated into Arabic by a professional and accredited translator. This is because some participants were under the age of 18 and their parents (from whom I needed to get consent) needed the forms in Arabic.
information was destroyed before I could analyze this data. Regrettably I am therefore unable to provide detailed profiles of interviewees as I had planned to originally or analyze any differences between participants (for example, examine differences between participants who lived in certain suburbs or by age).

In the focus groups and interviews I used a semi-structured interview format. According to Robyn Longhurst (2010, p. 103) semi-structured ‘…interviews (sometimes referred to as informal, conversational or ‘soft’ interviews) and focus groups (sometimes referred to as focus group interviews) are about talking to’ and listening to people. Although the interviewer may have some questions or some discussion topics in mind, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews ‘unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important’ (Longhurst 2010, p. 103). The interviewer has the freedom to phrase and rephrase questions as they see fit according to the themes the researcher wishes to explore as well as to follow up anything the interviewee has brought up (Fontana & Frey 2003).

Table of Interview and Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Female or Male</th>
<th>Individual interview</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 one-to-one interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ramsaya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 one-to-one interview</td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nuer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 separate one-to-one interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Coco</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 separate focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mischa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 separate focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Chanel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Hana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Sophia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 focus group</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 ZuZu</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Lisa</td>
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<td>1 focus group</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 one-to-one interview</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Rocky</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Jack Black</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 separate focus groups</td>
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<td>Anthony</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Budgie</td>
<td>Male</td>
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Before commencing the formal aspect of my research I did a ‘pilot study’, which involved testing my interview questions on a few of my friends who participated in a trial focus group discussion. They were also required to fill out the ‘Background Details of Participant’ form. Hala Abdelnour was one of the participants in my pilot study. She happened to be a young Australian of Lebanese-Christian background and a youth worker doing intensive work with young people from ASB and Muslim backgrounds. She, along with the other pilot group participants, provided useful feedback, which was used to refine interview questions and the ‘Background Details of Participant Form’.

My semi-structured interviewing format entailed asking exploratory questions that were aimed at: eliciting stories about their experiences of racism; their sense of belonging to the wider community; their actions in response to incidences of racism; and their memories of those times when they felt like they were being treated or perceived as ‘Other’. The questions I used to guide the conversation altered...
depending on ‘my audience’. For example, sometimes I began a focus group discussion by asking, “Has anyone experienced racism”? If the conversation didn’t start rolling I would re-phrase the question and put a slightly different slant on it by asking something like, ‘Have you ever felt that youse were being treated differently or unfairly cos you’re Muslim or cos you’re Lebo’? Follow-up questions were asked once my interviewees began talking.

Interviews and focus groups discussions were transcribed. Some of those transcriptions I did myself while others were done by paid professionals. When quoting participants in this thesis I have removed identifying details and used pseudonyms to secure participants anonymity. Most of the pseudonyms were chosen by the interviewees themselves.

From 2003 to 2009 I ‘immersed’ (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995) myself in the life worlds of young Australians of Lebanese-Muslim backgrounds. This involved field observations while participating in a range of activities such as youth camps, forums, festivals and leadership programs. These activities were organised by agencies such as the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS), Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV) and Australian Lebanese Welfare (ALW). I did some volunteer work with ALW and IWWCV, and both volunteer and paid work for VASS, during the course of my PhD. Material for this study was also gleaned from YouTube videos created by young ASB and Muslim Australians, (which form the basis of my discussion in Chapter Five).

My research findings, which came from my field notes, interviews and focus-group discussions and analysis of videos, were compared and analysed in relation to the research findings of comparable research (e.g. the findings from research focused on Australian Arabs’ and Muslims’ experiences after 9/11).
The interpretive process

Those working with the hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective claim that all social interactions and actions, including social research, involve the practice of interpretation. This is reflected by the relatively stable and habitual qualities that define much of social life, which requires well established patterns of meaning and frameworks for both informing and interpreting social interactions. Sharkey (2001) claims that, 'prior understandings' are essential in the task of interpretation, as well as for developing new understandings.

The task of interpretation is not one of jettisoning one’s prior understandings, it is rather one of discovering and testing them and rejecting and affirming them in dialogical play or interpretation. New understandings inevitably emerge during the conversation with the text … (Sharkey 2001, p. 29)

Sharkey’s description of the interpretive process aligns well with the way I conducted my interviews and interpreted the experiences shared by interviewees. For example, during the interviews and focus-group discussions that I did as part of this study, I often shared my experiences and understandings with the young people I was interviewing. These young people would also explain to me how their experiences, and interpretations of those experiences, were similar and different to my own. In this way, following the insights I had gained from my hermeneutic-phenomenological readings, I began to grasp the ways my ‘prior understandings’ were being identified and tested, sometimes affirmed and sometimes rejected. Through the research process, and particularly through ‘dialogical interplay’ with the young people I was interviewing, new understandings emerged that I hope more closely aligned with interviewees’ experiences (Sharkey 2001, p. 29).

A conversation with Nuer a young Lebanese Muslim woman, can be used to illustrate how ‘prior understandings’ were tested and how new understandings were able to emerge. My initial observations of Nuer suggested she had exhibited plenty of buoyancy and resilience in living her life in the post-9/11 context. I guessed that this was due
to her strong religious commitments. However, towards the end of the conversation, I learnt that while she considered her religion important, it was not her only source of inspiration and strength when faced with hostility. The following extract from the interview with Nuer reveals what happened:

Kavindi: You seem like a really positive, happy person… Do you think your religious background… has something to do with…?

Nuer: Mostly because of the religion and just reading a lot of books of motivation. Listening to the works of Tony Roberts, CDs… And having this sort of attitude of saying “why waste your energy on things you can’t change, where you can focus it on something you can change for the future”. So it’s focusing on the positive rather than the negative. Through motivational speeches and through the [service provider] organisation sort of helped me out as well… speaking to kids. Teaching them like sort of learning myself and applying it to my life as well. No point in telling them what to do if you don’t do it yourself. You got to sort of live that example. Pretty much religion as well because religion tells you that it’s not worth sort of pondering around saying that’s bad times you’re not going to achieve anything. You got to sort of translate that into a positive thing and go from there.

In effect Nuer was saying that some of her inspiration and strength came from the training and opportunities she had when she worked for a youth organisation. Her work for this organisation entailed speaking to other young people about her experiences. According to Nuer, listening to inspirational talks and motivational readings was important for developing a positive attitude. So too was the opportunity to give motivational speeches to other young people. This, she said, helped her deal with racism.

As can be inferred from this conversation with Nuer, differences between the researcher and the interviewee need not necessarily be a problem. The assumptions I had made about Nuer, and why she seemed to be so resilient, were identified and tested and through our dialogue new insights and new understandings emerged.

Those who work within the interpretivist tradition often see their work as committed to providing in-depth ethnographic accounts of people’s life-worlds. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist and a leading exponent of the interpretivist tradition, aimed for example to offer what he calls ‘thick descriptions’ of people’s lives. He said that the
thick descriptions ‘are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to’ (Geertz 1975, p. 9). Those thick descriptions are attempts to capture the meanings embedded in the actions and interactions that make up the life-worlds of ordinary people. As Blumer (1968, p. 2) points out:

The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them… The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Added to these premises are several other linked presuppositions, which include the following principles:

human group life consists of fitting to each others lines of action... such aligning of actions takes places predominately by the participants indicating to one another what to do and in turn interpreting such indications made by the others; out of such interaction people form objects that constitute their worlds; people are prepared to act towards those objects on the basis of the meanings these objects have for them; human beings face their world as organisms with selves, thus allowing each to make indications to himself; human action is constructed by the actor on the basis of what he notes, interprets, and assesses; and the interlinking of such ongoing action constitutes organisations, institutions, and vast complexes of interdependent relations. To test the validity of these premises one must go to a direct examination of actual human group life (Blumer 1968, p. 49).

The observation that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them has particular relevance for understanding how people within particular social networks act towards others, especially those they see as very different to themselves.

Among the advantages of the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is its capacity to show how the relationship between the researcher and those being researched enters into the narration of experience, as well as the interpretive process involved in understanding and sharing experiences (Sharkey 2001). This insight helped to resolve certain ethical and research dilemmas (as I discuss next) that I began grappling with in the early stages of the research.
project. These dilemmas also opened up some major issues about the very nature of interpretation.

**Ethical and research dilemmas**

In effect the dilemmas I am referring to have to do with the quandaries of interpretive research, and the question: what does someone who wants to understand someone else, need to know or to have experienced? I thought having had experiences of racism, and being a visible Other myself, would help to develop and establish connections or bonds with the young people I was interviewing, which is important for qualitative research. I was concerned however, that drawing on my own experiences and ‘prior understandings’ might constrain my ability to make sense of my interviewees’ experiences *from their point of view*. This problem, as I discovered later, has been recognised in the development of the hermeneutic tradition.

Gadamer (2004), who helped to develop the hermeneutic tradition, argued that there was no way to achieve a perfect circle of understanding. He said that any act of understanding was always going to be situated in a particular historical time and place, and that whatever it was that was being understood was itself also situated in time and place. In effect, whether the people you are making sense of lived in Athens in the sixth century (BCE) or in Broadmeadows in 2009, people have a historically shaped consciousness and are accordingly embedded in the particular history and culture that shaped them. This, however, is true of the erstwhile interpreter too. In effect, any interpretation involves a fusion of frameworks of meaning, where the person doing the interpreting seeks some kind of fusion with whatever they are trying to make sense of or understand. There is, however, no objective or neutral point of view that will enable us to form a view about the success, or otherwise, of our
attempt to understand. This may be why Hurd and McIntyre (1998), for example, have suggested that when the researcher identifies excessively with the interviewee’s experiences this may become a problem. Hurd and McIntyre (1998, p. 78) define this potential research dilemma as the ‘seduction of sameness’. They say the problem begins when the researcher identifies too closely with the people whose experiences s/he is trying to make sense of and this can result in the misinterpretation of their experiences. The risk is that it can hinder the researcher’s ability to be ‘critically reflexive’. I found some useful ways of thinking about this ‘problem’ in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition.

If I use these ideas to reflect on my research I can say that I did have a number of ‘prior-understandings’ of the kinds of prejudiced, even hostile, encounters the young Lebanese Muslims I was speaking with were likely to have had. My prior understandings or imaginings were not only based on media representations (and other sources), but also informed by my own personal experiences of racism and some of the contradictions involved in my wanting to ‘belong’. However, I realised from the very outset of this research that, whatever similarities I might have with my interviewees, I also needed to be mindful that there were some important differences. This includes the fact that while I could be considered ‘Oriental’ and Other, I am perhaps a less problematic ‘Other’ in the eyes of some Australians, especially when compared to young Lebanese Muslims, who, as Poynting (2006a, p. 32) says, have come to be constructed as ‘the pre-eminent folk devil of contemporary Australian society’. As an Australian with a Sri Lankan background, who is not a Muslim, and is a PhD student, I enjoy a different status. I may be perceived to have accumulated more ‘national capital’ (Hage 2000, pp. 193-196) than my interviewees, and this can influence how I am seen within the wider community as well as how I would be seen by the young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I was interviewing. In short, because of
my status as a member of a less-vilified minority group, my gender\textsuperscript{14}, my status as university researcher, and my age and the social context in which I grew up, I needed to be mindful of not making unwarranted assumptions. (I can also report that some of my own frameworks of interpretation were challenged in the course of my conversations with the young people that I interviewed and worked with.)

These reflections can be related to my readings on the ‘politics of representation’. As Norman Denzin (2004, p. 85), who has been a key figure in the development of research methods for many decades, has reminded us:

\begin{quote}
The politics of representation is basic to the study of experience. How a thing is represented involves a struggle over power and meaning. While social scientists have traditionally privileged experience itself, it is now understood that no life, no experience can be lived outside of some system of representation.
\end{quote}

Indeed, there is a powerful symmetry between my observations in chapter one about the way the media or politicians have set about representing young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims and my attempts to represent them. It matters greatly how people are represented. This is why researchers have to be careful when they construct interpretations about other people and their life-worlds. This is particularly so for those who have already been dealt with prejudicially and been subject to misrepresentation. As Said (1981, 2003) has pointed out, the life-worlds of Arabs and Muslims have consistently been (mis)represented by those who have the power to create meaning via their representations of Others, and this includes intellectuals and researchers.

Indeed, concern about being mis-represented was one reason why some of the young people I approached for interviews were initially

\textsuperscript{14} I mention gender because the public perception of the ‘Lebanese-Muslim Problem,’ and the ‘problem of ethnic youth’ more generally in Australia, is a gendered one (Collins 2002, pp. 12-13; Sercombe 1999; White 2007b). That is, the problematisation of young people (including young Lebanese-Muslims) is focused mainly on young men rather than women (Kelly 2000b; Noble, Poynting & Tabar 2003). Young Lebanese-Muslims, and many other groups of young men from minority backgrounds, are perceived as backward, brutal and misogynistic (Collins et al. 2004, p. 151). Such stereotyping positions me, as a woman, as a less problematic ‘Other’.
wary about having anything to do with my study. They said they were all too familiar with being exploited, with having their stories turned around and used as ammunition for other people's agendas.

I was challenged by having to deal with questions like the following. Even if I have had similar experiences to my interviewees in being treated as Other, and even if I had at times questioned my own sense of belonging to ‘the Australian community’, would I really be able to understand the experiences of Australian-Lebanese-Muslims? This question needed to be addressed given that they were worried that I would misrepresent their experiences. What this boiled down to was a concern that my research might further exacerbate their marginalisation.

To paraphrase one young Muslim, even well-meaning researchers, journalists and youth experts can, in their attempt to try to help, end up doing the opposite. He said he was sick and tired of being asked to attend the endless programs, interviews and forums that were focused on young Muslims and/or Arabs. It merely reminded him that people like him were being seen as ‘problems’. Some of the other young people I spoke with said they did not want to be given ‘special treatment’ or ‘targeted’ for enrolment in Muslim or ASB-specific programs and services designed to address ‘the problem’ of ‘their marginalisation’. They also reported that such ‘special treatment’ often evoked jealousy and resentment from other Australians. They described the hostile responses they got from others when Muslims and Arabs were seen to be receiving special treatment. This, they explained, exacerbated tensions between themselves and other groups within the broader community. Thus research like my own was seen as dangerous and as having the potential to cause further divisiveness, and to make worse their experiences of being treated as ‘Other’. I certainly appreciated these concerns, and especially the point that however well-intended my research was, it could be picked

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15 E.g. leadership programs aimed specifically at enabling young Muslims to have a stronger voice in the wider community.
up by others and fitted to agendas that would not serve the interests of the Australian-Lebanese-Muslim community.

Those early obstacles were, however, overcome by taking certain steps, such as by working intensively as a volunteer on community-building activities to develop a rapport with a number of Australian-Muslim and ASB communities in Melbourne. Through my efforts I gained the support of the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS). This not-for-profit organisation helped to establish my credibility and reputation as someone who could be trusted to provide a fair account of Australian-Lebanese-Muslim’s experiences. Workers at VASS introduced me to many young people and once they got to know me and my commitment to their communities (demonstrated by my volunteer work on projects with the community), they not only were willing to participate in the research themselves, but also helped recruit other young people for interviews.\(^{16}\) In short, my partnership with VASS allowed me access to communities that I would not otherwise have been able to ‘get into’. That initial right of entry was critical for making first contact and relationship-building of the kind that allowed me to gain an insider’s accounts that is needed for interpretive research. That preliminary work included developing an understanding of Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ cultures by immersing myself in the daily life of the communities. This allowed me to appreciate more fully what meaning they gave to ‘belonging’ and their experiences of racism, which was the main goal of my research.

It can also be noted that, while being an ‘outsider’ in the Australian-Lebanese-Muslim community had its limitations; it also had its benefits. For example, some of my interviewees said they were relieved to know that someone outside their community cared about

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\(^{16}\) I also did volunteer work with several other organisations including Australian Lebanese Welfare (ALW) and Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV). Whilst I was not able to recruit interview participants through organisations other than VASS, my volunteer work with organisations such as ALW and IWWCV provided valuable ethnographic insight for my field notes.
the issues they were facing and had taken an interest in them. Most of the young people also seemed to enjoy participating in the interviews. They saw it variously as an opportunity to vent their frustrations and/or as an opportunity to educate others about what it was like to be a young second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslim growing up in Melbourne. In short, while there were some things interviewees were not prepared to share with me because of my ‘outsider’ status, there were also things they did share with me because I was an ‘outsider’. It is likely that some would not have shared certain information if I had come from within their community. It was suggested by some of my interviewees that my position as an outsider meant that they did not have to worry about my gossiping about their personal lives with others in the tight-knit Australian-Lebanese-Muslim communities in Melbourne.

The hermeneutic circle has been helpful in resolving certain ethical and research dilemmas discussed thus far, because it requires openness to (instead of imposing, inserting, or conceptualizing) the truth (Youngquist 2002).

The hermeneutic circle is based in the interpretivist tradition which refutes essentialism – the notion that there is an underlying objective truth to be found in social phenomenon such as young peoples’ dealings with racism. As such, use of the hermeneutic circle has helped to militate against any temptation to develop mass generalisations about the young people who are the focus of this study – which as discussed in Chapter One can result in harms such as the negative stereotyping of Australian Lebanese-Muslims. It works as a buffer against essentialism because the hermeneutic circle is geared towards learning from people’s experiences, reflecting upon and testing assumptions and common stereotypes about ‘these young people’. It requires the development of mutual understanding through conversation. The risk of harm (that can come from when ‘experts’ such as researchers try to develop particular ‘truths’ about a group of people they research) is reduced because this analytical framework requires an admission upfront that the
interpretations provided in this thesis are ‘unfinished, provisional and incomplete’ (Denzin 1989, p. 83). As articulated by Denzin (1989, p. 158) those who employ the hermeneutic circle embrace the point that:

... all interpreters are caught in the circle of interpretation. It is impossible to be free of interpretation or to conduct “purely” objective studies.

In the spirit of this approach, I unabashedly acknowledge that someone else looking at the same ‘data’ being analysed in this thesis, can provide different interpretations to those which I have provided. Given that the hermeneutic circle allows for a multiplicity of interpretations in relation to any given ‘text’, the reader will see that throughout this thesis I have drawn on a range of theories to make sense of the material I have gathered. The limitation of taking this approach to my analysis and interpretation of ‘data’ is that it may appear to some as ad-hoc and messy, which could have been avoided had I opted to use a single theory from which to explain/interpret my findings. The strength however is that the reader will see the possibility of interpreting social phenomenon in many ways. Furthermore, the use of a variety of theories will provide new and fresh insights that would otherwise not have been possible had I constrained my enquiry to just one particular theory.

Next, I provide a more explicit account of how the hermeneutic circle has been applied.

**Closing the hermeneutic circle?**

As I have indicated, I had decided to make sense of the transcribed interviews, my field notes, and my analysis of YouTube videos, by drawing on what has been referred to as a ‘hermeneutic circle’.
As Marlene Cohen, David Kahn and Richard Steeves (2000, pp. 73-74) indicate the ‘hermeneutic circle’ refers to an approach to interpreting data in which the smallest statements must be understood in terms of the larger cultural contexts. I developed this interpretive process by first reading both my field notes, and each of my interview and focus group transcripts, several times. I did this to establish both a holistic understanding of interviewees’ experiences, as well as to identify some of the themes emerging in relation to the first three of my four research questions. To re-cap, these questions are:

- how do young Australians of Lebanese-Muslim background experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians;
- how have they dealt with the challenging and hostile interactions that have followed events such as 9/11; and
- what sense of belonging do these young people have in relation to the broader Australian society?

Finally, I re-read all the transcripts and field notes to identify any similarities and differences amongst the participants in relation to each of these research questions.

Analysis of research materials using the hermeneutic circle also required that I incorporate an understanding of the socio-political and cultural contexts that the participants and I were both immersed in. I also needed to critically self-reflect on my own prior understandings that interplay in the interpretation of interviewees’ narratives (Debesay, Nåden & Slettebø 2008).

I can illustrate how the ‘hermeneutic circle’ was applied in interpreting research materials by referring to the following extract from a focus group discussion. As you will note below, Coco (a young female interviewee) had questioned why the media identifies or makes the cultural and religious backgrounds of only certain groups of people a significant matter when reporting the news:
... why is that whenever something happens, and it happens to be a Muslim youth, why is that [the media have to announce that] they are Muslim youths [who committed the crime]? Do you know what I mean? Like those five white boys that raped that girl, that disabled girl, why didn’t they say [those boys who raped that girl was] Catholic Christian Jew, Buddhist, Hindu whatever... yes that Lebanese guy he did rape a girl in Sydney but why does it have to be [announced by the media] that he’s Lebanese-Muslim. They over exaggerate everything. Like that guy that shot those people in Tasmania. What’s his name? Why didn’t they say he was brought up as a Christian and went to church every Sunday, why wasn’t his Christianity [brought up as an issue]?

So how can the above narrative be analysed using the hermeneutic circle? As mentioned previously, it requires that the smallest statements (such as the above) be understood in relation to the larger context. The larger context helps to give meaning to what is said by participants such as CoCo. I acknowledged also, that my reading of Coco’s statement is coloured by my own prior understandings and prejudices, and as such, it is only one of many possible interpretations.

In the first step of analysis, I can see that this statement, when compared to other parts of Coco’s interviews transcript, is consistent with the other experiences she has shared, all of which point to CoCo’s frustration with Muslims being misrepresented and stereotyped, especially by the mass media. This common theme, of frustration with stereotyping and misrepresentation, that was picked up on when comparing the earlier statement made by CoCo with other parts of CoCo’s narrative, is illustrated with the next extract.

My sister is a nurse and she was telling one of the other nurses about our family. She told them I’m a nurse, my younger sister is a social worker, another one is a teacher, another is becoming a lawyer and she was explaining and [this nurse she was talking to] just started to cry she couldn’t believe it, she’s like “how do your parents let you go to uni”. She was so shocked.

They assume that you’re oppressed and you’re not allowed to. They don’t see it is so different than when you live in Saudi Arabia.

Having identified a common theme (namely, frustration with the stereotyping of Muslims), I note the various statements she made about this in her focus group sessions. I then did a close reading of other interviews and research materials (e.g. field notes).
In this way I was able to establish that the frustrations expressed by Coco, about being stereotyped and misrepresented, were not exclusive to her. Indeed most, if not all my interviewees shared similar frustrations. This is illustrated in the following extract from a focus group discussion in which two female participants, who have called themselves ZuZu and Ramsaya, talk about popular representations and assumptions made about Lebanese-Muslims.

ZuZu: I’ve never heard Catholic-Greek rapes a girl or Catholic Italian or anything.
Ramsaya: The media is what everyone listens to and although they know it’s full of crap they believe it because it’s always in their face.
ZuZu: Some people don’t come into contact with Lebanese-Muslims so the only thing they know about them is what they hear on the media or reading the newspaper and stuff and that’s the only view they can take.
Ramsaya: I walked into a shop once and a lady asked me out of the blue “where do you come from?” I felt like an idiot and I said to her “Coburg.” [Laughter]. And she looked at me and said no which country? And I said I’m Australian. And she said no... what are you? And I said I’m Australian and my background is Lebanese. And she said “oh okay, I just finished reading a book about um a book called Sold, have you read it?” And I said to her “no”. [And this lady says] “Oh it’s about a girl that get’s sold to Yemen”
ZuZu: Yemen.
Ramsaya: Which is a Muslim country. And she’s like “they treated her really horrible”. And she just told me this story and assumed that was what was going to happen to me. You could tell that’s what she was thinking and she wanted me ...

ZuZu: Maybe she wanted you to say, “yeah me too!” [laughter]

In this way, I was able to recognise shared frustrations about how Muslims are represented. Furthermore, all of the interviewees identified the media (including popular books such as ‘Sold’ that were about Muslim women being oppressed) contributed to these negative stereotypes.

The hermeneutic circle can be made more complete if interviewee’s statements are considered in the wider socio-political context. As I argued in Chapter One, this is a context in which interviewees had media reports about ‘Lebanese-Muslim gang rapes’ fresh in their minds, and where there had been a proliferation of books, TV shows, and public commentary about the ‘problems’ posed by Arab and Muslims. In this respect when ZuZu said, ‘I’ve never heard Catholic-
Greek rapes a girl or Catholic Italian or anything,' can only be said to make sense if we remember that Zu Zu is referring to what had been recent media coverage of the gang rapes in Sydney, in which the Lebanese-Muslim backgrounds of the rapists were the foci of considerable public attention.

Use of the hermeneutic circle also requires that the interpreter’s prior assumptions are tested. This was done wherever possible, and is illustrated with the following exchange between myself and a focus group participant:

Kavindi: Is that the biggest?... One of the biggest problems for young people: the media?

Zu zu: Yeah.

Prior assumptions could not always be so explicitly tested with participants. Sometimes because my own assumptions were not brought to light until after the interview session drew to a close and I had a chance to reflect on the conversations between myself and the young people. Perhaps too there are other assumptions left unrecognised, and this may be left to the readers and critics to point out. The hermeneutic circle however, with its emphasis on reading ‘texts’ in context, has been particularly helpful in helping me identify my prior assumptions, and then using that to develop fresh insights into what interviewees shared with me. This was exemplified in the course of a focus group discussion when Salim, one of the young men in the group, who expressed his frustration with a question I had put to the group: ‘Why is it good to be a young Lebanese-Muslim’? He responded by saying:

It’s not really a question. Cos there is nothing really good about that. It’s only good for us. We are happy that we are young Lebanese-Muslims. It’s maybe cos we believe in different beliefs. And it’s like why is it good to be a young white Aussie? Does that question get asked? I don’t think it does.

Using the idea of a hermeneutic circle proved helpful here because it encouraged me to think further about Salim’s frustration with my question. To do this I needed to put the question into the larger socio-political context. That context is one in which Australian-
Lebanese-Muslims have been constructed as the ‘Other’, and where there is much debate about the kinds of people who ‘deserve’ to be ‘Australian’ (Hage 2003, p. 44). The debate is often based on assumptions and notions that some groups of people somehow have more legitimacy and a greater claim to be here and to call themselves ‘Australian’ than others (Fisher & Sonn 2007, p. 29).

Salim’s critique may be best understood by appreciating the context in which he lives, where too often it is automatically assumed that being a ‘white Aussie’ is the best kind of Australian to be. In that context, being a young male Lebanese-Muslim is very low on the ranking list. Salim is sensitive to this aspect of social context. Salim was clearly upset about what he saw as having to justify why it was good to be a young Lebanese-Muslim. As he said, it is not likely that such a question would be asked of a white ‘Aussie’. In his retort to my questions, Salim indicated awareness that Whiteness is an invisible privilege in the national field, and as such it is only non-White Others (like himself) who are scrutinised (i.e. on what is good about being Lebanese-Muslim?). This reading also highlights why Salim may be concerned about ‘falling into the trap’ of having his culture or religion put under the microscope and assessed in terms of its worth. His critical response has relevance to the ‘discourse of value’ that Heidegger (1978) refers to.

It is important to finally realise that precisely through the characterisation of something as ‘a value’ what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object of man’s estimation. Every valuing, even when it values positively, is subjectivising. It does not let things: be. Rather, valuing lets things: be valid (Heidegger 1978, cited in Hage 2000, p. 121).

In other words Salim is protesting against having to justify why his faith and cultural background is ‘valuable’. He understands that if he answers my question by saying ‘what is good about being a young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim’ then he is implicitly accepting discourses that position Australian-Lebanese-Muslims in relation to ‘White’ Australians. That is, he would be accepting a discourse that assigns to some migrant cultures a different value or status to that
enjoyed, for example, by Anglo-Australians. The presumed superiority of being an Anglo-Australian is represented in such a way as to imply that other minority cultures only exist in a subordinate way to serve the latter, rather as a pinch of pepper is used to spice a stew or soup: they fulfil a function as an ‘enriching’ culture (Hage 2000, p. 121).

As illustrated thus far with, the hermeneutic circle is one approach used to analyse research materials. ‘Symbolic interactionism’ (which is also part of the Interpretivist tradition) is another framework for making sense of the ‘research data’.

**Interpreting interviewee’s narratives using Symbolic-Interactionism**

The observation frequently made by generations of ‘symbolic interactionists’ and summed up by Blumer (1968, p.2) is that ‘human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.’ This has particular relevance for making sense of what Aden, another young man in the same focus group as Salim (who I spoke about earlier), had to say.

Aden was happy to respond to the same question I had put to Salim, and to do so differently. Unlike Salim, Aden relished the opportunity to speak about and promote the positive value of being ‘Lebanese’ and being part of ‘Muslim culture’. Indeed Aden took up the invitation to identify what is good about being a young Lebanese-Muslim man with gusto:

> How about we talk about cultural things? Like big festivals, big gatherings, weddings... Say his dad [pointing to another focus group participant] comes from Lebanon, right? I’m not joking to you. There’ll probably be food from start of that door to the other side of the house ... Man ... people are very generous. They’ll spray you with hundreds of dollars... some Arabs are very uptight about their
money right? But why they are tight? Because if it’s going somewhere that it’s not meant to be going that’s a waste of money. A Jew would say. Apparently. I dunno. I’ve seen it on TV or something. A Jew would save five cents a day and apparently he gets some hundred dollars at the end of the year. Right, he saves a dollar a day, right? He gets this much at the end of the year. But we are not. We are not. We are very generous.

Everything. Eid festivals. It costs a fortune. I dunno, if you’ve ever been or not. It costs a fortune. The fireworks alone costs around fifteen grand to do. It lasts 15 minutes. That’s fifteen grand gone. Like that … It all comes down to respect … I’m enjoying [talking about] this … Respect is like the most important thing …You barely ever hear a Lebanese, a Muslim, or an Egyptian say “my parents, I fucking hate’em” or you know … “I hate my mum, she’s a fucking dumb/bitch slut” blah, blah. You never hear that. Like if he [pointing to another focus group participant] says, “My mum’s being a dumb bitch”, I’ll turn around and slap him for it. I’ll go, “why the fuck are you saying that about your mum”? You know what I mean? We care about our families so much. And then Aussies they got one brother or one sister and they hate them. They can’t stand’em.

Let me tell you one thing. I was working with this guy, right? And this Aussie guy come up to me and he goes, “man are you like interested in girls and that”? “What the fuck’s wrong with you? You think I’m interested in donkeys? Fucking hell, I’m interested in girls. You know? And he goes “yeah then you ought to see my sister, man”. And I go, “why”? And he goes, “man my sister is so hot man you want her number, man? You want her number”? I go, “You know what? You’re a fucking wanker”! You know, if anyone does touch my sister I would shoot him. I would chop his dick off and go bury him somewhere. Right? And he’s telling me “come do my sister”. His sister, man! He goes, come do her. This kid’s fucked. I’m not lying to you.

Aden’s response can, for example, be read as it were, ‘literally’, as he makes comparisons and refers to an ethic of care expressed by ‘his people’ towards family – something he claimed is missing from the ‘white Aussie’ culture. The same comparative opposition positions can be seen in terms of his claims about ethical considerations such as generosity, celebrations, family and the ethos of respect. More generally we can treat his defence of Lebanese ways as part of a representation that both validates and positions his culture as superior to what he has described as ‘white Aussie’ culture. He was clearly quite critical of ‘white Aussie’ culture and was also disposed to talk disparagingly about ‘Jews’. I read his response as being sensitive to a context in which he understood that Lebanese and Muslim Australians were being undervalued by people and institutions claiming to represent ‘mainstream’ Australia.
Blumer’s (1968) claim that ‘the meaning of… things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows’ is also useful for understanding or making sense of the research process. Aden, like all my interviewees, was well able to identify and read certain signs or symbols as they are attached to people and this would have been going on in my interactions with them. As symbolic interactionists argue, meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things that he or she encounters (Blumer 1968). Aden would, for example, have understood my non-Anglo name, taken note of my dark skin, and registered my accent as not typically ‘Aussie’. In this way I suspected that my interviewees may have assumed that I would understand and sympathise with them about life as a member of a minority group in the context of a dominant Anglo ‘culture’. Even though I am neither Muslim nor Lebanese I was in some sense ‘one of them’ simply by virtue of my not being a ‘white Aussie’. It became apparent in Aden’s response to my interview question that he had interpreted symbols such as my ‘minority status’ appearance to mean that I was likely to share his imaginations about ‘White Australians’ and their families. Thus, he acted towards me (e.g. he told me that ‘the Lebanese-Muslims’ are more ‘respectful’ to their family members than ‘White Australians’ are) on the presumed basis that I would share the same perspective because of our similar positions as ‘Others’ in relation to ‘White Australians’. Therefore, I believe that interviewees such as Aden were more comfortable than they might otherwise have been. I am sure Aden assumed that I would share his perspectives on ‘White Australians’ and their lack of ‘respect’ for family members because, in his social interactions with other ‘non-White Australians’, he has found that that ‘non-White’ Australians generally agreed with his perspective.

Symbolic interactionism is also useful for understanding how words like ‘Muslim’ are loaded with all sorts of significance and associated with being variously ‘anti-Western’, ‘dangerous’ or a ‘terrorist’. Likewise, objects like the hijab have come to signify being ‘Muslim’,
and in turn represent all the meanings associated with Muslims. In this way the ‘objects’ or words themselves have a powerful symbolic status with emotions such as fear and hatred attached to these (Cohen 2002, p. 27). As Cohen has noted more generally, terms like ‘Muslim’ are lifted out of their context and torn from any previously neutral or culturally informed appreciation, and through that process acquire wholly negative meanings such as ‘potential terrorist’ (Cohen 2002, pp. 27-28). In other words, ‘symbols and labels eventually acquire their own descriptive and explanatory potential’ (Cohen 2002, p. 28). Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim women like my interviewee Ramsaya, who wears the hijab, can easily become the target of prejudicial treatment because of how her headscarf is understood by some in the wider community. She described the encounters she had on more than one occasion, while walking on the streets of Melbourne: ‘I have been sworn at, I’ve been spat at, I’ve been looked at, run from’. Ramsaya described how on one occasion she was wearing her hijab and was verbally abused by a stranger while driving her car.

.... The guy could have possibly been stoned, I don’t know, but he was holding alcohol, I was in the car and he just started abusing me, “you eff’n terrorist, you go back to your own country”, stuff like that and my sisters aren’t covered and they didn’t realise how much we [Muslims who do wear the hijab] do get abused. At that point my sister said to me, “It is so wrong, I didn’t even realise how much you get abused”.

Rocky tells a similar story. His cousin was ‘picked on’ for ‘looking Muslim’. Rocky went with a group of his friends and cousins to a football match between Carlton and Essendon. One of his cousins, who sported a beard, was ‘teased’ by some ‘Essendon fans’ because of what the beard represented to them (i.e. ‘Islamic terrorist’).

We were at the footy the other day. A bunch of about fifteen/sixteen of us and we all go for Carlton ... one of my cousins has a beard, it’s not full but it’s about two/three centimetres long. It’s a short beard. And as we were getting into an argument between Carlton/Essendon, instead of keeping it just Carlton/Essendon, they [the Essendon fans] start saying go back to your country, Osama, they start screaming out names like that and then when security come they tell us [instead of the Essendon fans] to calm down. So that’s another part of racism.
Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how I arrived at the conclusion that a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach was best, given my research intentions. Some of the valuable aspects of this approach, as well as some of the ways it helped to address certain problems that I encountered during the early stages of my research were outlined. I also explained how I went about collecting the material needed to answer my research questions, and how ideas, stemming from the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition such as the hermeneutic circle and symbolic interactionism, were used to analyse empirical material.

While there are some research gaps left by the data collection methods I have adopted, the benefits of my chosen route outweighed its limitations. In the end, as I indicate later in this thesis, the research approach I adopted did enable me to generate valuable insights into the experiences of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. Undoubtedly further research will be needed to address some of the gaps in my research. One area for further research is to establish if young Australian-Lebanese-Christians living in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne have had similar experiences to those shared by my interviewees, following events such as the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001, and the Sydney gang rapes. It would also be interesting to find out if there might be any differences in research findings if a similar study were to be conducted by someone who is already embedded in the community and is easily identifiable as part of the community (i.e. identifies themselves and is identified by others as Australian-Lebanese-Muslim). Perhaps also a researcher who is more of ‘an insider’ could secure interviews with those young people who are not in any way connected to service providers such as VASS, and those life-worlds that I otherwise did not have access to.
Granting that the ‘proof of the pudding is in the eating’ I turn to the first item on the menu namely establishing how young second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims experience and make sense of their interactions with ‘other Australians’.
Chapter Three: Experiencing Racism and Belonging

Now, of course we have to differentiate between Lebanese Christians, who are just as indignant as are other Australians about the behaviour of Lebanese Muslims, many of whom are Australians, but they call themselves ‘Lebanese Muslims’.

Alan Jones on *The Alan Jones Show*, Radio 2GB (in *For Being Lebanese* 2002)

In his study of the social processes of making distinctions between kinds of people, Eviatar Zerubavel (1991, p. 61) remarked that reality is not made out of ‘insular chunks unambiguously separated from one another by sharp divides but rather of blurred vague essences …’ He adds that segmenting reality into ‘discrete islands of meaning usually rests on some social conventions and most boundaries are therefore mere social artefacts’. He points to the role of ‘mental scalpsels’ in the creation of categories like ‘sexuality’, ‘gender’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’, and how these ‘mental scalpsels’ create categories that not only vary enormously across time and space but can also be deeply contested within one community. That categories like ‘gay’/’straight’ or ‘white’/’coloured’ are ‘mere social artefacts’ is an idea central to the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition. That these distinctions are also both deeply felt and authentically experiential aspects of daily life is also the case as so many young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims can testify as they talk about and interpret their interactions with other Australians, and their sense of belonging to the broader Australian society.

The purpose of this chapter is to document and describe some of the ways young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I spoke with make sense of their interactions with other Australians. This chapter will also provide some interpretations of how interviewees understand their sense of ‘belonging’ to the broader ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) that is, Australia. As I will show here, drawing in part on the theoretical traditions laid down by key figures like Schutz (1967,
1970) and Blumer (1968) in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, like all of us the young people I spoke with draw on a range of categorical classifications that are then put to interpretative work in a various settings and interactions.

What those classification schemas are and how they are used in their daily lives is arguably a consequence of social encounters occurring regularly in the social relationships and interactions that make up the life-worlds of these young people. These life-worlds are very complex, as are the components of these interpretative schemas. As Blumer (1968, p. 2) argued, how people both understand and engage with other people is a process that is continuously being informed by a range of wider social narratives. In the case of the young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I interviewed, both their understanding and engagement with other Australians is informed by narratives such as that being circulated in the mass media about ‘citizenship’, ‘belonging’, ‘national identity’ and ‘tolerance’. These narratives enable social actors to make sense of daily events, either of a face-to-face kind (such as in their interactions with teachers or school peers) or as they read or watch the news on TV. As Lal (1995, p. 423) argues, these interpretative schemas, and the use they are put to on a daily basis, are constituted interpretatively and are constantly emerging out of the actor’s values and beliefs, which in turn have been shaped by their family life, their interactions with their own community, and by their education. It is important to stress that these interpretative schemas are not just cognitive in character. As Katz argues, our ‘moral emotions’, like pride in belonging to a certain community, or righteous anger in the face of insults, also play their part continuously in everyday situations people confront (Katz 1988, p. 423; Lal 1995).

In the first section of this chapter, I analyse some of the young people’s direct experiences of racism – that is, personal experiences of various expressions of prejudiced and racist behaviour, which they perceived as negative, demeaning and/or as signs of disrespect. I then move on to a description and analysis of mediated and vicarious
experiences of racism. In doing this I want to focus on the way these young people interpreted their experiences. In the second half of the chapter, I examine what I describe as the more ‘positive experiences’ young people had in interacting with ‘other’ Australians, which helped my interviewees foster a wider sense of community belonging. Attention is given to making sense of interviewees’ understandings of ‘positive’ interactions, namely those interactions and incidents that left them feeling appreciated, valued and feeling connected and understood by ‘other’ Australians. I start with the face-to-face experiences of racism.

**Face-to-face experiences of racism**

Philomena Essed’s (1991) account of ‘everyday racism’ which I discussed in chapter one, reflects much of the experiences narrated by a number of the young people I interviewed. To re-cap, Essed’s (1991, pp. 2-3) concept of ‘everyday racism’:

... connects the structural forces of racism with routine everyday life. It links ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes and interprets the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life...not all racism is everyday racism... the later involves only systematic, recurrent familiar practices...

‘Everyday racism’ includes the racist practices that can be experienced in often deeply personal encounters, when for example a person tells you to your face that you do not ‘deserve’ to be in Australia because you appear to be a Muslim or an Arab. It can also be experienced vicariously in the sense that someone hears about this kind of interaction as reported by friends or members or one’s family, or in more abstract ways via, for instance, the media (Essed 1991).

The following extract from one of my focus groups offers some insight into how face-to-face encounters of racism were experienced.
This kind of interaction, as in this case between a group of Australian-Lebanese-Muslim boys and their teachers, was described as a recurrent and familiar practice of ‘Lebos’, and ‘wogs’ more generally, being ‘unfairly picked on’.

Ali: Like teachers and stuff they pick on you …
Axle: … Cause you’re the Lebo.
Ali: Like out of everyone in the whole class they just pick on. Mostly, like the Lebos and they pick on…
Salim: They only people who get in trouble is the Lebos.
Budgie: The wogs.
Usher: … and the Palestinians.
Salim: And that’s what causes the Lebo boys to drop out of school.
Ali: That’s why we all dropped out.

Many of the young people I spoke with were preoccupied with avoiding being ‘picked on’ by virtue of displaying the visible signs of being ‘Arab’, ‘wog’, ‘Lebo’ or Muslim’. It influenced their views of ‘other Australians’ and had some bearing on their feelings of belonging to ‘a wider Australian community’. As Rocky explained, his sense of belonging and feeling of personal safety or security changed after he left his Muslim primary school and enrolled as a student at a Catholic secondary school. As Rocky put it:

I went to a Muslim primary school so everyone was the same. No racism, no different culture, everyone would bring the same type of food for lunch. Most of the kids there were Lebanese so you could speak Arabic or English and everyone would understand. And a lot of people knew each other outside of school because they’d be friends. That’s how it was. But in high school it’s completely different because in high school the Lebanese people are in the minority because I go to a Catholic school and then Lebanese-Muslims are the smaller minority. There’s probably six or seven of us in the whole school. So all the Arabs in my school stick together – there’s about fifteen/sixteen of us… It’s mostly Lebanese and Syrian. It’s pretty much Lebanese, two Syrian… [There are other groups at my school] … there’s the Asians, the Italians, the Aussies are friends and so if we break it up into a smaller group you get picked on.

Rocky explained that as a student in a multi-cultural secondary school he became more acutely aware of being ‘different’ and part of ‘a minority group’. This experience led him and his Lebanese friends to draw closely with other ASB students. He pointed out however, that this was not simply for personal safety but also because they shared a wide range of interests. Who was included or not included in the group was not so much about sharing a particular racial or
religious identity. What was most important for group membership was that you were not a ‘racist’ and that you were ‘good’ to the people in the group. As Rocky said:

Everyone thinks we’re racist, that we stick together, but [there are] non-Lebanese people that hang around with us … one of them is Italian and a lot of them are Aussie… They hang around with us and are our friends because every Lebo likes football or soccer; that’s something in common we have with them so we go and play at the same club and all that. Because they’re not racist, they’ll be our friend, they come into our house and they eat with us, our food and we go to their house and be friends. But then lots of people say, oh Lebo’s just hang around with each other; they’re not friends with anyone else; they think they’re better than everyone, but it’s not really like that. The way it goes is if you’re good to us, we’re good to you, if you’re bad to us, we’re worse to you. That’s how it is.

It is evident that Rocky’s understanding of what was going on was influenced by a range of broader cultural discourses. These included discourses about ‘multiculturalism’, a policy discourse that in the view of some commentators like (Hage 2007), has shifted over the years to a ‘more sophisticated’ version of the old ‘assimilation’ line. Rocky’s observation that ‘everyone thinks we’re racist, that we stick together’ reveals reflexivity and awareness of the fact that being ‘racist’ is a negative quality. It reflects a sensitivity to recent public debate in Australia about multiculturalism, which has played on and exaggerated public fears about the dangers of ‘ethnic enclaves’ and the idea that certain migrant groups ‘stick together’ unwilling to ‘integrate’ with ‘mainstream Australia’ (Bailey 1995). These critiques of multiculturalism typically focus on particular cultural symbols as evidence of the existence of these ‘ethnic ghettos’ and the alleged refusal by certain communities to assimilate. For example, as researchers like Poynting, Noble and Tabar (2001, pp. 72-73) have pointed out, a group of boys of ‘middle-eastern appearance’ who spend their leisure time regularly in public spaces, like certain streets or near public transport and shopping centres, have come to symbolically represent ‘ethnic youth gangs’ and a ‘public menace’. One of the more powerful symbols of late is the scarf or hijab which
many Muslim women wear in public. The hijab has come to be treated as a symbol that stands in for all the ostensibly negative aspects of the Muslim way of life and as a sign of the potential Muslims have, by their very presence in Australia, to subvert social cohesion (Ho 2007). Those who are easily identified as the ‘Other’, like women who wear the hijab, have become obvious targets for discriminatory practices (Poynting 2002).

Ramsaya, one of my interviewees who wears the hijab, spoke about how others acted towards her on the basis of the meanings her hijab had for them. Ramsaya’s narrative illustrates what symbolic interactionists like Blumer (1968, p. 2) refer to when they observe ‘that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’. From her experience she has come to learn that her hijab is so symbolically potent that it appears to obliterate her as a person in the eyes of others. It is as if all of the other aspects of her identity, like being a woman or being a young person, become invisible.

It’s the most visible thing [the hijab]. If I wear the hijab and people see that, [then] their first reaction [towards] me [is based on what the hijab symbolises for them]. They don’t see me... I don’t think they... see me as a woman... or as a young woman. They just see me and say, “yep, she’s a Muslim”.

While Ramsaya was proud to wear the hijab, she was also acutely aware of the way in which it stigmatised her in the eyes of others. The hijab can be understood as a stigma (Goffman 1963). The term ‘stigma’ for symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman (1963, p. 5) refers to:

... an attribute that is deeply discrediting... an undesired differentness... by definition of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his [sic] life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his [sic] inferiority and account for the dangers he [sic] represents...

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17 Hijab is the word used in the Islamic context for the various practices of dressing modestly. It is often used, by both Muslims and non-Muslims, to refer specifically to a form of headscarf (Bedar & Matrah 2005, p. 58).
Ramsaya understood that her hijab represented a stigma, and some people only saw ‘the thing’ (i.e. her hijab) and not her as a person. The hijab is a stigma that has come to symbolise ‘Islam’ and ‘the foreign terrorists’. It also carried secondary meanings, such as the ‘oppression’ of women that is often imputed to ‘Islamic culture’, which is understood to represent a clear cultural threat to ‘the West’ (Aly 2009; Ho 2007).

Another example of the ways ‘that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’ (Blumer 1968) can be seen in the following account given by some female students on their encounters with their ‘white’ gym teacher, who they described as acting prejudicially towards Muslim girls, especially those wearing the hijab.

A local non-government organisation, in which I was a volunteer, was invited in 2003 by a school year-level coordinator to visit the school and conduct a focus group discussion with female Muslim students. A group facilitator from the agency and I went to the school and conducted a group discussion with some of these students. The girls in the group were from different cultural backgrounds (including a few who identified as second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims). The discussion in this focus group centred mainly on a conflict the girls had with their male gym teacher. The students described the ‘Anglo’ gym teacher as a ‘feeler’ and went on to describe incidences that revealed why they labelled him as a ‘feeler’. They said how the teacher, under the guise of ‘uniform inspection’, would lift their headscarf or shift it around the neckline just a little bit above their chest, supposedly to check if they were wearing the correct school uniform underneath. He claimed that he was only looking to see if they were wearing t-shirts underneath the school shirt. They said he would also touch their pants, around their thighs, to check if they were wearing the correct school pants. He would also go into the girl’s changing room while they were changing. The students emphasised that there was nothing ‘innocent’ about his behaviour. Indeed one of the girls said how she was spared this treatment
because she did not wear the headscarf and he gave special attention to girls wearing the hijab.

Using symbolic interactionism, I interpret the gym teacher’s specific targeting of student’s wearing the hijab in terms of the meanings commonly attributed to this highly symbolic representation of Islam. Whist I have not directly spoken to the gym teacher to ask what the hijab symbolises for him, it can be inferred, in the context of discourses about the hijab (that have come to be common since the September 11 attacks) that this teacher, sees Islam and particularly the hijab as representing a way of life and set of beliefs as threatening and intolerable (IDA 2007). From a symbolic interactionist perspective ‘human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’ (Blumer 1968, p. 2). With this in mind I interpreted the gym teacher’s actions as reflecting his view that the hijab and those who wore it were a direct threat, and thus ‘legitimate targets’ for discriminatory practice. Those like the gym teacher, who feel a sense of ‘governmental belonging’ assume they have a duty if not a right to punish those who threaten their national home and identity (Hage 2000, 2003).

However, it was not just the sexualised character of the teacher’s conduct that upset the girls. They were also upset about what they took to be his insensitivity and failure to demonstrate respect towards them and their religious beliefs and practices. For instance, when the students told the gym teacher, ‘We are Muslims, men are not supposed to touch us’, he reportedly responded, ‘I don’t care about your religion’. When my colleague who was working with me at the time suggested that the girls should report his behaviour, one replied, ‘The other teachers … they don’t care … they don’t listen’. Another said, ‘There’s nothing we can do about it’. The clear lesson learnt at this school was that the teacher’s behaviour was acceptable and for that reason reporting what their gym teacher was up to was a waste of time and indeed was likely only to involve them in more trouble. The students said that the only person who seemed responsive and sympathetic to their protests was the year-level coordinator. They
also said to me that she was not in a position of power to do anything about it. Given these revelations it became clear why the coordinator had contacted us to carry out the focus group with the Muslim students.

Further evidence of cultural and religious insensitivity, and what the students described as prejudice on the part of the school, was the mandatory nature of certain activities that conflicted with their cultural and religious practices. Of particular concern was the compulsory mixed gender sport curriculum. The female students described how they had refused to play sport with the boys, saying that as Muslim girls they were not allowed to have either physical contact with or play with boys. In response to their protest the gym teacher would give them a detention. When the students complained to other teachers, these teachers were complicit, making comments such as:

Well if you girls had been nice to Mr (X) … and cooperated (i.e. played mixed gender sport) then you wouldn’t have gotten a detention.

These experiences made the students feel humiliated, powerless and frustrated. Comments allegedly made by the specific teacher to the effect that ‘I don’t care about your religion’, and the school’s more general refusal to accommodate their needs by providing separate gym/sport activities for boys and girls was a major issue. The gym teacher’s prejudice and his predatory behaviour were of particular concern to them. They were certainly not naïve about his behaviour, as their label for him as the ‘feeler’ revealed.

Racism, in a range of other contexts that went far beyond the school gate, was also experienced in other quite personal ways by the young people I spoke with. Ramsaya, for example, described the hijab she wore as an outward expression of her commitment to modesty. She understood, however, that in the context in which she lived, many people did not see the hijab in the way she viewed it. Stereotypes about Muslims who wore the hijab that flourished following events like the Gulf War of 1991 and the terrorist attacks of
2001 had a direct impact on her life. As she explained, it certainly affected her prospects of getting a job:

There’s a lot of jobs that I wanted to go for which a lot of people have told me not to [go for] just because I won’t wear a [revealing] uniform. I’d love to be an air hostess but everyone has told me you are going to have to wear knee high skirts which I can’t wear, so it does stop me from doing a lot of jobs that I wanted to do.

…. I remember, for the job I’ve got now, the interviewer asked me: “Would you be restricted from wearing any of the uniforms”. We didn’t have a uniform but he wanted to know if I’d be okay with wearing pants or how would I wear my uniform. I think they thought … that I might be extra religious the next day and wear the whole cover … I think that was what he was getting at … would I ever wear that? So at that point I explained to him “[my religion] doesn’t stop me from wearing anything except as long as my body isn’t shown I’m happy to wear … I’ve always made sure that I do look professional [and I will wear what] you guys want just as long as I’m comfortable with it”. At that point I thought I may not have got the job … [but I did get the job in the end].

I think it’s mainly [in relation to] uniforms that a lot of Muslims do get discriminated against. Also a lot of work with … I know we have several departments in this retail place that I work at; they asked me also if I would ever work in men’s wear and I didn’t have a problem with that because I didn’t see that there was … I wasn’t ever going to be one on one with a guy or … that I… was going to be unsafe. So I said to them, yeah, that was fine but that did trigger something … that has stopped me from applying for positions … I mean, yes, this person who was interviewing me had the guts to ask me but a lot of people won’t because they’d be afraid to be stepping on [anti-] discrimination [laws] and that’s what has stopped me from applying for a lot of positions because of questions like that.

Ramsaya interpreted these questions from her employer as a coded way of saying that, while he was ‘okay’ with the hijab, he would not employ someone who wore the niqab or the burqa. Nor would he employ people whose religious commitments might conflict with particular working arrangements, such as working in men’s wear\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{18}\) A niqab is a veil that covers the face, worn by some Muslim women as a part of the hijab … Two different items of traditional Muslim women’s clothing are known as a burqa, (sometimes Anglicized as burka or burqua). One is a kind of veil which is tied on the head, over a headscarf, and covers the face except for a slit at the eyes for the woman to see through. The other, which is also called a full burqa or an Afghan burqa and occasionally called a chador, is a garment, which covers the entire body and face. The eyes are covered with a “net curtain” allowing the woman to see but preventing other people from seeing her eyes. Both kinds of burqa are used by some Muslim women as an interpretation of the hijab dress code, and the full burqa was compulsory under Taliban rule in Afghanistan’ (Bedar & Matrah 2005, pp. 57-58).
Ramsaya’s story illustrates how those who are identifiably Muslim, in sites like the work place, experienced their interactions with non-Muslim Australians as sometimes hostile and/or as distorted by misunderstanding. Ramsaya thought that this owed a lot to mass media ‘misrepresentations’ of Muslims. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, the mass media play a key role in reinforcing prejudices about certain social groups. Particular representations of Islam and Muslims have been prominent in the press and on television since 9/11 (Dreher & Ho 2009; Hussein 2007). According to Ramsaya, the mass media and particularly the tabloid press have a lot to answer for. She thought the questions put to her by her employer were likely to have been informed by ongoing scare campaigns promoted by the media. Ramsaya speculated that employers may have heard horror stories in the media that tended to create anxieties that had nothing to do with the actual lives and experiences of Muslim women. There is, for instance, the stereotype of Muslim women as ‘oppressed creatures’ and the perception that Muslims were inflexible, particularly about their dress or preparedness to work in places where men were also employed. While Ramsaya was successful in getting a job she found the process of being questioned about her religious practices upsetting and confronting. This experience, and other similar experiences that she has encountered, made her think twice about applying for work in ‘certain areas’ because, as she pointed out, ‘Yes … this person who was interviewing me had the guts to ask me, but a lot of people won’t because they’d be afraid to be stepping on [anti-]discrimination [laws]’.

Ramsaya also spoke of another incident that she says reflected the influence of the media in shaping how people imagined Arabs and Muslims as ‘Islamic terrorists’ and their association with airplane hijacking. As she put it:

One comment which I’ve gotten twice and it upset me so much … I’ve had two friends go for a job at an Arab airline and they have
said to me, oh yeah, we’re more comfortable going for this job because ... and I’m sure they didn’t mean it to hurt me or to say it so racist but it came out really racist ... they said, “You know, we’re more comfortable flying with an Arab airline because at least we know that it won’t be hijacked”. ... I thought, yeah, wait a minute... the media has played [a] role ... it’s made people think that if I do go with an airline company, an Arab airline company then it won’t... get hijacked...

Like some of the other young people I spoke with, Ramsaya was able to challenge the meanings attributed to certain ‘things’ like the hijab by discussing it with people. In doing so, young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims like Ramsaya said she believed she could help change, in positive ways, how people acted towards what they saw as ‘representatives’ of Islam:

Now, in my job, I’ve had one Anglo-Saxon woman, who has just never met a Muslim before - a physically visible Muslim in her life - she didn’t know much about [Islam] actually... She lives in an area [where she doesn’t have the opportunity to interact with Muslims], and she really didn’t think much [about Islam and Muslims] until the media has come out with [all the stereotypes of Muslims] yeah... together we have [been learning more about Islam]… I’ve been learning more and she’d ask me questions so I have been telling her more and more, I’ve been giving her books to read and stuff, so she... understands more about my religion and she’s also opened up and thought, okay, so this religion exists and it’s not what... the media says it is.

John’s story and his experiences of prejudice are similar in some ways to Ramsaya’s and those of other young people. In John’s case he had been teased by his peers at school for praying:

In my school it’s all Australian people and there’s only me and my brother and some other people that are Lebanese... I was praying in the classroom during lunch time once and some people started laughing at me [when they saw me] through the window. The teacher saw what happened and then she told me, “Oh ... it’s because they don’t know [that’s why they laughed]”. So the next day I actually did a speech to the class and now they know why I do it and they’re always asking questions, like how do you pray and stuff.

John reported that the other students stopped teasing him after he had given his speech and answered their questions about his faith and his religious practices. He said he was really happy because he had been able to change the meaning they were attributing to him and other Muslims, and activities such as praying. This he said made him feel good because he believed he helped change their
perspectives and negative attitudes towards Muslims. It confirms Blumer’s (1968) point that in the process of changing the meanings ‘things’ (e.g. the meaning that the practice of prayer has) actions towards the people who are associated with these things or activities can also be changed.

Unfortunately, however, not all conflict and tension with ‘other Australians’ was resolved so easily. For some of the young people who felt they had to deal with conflict and tension in their interactions with ‘other Australians’, often the feeling of being marginalised had a cumulative effect and it made them feel apprehensive about relating to people outside their immediate community. Some young people like Rocky went so far as to avoid areas where Lebanese people did not have a large and visible presence. As he explained, while a lack of confidence, and feeling of separation from ‘the wider community’ resulted from direct and personal experiences of racism, encountering racism in mediated ways had similar consequences. It is to these experiences that I now turn.

**Vicarious and mediated experiences of racism**

Philomena Essed (1991, p. 5) found that a substantial part of black women’s experiences of racism were shaped vicariously through friends, family members and other blacks, through the media and cognitively through heir general knowledge of racism in the system. My own research has similarly found that a substantial part of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ experiences of racism was also shaped vicariously. It was experienced quite powerfully when they heard about other people’s encounters with racism, particularly when they identified with the people who were victims of racism (e.g. other Muslims or Australians of Arabic speaking background). They reported how they felt when they saw events like the Cronulla race
riots, where large mobs of Anglo-Australians were televised bashing anyone who appeared to be Muslim or Middle Eastern.

Most of the people I spoke with interpreted their direct experiences of racism as a consequence of negative media representations of Muslims and Arabs. Ramsaya, for example, thought that the media needed to be restricted in the way they reported on Muslim issues.

... I think most of it’s the media’s fault ... all the racism today. People wouldn’t think about racism if it wasn’t for the media. I think they would have continued to see [Muslims and Arabs as] normal ... people who live in those Anglo-Saxon areas ... if they had come to a Arab-Muslim area they ... wouldn’t have ... this [preconceived] idea of Muslims being bad, we need to run away from them, we need to convince them... to assimilate more, to be [more] ‘Australian’ ... They would have just [simply seen], okay, these people are dressed [different] but that’s it. But because the media has ... slammed Islam so much, that people think bad of it and now have got really bad thoughts of it.

Many of the other young people also felt that the hostility shown towards them was due largely if not entirely to media reporting. Even if they had not personally experienced racism following negative media reporting, what they saw happening on the media to other Arabs and Muslims affected how they saw themselves and other ‘Australians’ and how they interacted with members of the wider community.

Rocky was one young person whose interactions with other Australians have been affected by his vicarious experiences of racism. He reported only a few occasions of direct racism, far fewer than most of my other interviewees, who spoke often about ‘in your face’ experiences of racism. Yet Rocky seemed to have been far more affected by his experience than any other young person, so much so, that he referred to a sense of ‘being under siege’ because of mediated or vicarious experiences of racism. Rocky illustrated this in a story he told about how the media coverage of events such as the Cronulla riots and the ongoing ‘war on terrorism’ converged to create an environment that he perceived as being hostile to himself and his community. Rocky, like many of the other young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I spoke with were not just upset about the way he
and his friends were treated but, as he explained, they were also concerned about how ‘the West’, through the media, depicted Muslims and Arabs. Rocky, was especially angry at what he described as the USA’s hypocrisy and its declarations of moral superiority. As Rocky put it:

The media portrays the Muslim as terrorists … [but the USA Army are the ones] killing kids and they’re killing women and they’re killing old men and they’re killing injured people and they’re getting honoured for that. And they’re even killing people that are trying to defend their country. Like what’s wrong with trying to defend your country? You’re defending your country and you’re getting criticised for it…

All we’re trying to do is live peacefully and the stupid thing is … instead of America getting criticised for [the blood shed in Iraq] we get criticised for it. Muslims get criticised for it. Who has all the billion-dollar weapons? America. All the Western countries. Who has all of the weapons? Who has all of the things?

Rocky’s view typified how many of my interviewees interpreted and responded to this kind of media reportage. They interpreted media reports, like the ones that Rocky described, as racist encounters, and referred to these mediated experiences of racism in the process of making sense of their interactions with non-Arab and Muslim Australians. Like those journalists and commentators responsible for those reports, Rocky and many of my other interviewees drew on the same ‘us and them’ dichotomy and/or the ‘West’ (them) against the ‘rest’ (us). As Rocky put it, ‘There’s just two groups: Arabs and everyone else’. As he saw it, Arabs (including the Lebanese) and Muslims were going to have to stick together in the face of hostility from ‘other’ Australians:

[The Lebanese-Muslims stuck together even before September 11. When the Lebanese-Muslim migrants came to Australia they were] the minority and we were forced [to stick together] you know. And they came out with no money so they had to work together. They all went to factories and butchers to work together. And everyone else wasn’t really Muslim … Nobody understood them. Even you’ve got now the older [generation], my grandma and all that, they don’t speak English. When you think about they were pretty much forced. And all the racism: “go back to where you came from”.

This suggests how Rocky’s mediated experiences of racism were just as strongly felt as any he had experienced face to face. In Rocky’s case those media reports were made even more powerful
because they resonated with family stories told by members of the older generation of Lebanese-Muslims. In this way racism assumes an historical character as a form of ‘collective memory’. As Ron Eyerman (2004, p. 161) puts it, such collective memory consists of recollections of a shared past, which can be passed on from one generation to the next. Eyerman (2004, p. 162) writes:

…what the past means is recounted, understood and interpreted and transmitted through language and through dialogue… All nations and groups have founding myths, stories which tell who we are through recounting where we come from.

It was evident from my interviews that the young people were drawing on the stories told by their forebears to make sense of their contemporary experiences as these stories resonate with and are transmitted to future generations (Dijck 2004, p. 267). This collective memory enabled young people like Rocky to understand his relationship to the wider community by drawing on an ‘imagined’ common history of Australian-Lebanese-Muslim exclusion from national belonging (West 2008).

These often quite negative experiences, whether of the face-to-face or the mediated kind, are closely related to these young people’s ambiguous sense of belonging to the national family. Their criticisms of the incivility shown by others towards them are intimately connected to a desire to be recognised as Australian.

On belonging

The idea of belonging can mean different things to different people. Linn Miller (2003, p. 216) writes for example that:

… a minimum conception of belonging might be understood as standing in correct relation to one's community, one's history and one's locality.
Others (Hage 1996, 2000, 2002b, 2002c, 2003; Trudeau 2006) argue that the ‘correct’ relation of belonging to the national community, history and locality is what is at stake in the often hotly contested debates about contemporary multicultural Australia. There has been public debate concerning the question of whether certain groups such as Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, can make a ‘legitimate’ claim to belonging in or to Australia (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007). In this debate, ‘White’ or ‘Anglo’ Australians are often positioned as having more of a ‘correct’ relation of belonging than other cultural communities in Australia (Hage 2000).

As Hage (2000, p. 50) argues, a sociological conception of national belonging is one that necessarily examines how people experience and deploy their claims to national belonging. The people who are able to deploy and thereby ‘experience more national belonging’ are those who have been able to accumulate more of what Hage (2000, pp. 53-54) calls ‘national capital’.

Hage’s (2000, p. 53) neologism of ‘national capital’ draws from Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of ‘cultural capital’. In effect ‘national capital’ represents the sum of valued knowledge, styles, social and physical (bodily) characteristics and practical behavioural dispositions constructed as valuable within the national field. This capital can be inherited (e.g. by being born into the dominant cultural community) but they can also be accumulated, for example, by ‘migrants’ acquiring English language skills and an ‘Aussie’ accent (Hage 2000). Hage further notes that:

National belonging tends to be proportional to accumulated national capital. That is, there is a tendency for a national subject to be perceived as just as much of a national as the amount of national capital he or she has accumulated (Hage 2000, p. 53).

To reiterate, not everyone in Australia has equal access to national capital. Accordingly, not everyone has an equal chance to achieve wider recognition of national belonging. For example, a migrant of English ancestry who has accumulated national capital in the form of the dominant linguistic, physical and cultural dispositions is able to accumulate more national belonging than say a migrant of Lebanese
ancestry, who lacks the physical characteristics and dispositions of the dominant national ‘type’ and has not yet managed to acquire features like the dominant national accent. This Lebanese migrant who has lived for a long time in Australia, however, can yield more national belonging than, for instance, a more recently arrived person from Lebanon who has not yet learned English.

The inheritance and/or accumulation of national capital is pertinent to the two modes of national belonging identified by Hage (2000), which he calls ‘passive belonging’ and ‘governmental belonging’. Hage (2000, pp. 45-46) explains these two modes of national belonging as follows.

The nationalist who believes him or herself as ‘belonging to a nation’ in the sense of being part of it, means that he or she expects to have the right to benefit from the nation’s resources, to ‘fit into it’ or ‘feel at home’ with it. This mode of belonging can be called passive belonging. The other mode of national belonging, the belief that one has a right over the nation, involves the belief in one’s possession of the right to contribute (even if only by having a legitimate opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it remains ‘one’s home’. That is what I call governmental belonging. [Emphasis in original.]

One reason why I use Hage’s conceptions of ‘passive belonging’ and ‘governmental belonging’ is because these conceptions are reflected in many of my interviewees’ narratives of belonging. For instance, the following story told by Bu, one of the young people I interviewed, can be treated as an expression of what Hage called ‘governmental belonging’:

We’re born here …

Why do the Australians’ feel they belong here? They come on boats … They were First Fleet, we’re high class. They came by boat, we came by plane. We feel like we can belong here if we can stay here, but we know that they don’t want us in here … This country is our country as much as their country.

This statement is one that expresses Bu’s belief that he and his fellow Lebanese Muslims have a legitimate claim to be included in the idea of Australian nationhood by virtue of being born in Australia. At the same time he realises that ‘Anglo’ Australians may want to claim to have more ‘national capital’ than he and other Australian-
Lebanese-Muslims. This is because not only were most ‘White’ Australians born here but their ancestors were also born here and they can claim a closer match to the dominant cultural group. So, when Bu says, ‘Why do the Australians’ feel they belong here? They come on boats… They were First Fleet, we’re high class. They came by boat, we came by plane, he is mounting a discursive challenge to ‘White’ Australian claims to have more national belonging than he and other Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have.

The second reason I draw on Hage’s conceptions of national belonging is that it also sheds light on the forms of racism being experienced by young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. My research suggests that much of the racism they have experienced is directly related to some Australians’ anxieties about ‘Others’ affecting their sense of home in some negative fashion. In other words, the racism Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have experienced can be understood as the effect of efforts made by those in the dominant cultural position to maintain and exercise that dominance by asserting their right to operate as the sole managers and protectors of the national space. This is an anxiety that possibly grows from observing Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ and other minority groups’ determination to assert their claim to governmental belonging in relation to Australia. Those who have long held the dominant cultural position may fear that they are losing control over the character and shape of the national space. They see the potential for Australia’s newer cultural minorities to shape the political, social and physical landscape in such a way that would render Australia no longer the place of exclusive belonging long held by ‘White’ Australians.

The third reason why I draw on this particular conception of belonging is that treating the boundaries of belonging as an expression of ‘caring for the nation’ is not only a discursive strategy that ‘White’ or ‘Anglo’ Australians can deploy. Australian-Lebanese-Muslims can also feel nationally empowered enough to make claims about what kinds of people deserve to belong to the nation. This was evident for example when Rocky said, “They [those other Australians
who are being racist towards us] don’t deserve to be here”. When
Australian-Lebanese-Muslims make judgements like this they are
asserting a desire and a claim to belong to the nation (at least as
much as, if not more than, those they judged as not deserving to
belong).

Perhaps it is in this discursive context, where people feel compelled
to justify how or why they ‘deserve’ to belong in the national home,
that my interviewee Nuer’s comments can be read:

The [Australian-Lebanese-Muslim] youth, they use identity as an
excuse for not getting employment. [They say] I’m Lebanese, or my
name is Mohammad or my name is Talia and I don’t get
employment because [my name gives away to the employer that I
am an Arab/Muslim] they go “Naah, I’m Muslim, I’m Lebanese, or
I’m a wog. What’s the use of bothering seeking employment”? So
they have all these sorts of excuses... Melbourne is a multicultural
state. And I doubt it very much that they [employers] are going to be
racist against you because of your nationality or something. They
[the employers] are going to look at maybe your skill, your
experience. But a lot of them say, “Naah ... I’m Lebanese you know,
they are not going to hire me”. Maybe they don’t have the
experience, haven’t reached a certain education level all that kind of
stuff.

One interpretation of Nuer’s comments is that she is playing into the
discourses of ‘colour-blind racism’, because it enables her to position
herself as belonging in the ‘broader national community’. For this
argument to make sense, we need to recall the notion of ‘colour-blind
racism and connect it to Hage’s (1998) ideas about how ‘ethnic
Others’ can accumulate national belonging and present themselves
as having a ‘correct’ relationship to the national community.

As discussed in chapter one, the idea of ‘colour-blind racism’ can be
‘drawn upon to describe mainstream attitudes to issues of race and
the persistence of racial inequalities’ (Rhodes 2009). For Rhodes,
‘color-blind racism’ can be described as the ideological armour used
to downplay the role of racial discrimination in the production of
social, political and economic inequalities (Rhodes 2009). Colour-
blind racism has four central frames: ‘abstract liberalism’; ‘naturalisation’; ‘cultural racism’ and the ‘minimisation of racism’
(Bonilla-Silva 2003). The frames of ‘Abstract liberalism’ and the
‘minimisation of racism’ are most useful for analysing Nuer’s comments. According to Bonilla-Silva (2003, pp. 28-29),

The frame of abstract liberalism involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., “equal opportunity,”…) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters...

Minimization of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances (“It’s better now than in the past” or “there is discrimination, but three are plenty of jobs out there”).

Such frames can be used not only by those who are generally recognised as being ‘in’ the culturally dominant group (i.e. Whites), but also by those who are culturally marginal to argue they too belong. Bonilla-Silva (2003, p. 171) in his own research in the United States found that:

... frames and ideas of colour blindness have had a significant indirect effect on blacks. For example, the frame of abstract liberalism has shaped the way many blacks explain school and residential segregation.

In this way, the frames of ‘colour blind racism’ (e.g. ‘abstract liberalism’ and the ‘minimization of racism’) shape young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims understandings of why they, or other young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, experience inequalities – including difficulties in gaining employment.

Within this framework, the ability to secure employment is seen to reflect the ‘choice’, skill level and motivations of individuals and the individual’s own efforts to secure employment. Within the terms made available by this kind of ‘abstract liberal’ discourse, those who do not identify as experiencing systematic prejudice, as a reason for the difficulties they face in finding employment, can present themselves as having a more authentic claim to belong to Australia.

In using these frames Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims, such as Nuer, are able to position themselves as having a stronger and better connection to the national community than those Australian-Lebanese-Muslim young people who are represented as ‘playing the race card’. This is suggested in Nuer’s comments about ‘other’ young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims who, unlike herself, make ‘excuses’ or
blame racism/discrimination for difficulties encountered in securing employment.

Following Hage’s (1998, p. 61) line of argument, Nuer’s comments can be seen as a discursive strategy for accumulating national capital. That is, by minimising racism as an obstacle to gaining employment, Nuer is able to present herself as a ‘good Australian’ who subscribes to the ethos of individualism and neo-liberalism. Her comments can also be seen as representing a struggle for the valorisation of ‘the Lebanese-Muslim’ within the Australian national field. This is because she perceives that her ‘Lebanese-Muslimness’ operates as a kind of negative capital in the national field (Hage 1998, p. 61). She struggles to retrieve its value by distinguishing ‘those’ Lebanese-Muslims who use racism as an excuse, from the Lebanese-Muslims who (like her) don’t use such excuses for the circumstances they find themselves in (Hage 1998, p. 61).

Experiences of belonging

If we are to think about ‘belonging’ in the ways typical of those who work within the symbolic interactionist approach we can focus on descriptions by the young people I interviewed that work to elicit what it meant to them to experience a feeling or sense of ‘belonging’, rather than trying to construct an argument based on some ‘objective’ definition of belonging. The phrases the young people used, like ‘not feeling like the odd one out’, ‘fitting in’ and ‘being accepted’, go some way to grasping this ‘insider’ aspect of what it means to belong (Kellehear 1993, p. 27).

Any understanding of what it means to ‘belong’ is contextually dependent and so the meaning that young people attribute to belonging is very much a context-specific understanding shaped very much by things like the debates about multiculturalism and assessments about the kinds of people who ‘deserve to belong’ in
the imagined national community. As (Hage 2000, pp. 45-46) has argued, ‘belonging’ involves having an expectation that a person has the ‘right to benefit from the nation’s resources, to ‘fit into it’ or ‘feel at home’ within the nation’ and ‘the belief in one’s possession of the right to contribute (even if only by having a legitimate opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it is ‘one’s home’.’ My discussion of how young people experience ‘belonging’ is based on this understanding.

Five of the thirty-one young people I interviewed, spoke at length about their experiences of ‘belonging’. Four of them, including Mia, were women. Mia was one of the girls who spoke about experiences of belonging. Mia recalled that at the Islamic school she never felt uncomfortable when practising her religion. In her new state school, however, she did feel uncomfortable and found it challenging to practise her beliefs:

Yeah, definitely [felt more included and felt more of a sense of belonging in the Islamic school] because we all wore the same things. Like how beautiful is the headscarf? So we were all wearing head scarves. When it was time for prayer everyone would line up together … [Whereas in the public school I went to I had to] go to a little corner by myself and make sure no-one was looking because I was embarrassed. Everyone was doing the same thing [at the Islamic school] and it was just like so relaxed and I felt like definitely I belonged, yeah, definitely in that Islamic school. It’s one of the best schools.

Mia, like many of the other young people I interviewed, said she felt a strong sense of belonging when others around her shared the same beliefs and practices (e.g. ‘everyone was doing the same thing’ and ‘we all wore the same thing’).

Such descriptions of belonging are part of what Mulligan et al. (2006) describe as a ‘way-of-life community’, one based on shared or common attitudes and practices (Mulligan et al. 2006, p. 18). There ought to be no surprise that this sense of belonging and community, which people like Mia described should be the same kind used by ‘other’ Australians when they talk about who does and does not ‘belong’ or why it is that Australian-Lebanese-Muslims do not or cannot fit into the ‘mainstream Australian community’ or their ‘way of
life’ (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007) As some commentators who wrote about the ‘Cronulla riots’ put it, Anglo-Australians were protesting against Muslims and Lebanese coming into what they felt was ‘their territory’ and ‘their beaches’ (Barclay & West 2006; Collins 2006, 2007; Poynting 2006b). Those protesters wanted to protect ‘the Australian way of life’, which they saw as being threatened by the apparently quite different lifestyle of Muslims and Lebanese people. As an Anglo-Australian resident of Cronulla put it, the Lebanese and Muslims did not fit in with an ‘Australian way of life’ because: ‘They cover their own women up but come down here to Cronulla to perve on ours. They’re hypocrites’ (Johnston 2005). The Cronulla ‘protesters’ were reportedly also anxious because what they saw as the ‘infiltration’ of Lebanese and Muslims into ‘their’ territory would mean that their community and their space would no longer be theirs; they would no longer feel ‘at home in’ Cronulla (Hage 2000).

The ‘way of life’ framework of belonging can be ‘exclusive’ in so far as people who want to be recognised as belonging to the community need to display or exhibit the characteristics that define the ‘way of life’ of the imagined community. With this interpretation of what it means to ‘belong’, there does not seem to be much space for diversity, or room for negotiating how members who do not neatly fit with the ‘way of life’ of the community can be accommodated, let alone appreciated, for the valuable differences they might bring with them into the community. This mode of belonging is defined by anxiety. It is based on defending a ‘way of life’ and is focused on rejecting those who do not fit with the imagined community.

This, however, is not the only way that belonging can be understood or a sense of community connection achieved. ‘Belonging’ does not necessarily have to hinge on members of a community recognising each other as being much the same. Instead, what ties this community together is a commitment to honouring all its diverse members (Hage 2003). Mutual respect and understanding is what defines this kind of community. What this kind of community might
look like, and how it might operate, is illustrated next by Nuer’s account of her experience of growing up in Melbourne.

Nuer had heard stories about Muslims and Arabs experiencing discrimination and feeling marginalised. Nevertheless she found these stories hard to relate to because her experience of growing up as a young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim in her view had largely been a ‘positive’ experience. That positive quality had only occasionally been upset by the odd racist remark by another Australian or by media stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims. She said:

I was surrounded by people that were very positive so I couldn’t see that sort of … um … point of view and disrespect that a lot of Muslims have faced … the discrimination. [The September 11 attacks haven’t] affected me … I’ve been very fortunate in that way.

Before [the September 11 attacks] I was just a kid … I was loved by everyone I guess. [When I say I was loved by everyone, I’m not just talking about family and friends.] No! Everyone! People from school; people from different backgrounds … people in the street you live in … They see this little kid like their own people. They [accepted me for me].

Nuer suggested that her sense of belonging was informed by her childhood memories of being ‘loved by everyone’. That is, the meaning she gave to ‘belonging’ was based on prior interactions with people ‘from school, people from different backgrounds, people in the street’ who acted towards her as if she were ‘like their own people’.

Nuer’s story emphasised a strong sense of connection to the wider community, and her feeling of being accepted by other Australians in spite of her religious and ethnic differences. She also approached her interactions with other Australians with a strong desire to both accept the people she met and be respectful of difference, which seems to have been encouraged during her years in high school.

Nuer recalls that there was ‘a little bit of racism’ at her school but that this was overcome and more than compensated for by the positive experiences:

[I didn’t go to an Islamic school. I went to a public, mix-gendered school]. I went to a very good school … A lot of wogs there as well. A lot of people from different backgrounds: Australians, Lebanese, Greeks, Italians, people from America, New-Caledonian, you know, you had all the nationalities. Which made it a lot easier. Yeah,
maybe there was a bit of racism and all that. And you face it. But you learn from a lot of people through high school.

When Nuer says that experiencing this diversity ‘... made it a lot easier’, she also seemed to be saying that the diversity made life easier for her because she did not feel like the ‘odd one out’. Had the school environment been more culturally homogenous she might have felt her differences as an Australian-Lebanese-Muslim a lot more. It appears that Nuer connected and felt a sense of belonging to the school community, in spite of the fact that everyone else was not like her: she simply did not need that for a sense of belonging. Rather, she felt that she ‘belonged’ because like most of the other students at the school she was ‘different’ and, importantly, there was mutual exchange and recognition of each other’s differences as well as their similarities.

Nuer also reported that her teachers were approachable, friendly and respectful of a range of needs and perspectives, and that this contributed again to a positive sense of ‘belonging’. Nuer explained how the teachers helped her to feel included:

You talk to a lot of teachers as well about your religion; about what’s appropriate for women when they play sport or girls when they play sport because we are not allowed to touch men.

Most teachers [respected what I had to say]. Especially the physical education teachers for some reason. In every school P.E. teachers are the best teachers because they are very down-to-earth people and they understand, you know? [The teachers and students] ask you questions about your scarf and all that and [I explain] we have to wear our scarves and we can’t take it off and we can’t really have contact with guys... They are sort of pretty cool with that. And they say, “Maybe you could try and walk around them”? The boy’s sports and girl’s sports were separated. Makes it a lot easier for us. It’s always pretty good and it was fun.

A lot of Muslims were there at my school. Not all of them had scarfs on but they [teachers and students] were very considerate of that and the religion. Of all the religions, not just Islamic. But we [Muslims] are actually sort of limited [compared to the other religions]. We can’t be mixing around with guys compared to other religions. But they were pretty cool and very understanding which made our job a lot easier...So it’s a pretty good school. A very good school.

Nuer’s experiences seem to contrast starkly with the experiences I reported on earlier in this chapter, like the story told by a group of
young Muslim women about being both discriminated against and
becoming the object of sexually predatory behaviour by their male
gym teacher.

Nuer recalled that it was not only the staff at the school who
demonstrated respect. Nuer said that many students were also
considerate of different needs and demonstrated respect for
differences. This notion of respect was central to Nuer’s idea of what
constituted ‘belonging’:

For example… if you are playing with a mixed team you won’t go in
as hard. You stand back… or you organise a girl’s team or a girl’s
class… After school. We’re going to play together. Guys can’t touch
the girls. All that kind of stuff. So you can make up your own rules
as you go along as well. … The guys did respect [my religious
beliefs]. They understood that. They were learning heaps. We were
learning from them as well about their religion as well. Especially
the Greek Orthodox, we learnt heaps from them.

Nuer’s stories make the point that different needs can be met, and
the occasional difficulties involved in living in very diverse
communities overcome, when there is a willingness to do things
differently to the way things have been done before, and to do so in a
spirit of acceptance and of wanting to live and learn from one
another. Recalling Bauman’s (1989) remarks about the ethical
response evoked by the discernment of ‘otherness’, we might say
that both her teachers and her peers interacted with one another in
ways that evoked a practice of moral responsibility for the ‘Other’.

Nuer also told me a story that mattered deeply to her. It involved a
journalist writing an article about her wearing the hijab, playing sport
and coaching others to reach their sporting goals, which appeared
subsequently in the local newspaper:

[An important point in my life was when] I was at TAFE finishing up
my diploma … [and there was an article in the local newspaper
about me…]. The article was about me and my religion, me playing
sports along with me coaching.

As she explains, a youth organisation then offered her a paid position
as a motivational speaker. This further bolstered her sense of
belonging to the wider community and allowed her to pursue her
passion for encouraging other young people, as she put it, ‘to reach
for their dreams’. She told me that she still wanted to help others find the courage to be true to themselves, in the same way she had found the courage when others told her she couldn’t be herself (e.g. wear the hijab as an outward expression of her identity and play sport simultaneously). For Nuer this was clearly a ‘critical incident’ that strengthened her sense of belonging to the wider community. Nuer’s story points to a record of positive encounters with other Australians, like the journalist who wrote an article about her, and the skills she developed with the support of a youth organisation. This record seems to have given Nuer the ability to approach difficult situations and hostile interactions with other Australians in a ‘positive’ way:

[A staff member from a youth organisation read the article and] she got me through the article. She got all my details and all that and she interviewed me and said, “yeah, you will be a good role model”. [So she employed me as a motivational speaker and I got training to and support to do public speaking]. [Not only was I helping others through this work it] sort of helped me out as well... Speaking to kids. Teaching them [required] learning [more about] myself and applying [what I taught] to my life as well... No point in telling them what to do if you don’t do it yourself. You got to sort of live that example. Pretty much religion [has helped me to take the positive out of very negative situations]... Religion tells you that it’s not worth sort of pondering [about the] bad times, you’re not going to achieve anything. You got to sort of translate that into a positive thing and go from there...

Nuer told me that she generally acted towards ‘other Australians’ with strongly ‘positive’ feelings developed in the course of a series of ‘positive’ interactions. Her positive sense of belonging seems to have been the product of both her experience and her own capacity to transmute ‘bad times’ ‘into a positive thing’.

Coco, another young person I spoke with, also believed that school and education could play an important role in fostering a sense of wider community belonging. She said schools could play a major role in combating discrimination and enable people to participate in processes that transformed the experiences of ‘difference’ and ‘togetherness’. She emphasised that this required multicultural education to go beyond simplistic approaches to understanding cultural differences. Coco said it required people to engage with each other at a ‘deeper level’:
Oh yeah, we had a multicultural [day]. They wanted us to get different food... that's all it meant to them. That's all they knew. That's my culture: get them my tabouli and my hummus and they were happy with that. They don't look beyond that. It stops there.

[Multiculturalism is more than eating different foods. It is] trying to understand what the culture is, not just what you see.

Like at Greek weddings they throw glass plates ... we don't know what it means because we haven't [been taught about it]. All we know is they throw glass plates.

I would like to have an actual subject within school actually talking about different – like I know they talk about Captain Cook and ancient Egypt and they never look too much at the population – like they look at what they import or export. It is never what you really want to know. [If we learnt more about different cultures and religions, then] if they saw someone who is Jewish and they were doing something weird if I had learnt about it I would have been more accepting. I think they need to implement it more in classrooms and that's the only reason why I'm majoring in sociology so I can make a bit of a difference in other kids like try to teach them more than computers and just about main topics. That's all I remember from my learning about ancient Egypt and Captain Cook. I would rather learn about Aboriginal art and they never really taught us the truth, I never learnt it until last year. It was shocking to know all this stuff and all these stories and it is how they are trying to make it seem like Aborigines.... I think to this day [Aboriginals are not] accepted, because a lot of people just assume we're multicultural, we're accepting.

Coco was critical of what she believed was the general assumption that simply by virtue of living in a ‘multicultural’ Australia that this therefore meant that ‘Australians’ were now generally either accepting of or respectful of cultural and religious differences. This assumption, she pointed out, allowed people to ignore or downplay the disadvantages and ‘colour-blind’ racism that groups such as Indigenous Australians were still confronting. Academics like Hage (2000, p. 77 & 84) have similarly argued that racism and tolerant ‘multiculturalism’ can coexist – and that tolerant ‘multiculturalism’ is not necessarily the antidote for prejudice. Coco argued that Australian multiculturalism as a mode of living with and learning from different people’s beliefs, cultures and perspectives needs reinvigoration. She said that what was needed was an education that went beyond surface level meanings and dug deeper. She said this was necessary if only in order to offer alternative interpretations of the way communities like her's was understood or represented,
hopefully so that people could act towards one another on the basis of new understandings:

At [my] school half the school population was Muslim and yet they didn’t try to teach the other kids about Islam. They could have taught them about the different religions, they could have been more accepting. Some people absolutely hated Muslim people... They thought they were more superior to those Muslims. I think if they had understood [more about Islam] ... had been actually taught [about Islam, then they wouldn’t have hated Muslims or thought of them as inferior]. It also comes down to the parents, what their parents teach them. If they’re telling them: ... “those Aborigines ... they’re drunks” or “don’t look at those Muslims – they’re terrorists” or “don’t play with them” [well] the kids [who have been taught these prejudices] are going to believe what their parents tell them. It comes down to education and teaching your kids.

Hage’s (2002a) conception of ‘honourable belonging’ seems especially relevant here for understanding Coco’s story about her school and how it had failed to ‘recognise’ its sizable Muslim population. According to Hage people need to have their existence both acknowledged and valued by others if they are to feel a sense of belonging to that community. Coco’s account points to a school that had a sizable Muslim population, but neither recognised its Muslim students nor acknowledged let alone dealt with the conflicts and tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim students. Coco’s experience contrasts with Nuer’s story of a school which worked as an inclusive place.

Mia, another interviewee, also believed that educating people about different faiths and cultures would be an important step towards fostering a sense of belonging in a community with a sizable population of people with quite different belief systems. Mia told me that, as part of a class presentation, Mia shared her religious beliefs with her peers and found it an empowering experience that strengthened her sense of belonging in the school. She said it helped her feel accepted in the classroom and that it helped her fellow students have a better understanding of her community and why, for example, she wore the hijab. Having an opportunity like this to talk about her religious practices and beliefs was one important way that Mia felt that she was being acknowledged and respected, even honoured. As she told me:
I did my oral on the [banning of hijab in schools in France] because at my school [there was a lot of talk about the hijab]... Like it didn’t make sense to me why they were doing that because... what’s [preventing girls from wearing the hijab] going to do? It’s not going to make the education better. So that’s what influenced me to do something about that and ... Yeah, because they don’t really know all my side of the story... [What they heard in] the media that’s the only thing that they heard, that’s what they believe so I wanted to tell them why we wear it and how something that we have to have and by banning it ... [then that may prevent] young girls [getting] educated. Because I’m pretty sure they’re not going to take it off. [Those who were listening to my presentation] they felt really bad and they [said] “Oh I never knew...”

Yeah, which was really nice. It was a good response ... I always had to hide why I [wore the hijab] and now I can tell everyone.

In Australia today there is a real potential to foster a national community not founded on ‘paranoid nationalism’ (Hage 2003) but instead based on a mode of togetherness, where moral responsibility for the ‘Other’ is promoted actively (Bauman 1989). Mia’s story suggests that such a mode of togetherness is possible especially when there is a commitment from community members to learn from each other, to hear different voices and to respect all its members (Hage 2003).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that some of the young people I spoke with interpreted their experiences with ‘other’ Australians as negative, especially when they felt they were not being understood, valued or else were being treated as if they truly were the Other. The negative experiences that these young people reported on were sometimes based on personal and face-to-face encounters with ‘other Australians’. I gave several examples of how this kind of racism was experienced, including the example of a group of young female Muslim students wearing the hijab subjected to demeaning and racially charged treatment by their male gym teacher.
Equally, racism could be experienced vicariously in all sorts of mediated ways. This could include hearing stories in the media, having friends and family members tell stories of their experiences or simply being exposed to various expressions of collective memory. In these ways the young people I spoke with made sense of their relationship to ‘Australian society’ as an ‘imagined community’ in the course of their daily encounters and their judgements about how they ought to act towards ‘other Australians’.

Perhaps unsurprisingly some of the people I spoke with had a precarious sense of belonging to the wider Australian community. Some went so far as to avoid interaction in certain spaces or certain places in which ‘people like them’ were a minority, so that they could feel safe and avoid being seen or treated as Other. Some of them said that they felt a strong sense of belonging only when they were in communities where there were other Muslims and Arabs, such as in their Islamic school. I noted how this ‘way of life’ notion of belonging was also exclusionary. It was the same notion of belonging that enabled ‘other’ Australians to argue why Muslims did not fit in with their ‘Australian’ way of life. I suggested that perhaps a way of belonging that is less exclusive and more embracing of difference is based more on understanding and negotiating the symbolic meanings attributed to different cultures and beliefs. It is also a way of belonging that does not create such a large breathing space for racism as ‘the way of life’ notion of belonging, and is associated with more ‘positive’ experiences such as feeling understood, valued and respected. Several examples of positive interactions in communities that had a more inclusive mode of belonging were offered, as I attempted to spell out what it was about these interactions that made young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims feel good. Interviewees reported that belonging is characterised by feelings of being: listened to and valued for their input; having opportunities to negotiate needs; having the space to have an open dialogue, to hear what others had to say in a civil and friendly way and to gain from new and different understandings; and importantly being accepted for who you are.
They said that encounters were positive when their ‘moral worth’ was acknowledged and when they felt they were being respected.

In the next chapter, I look at what these young people did with their experiences of racial prejudice.
Chapter Four: Young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim’s Responses to Racism

Then I go, “I’m Lebanese”. And he goes, “you probably eat [dogs] in your country”. And I’m like “actually we don’t…” and then he started criticising Muslims and saying, “you don’t belong here” and I’m like “excuse me, my parents came here rightfully I don’t know what your descendants are they’re probably criminals or something, you look like one”. And then he started insulting this girl who was sitting there, she’s an Aussie, and not because she’s Muslim, and he started calling her a lesbian. And she’s like, “I am engaged to a guy”. She goes, “not that I need to justify myself and not that these young ladies… need to justify themselves to you”. And he just kept on swearing at her and calling her all these names and “you’re probably a slut”. And she’s just sitting there thinking, out of the four people that were sitting there he was the dirtiest, he was in his scruffy clothes. I am not trying to, well actually I am judging him because he was wearing ugly dirty clothes and he’s sitting there judging us assuming he’s superior to us because he’s Australian and we’re not. And I’m like, “get off the train with your dirty dog”.

Coco, female interviewee

The fact that racism is both a ‘belief system’ and a ‘set of practices’ highlights something of the strange character of racism (Miles 1989; Shipman 1994). Studies on racism, such as by Essed (1991), suggest that specific events of unfair treatment or experiences of discrimination may not be categorised as racist (even if others observing this same event might identify it as racist). This is partly because general knowledge of racism is an important source of information when interpreting specific events and labelling it as racist (Essed 1991, p. 3). Furthermore, once an event or interaction is interpreted as racist, how that experience is responded to can vary greatly amongst social actors. The authors of a Canadian study exploring how South-East Asian refugees coped with racism make the point that:

Although racism has been a long-standing preoccupation in political, ethical, and social science discourse, health researchers have only recently begun to investigate its effects on individual well-being (Jackson, Brown, and Kirby 1998; Krieger 1990; Salgado de Snyder 1987; Williams, Lavizzo-Mourey, and Warren 1994). Yet most studies do not illuminate how individual members of racial groups respond to the experiences of discrimination (Noh et al. 1999).
In this chapter, acknowledging both the need to catch the peculiar qualities of racism and the need to fill the research gap identified by Noh et al. (1999) I establish how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims dealt with the sometimes hostile interactions that occurred in the wake of events like the ‘Sydney gang rapes’ and the ‘Cronulla riots’. Events like these mobilised highly charged sentiment against Muslim and Lebanese young people. In this chapter, I address my second research question pertaining to how interviewees dealt, in some fashion, with their experiences of racism.

I argue that the young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims I spoke with had found a variety of strategies to deal with their treatment. Drawing on similar studies to my own research, including that done by Essed (1991) and the ‘Isma’ report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC 2004), it seems that there are some commonalities to be found on how people cope with racism. I suggest that the common strategies employed by my interviewees can be included within the following three broad themes: ‘avoidance’ (which also includes strategies for minimising the effects of racism), ‘fighting back’ and ‘constructive engagement’.

I begin this chapter by looking at practices that can be classed as ‘avoidance’, which include avoiding places or situations where the likelihood of conflict is high. It also includes limiting interactions with those who are perceived as very different to themselves. I draw on the literature produced by academics such as Bauman (1989), White et al. (1999) White and Wyn (2004) to suggest some of the dynamics at work here. Classified under the umbrella of ‘avoidance’ also are strategies that ‘minimise the impact of racism’. This is done, for instance, by laughing about a racist remark, or interpreting a particular event as something other than racism, so that it has a less distressing impact on the Self. I then discuss those actions taken by interviewees that can be broadly understood as ‘fighting back’. I explore the extent to which ideas like ‘moral emotions’ (Katz 1988), ‘resistance’ (Hall & Jefferson 1976), ‘capitalising on Othering’ (Jensen 2009) and resilience (Ungar 2004, 2005b, 2008) are useful
concepts for understanding actions that can be classified as fighting back – actions such as arguing with someone who has just made a racist comment through to ‘bashing’ those perceived as racist.

Finally I look at those strategies that involve ‘constructive engagement’, undertaken in an effort to engage other Australians in dialogue and in an attempt to move towards mutual understanding and respect – to address what interviewees believe are the root causes of racism, such as misunderstanding and fear of the ‘Other’. I use the work of Michael Ungar (2004, 2005b, 2008) and Peta Stephenson (2008) to explore this way of dealing with experiences of racism.

Classifications like ‘avoidance’ or ‘constructive’ may be problematic because they are overly reliant on a range of moralising assumptions rather than deep ethical insights or practices of the kind Bernstein (1997, p. 397) talks about when he calls on us to resolve to act in such ways that ‘however much we are committed to our styles of thinking we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other’.

In all classifications, including those used by botanists attempting to place a particular plant in a species, there is always an issue of porous boundaries given that many human interactions can be placed in more than one category and, as Harre and Moghaddam (2003) have argued, there are various positions in which people who are engaging with each other can adopt. For example, talking back to someone who has just made a racist comment could be treated as an example of ‘fighting back’ or of ‘constructive engagement’. It might be understood as ‘fighting back’ in the sense that the person is taking a stand against the aggressor and letting them know that their racist comment will not be accepted passively. It might also be considered ‘constructive engagement’ because arguing back can be an initial step towards reasoned argument and dialogue, allowing some understanding to be arrived at and perhaps some stereotypes or assumptions broken down in the process of that dialogue. This example also illustrates how the term ‘fighting back’, which often
carries negative connotations, can instead be seen as constructive – which the term ‘constructive engagement’ implies. Despite the limitations in the use of these typologies, it nevertheless seems to me to be a useful way of exploring how some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims deal with racism.

Given that there is a variety of ways young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims engage with other Australians, I then go on to establish the sense of belonging they have in respect to the broader Australian community. I propose that one of the key ways that young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims develop a sense of belonging to Australia is through actions typical of ‘constructive engagement’. These are actions such as volunteering in a community project that enables young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims and members of the broader Australian community to come to know one another.

I start by exploring some of the responses to negative interactions.

**Avoidance**

I have already indicated that some of the young people I spoke with interpreted both their own direct experiences and their more vicarious experiences of racism by placing that experience in a history of a long-standing and deep division between ‘them’ and ‘other’ Australians. They also believed that this division was continuing to be fuelled by persistent media ‘mis-representation’, which had got under way at the start of the twenty-first century. Some of these young people felt that, given some of the ways they were perceived and treated, they were better off ‘sticking together’ by associating mostly with people who shared ‘their way of life’, and the best thing to do was to avoid places and interactions with ‘other’ Australians likely to involve them in challenging or hostile interactions. This way of
dealing with racism Bauman (1989) has pointed out, is typical in an environment where people feel collectively excluded and Othered. It makes sense that those who feel marginalised would draw support from and seek friendship with others who share similar experiences, and simultaneously keep their distance from those who they either feel to be very different or believe are stigmatising them.

Even though some of the young people like Rocky had a clear idea of who ‘the enemy’ was, and claimed to understand the basis of the differences between ‘the enemy’ and ‘his’ community, the striking dualism this understanding implied could sometimes be blurred in their ordinary interactions with each other.

Rocky gave an example of this blurring of differences. During a school excursion to a theme park, Rocky and his friends were rowing a boat when suddenly the boat started filling up with water. When he and his friends cried out for assistance it was some Anglo-Australian students (with whom Rocky and his Lebanese friends were involved in conflict in their school) who put their differences aside and came to their aid:

> We were nearly under the water. And so then we were screaming out ‘help’ … and then the funny thing is the people who are our rivals in school came to our aid. [Our rivals are the other group in the school] … There’s just two groups: our group and the other group. Arabs and everyone else. They came to our aid and … they’re helping us take out the water…

Aside from rare instances like this example of a quite positive interaction, Rocky and his peers generally neither wanted nor sought out many opportunities to get to know people from different cultural backgrounds. As Rocky put it, this certainly included those they thought, rightly or wrongly, to ‘be against them,’ namely ‘White’ Australians:

> [People ask] why do Leboe’s just stick together? But when you think about it we’re forced to stick together because everyone else is looking down at us; everyone is just looking down at us pretty much and making us stick together.

The disposition to ‘stick together’, to protect oneself and others in the group from various kinds of vilification while seeking support from
others who have shared experiences, is not an unusual way of coping in the face of a hostile environment. Researchers like Collins et al. (2000) and Barker (2005) have demonstrated how this coping strategy is used by other minority groups, particularly other young marginalised men, in the face of persistent social, cultural and economic exclusion. However, bonding with people like themselves may not by itself do all that much to prevent or diminish the experience of vilification. By ‘sticking together’ young men like Rocky may well feed off and affirm each other’s identity as ‘victim’ and as the object of injustice, but this may also reinforce the process of exclusion – and reinforce social containment (White & Johanna 2004; White et al. 1999). People do not necessarily have to personally experience racism to form a view about racism and what to do about it. Furthermore, when they hang around ‘people like them’ they become even more visible targets for racial and religious discrimination, and when they are targeted as a group it serves to confirm their sense of exclusion (White & Johanna 2004).

Perhaps that is why some of the young people I interviewed opted to avoid interactions with particular people or places they believed were likely to be hostile to them. Nuer, for example, told me how she had avoided leaving the safety of her own home for a few days after the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001. She took this course of action partly because she said she was afraid of being attacked, but also because she was worried about how she would react to any hostility that she encountered. She was particularly worried about reacting to hostility in ways that might exacerbate the negative image that Muslims had. Nuer wore the hijab and she knew that anything she did could be interpreted by other Australians as typifying the thoughts and actions of ‘the Muslim’. Taking all of this into consideration Nuer decided that it was best to try to avoid such a situation and stay at home until the ‘moral panic’ about Muslims had died down. She told me:

… you hear stories. The story that I heard I thought was about my cousin but it was false, it wasn’t her, it was some other sister. She got kicked out of the bus because she was wearing the scarf. So
you know it’s like, oh my god what’s happening? When that happened, I didn’t go out. Parents and brothers said don’t go out because it’s pretty bad. A lot of Muslims are getting harassed on the streets. So I stayed in the house for a couple more days to see how things go.

So I didn’t go out. Sometimes it’s like. It’s like fear is like, what if it is you? You are going to go out where people that are going to harass you and then you’re going to go psycho at them? Then what kind of impression are we sort of leaving about Islam?

Nuer’s decision to stay at home and avoid going to places where people might harass Muslims did not stem from any personal experiences of racism. Rather it reflected the fact that she had heard stories of other Muslims being harassed on the streets. Hers was a vicarious experience.

A report to The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission by researchers Greg Noble and Scott Poynting (2004) revealed similar findings to my research. The authors of this report made the point that ‘the starkest feature in the landscape of fear and incivility … [is] when people actually fear for their lives or are afraid to leave their homes’ (Poynting & Noble 2004, p. 16). That report pointed to the way ‘victims of racism’ dealt with personal experiences and the resulting insecurity and anxiety by withdrawing from the wider community:

Mushrid, a middle-aged Muslim man of Indonesian origin, says, ‘I’m scared to go out from the house’. He is awaiting a response from the Department of Immigration to his visa application, and is fearful of being provoked in public into a retaliation that will be damaging for him.

Aladdin, a 40 year-old tradesman of Lebanese Muslim background, explains that after his wife and daughter were violently assaulted in a racist attack in a shopping centre, ‘we started to delay the shops for once a month, for example, we go to the shops and get all what we need’ (Poynting & Noble 2004, p. 16).

Another response to racism that can be treated as ‘avoidance’ was highlighted in the course of a discussion among members of a focus group made up of young men. This group discussed whether ignoring racist comments and/or walking away from those being racist was a good idea or not. Axle and Valentino, two of the young men in the group believed, for example, that a ‘non-violent’ approach
when confronted by overt racism was the best course of action to adopt:

Axle: One weekend I was in the city with the boys and this group of Aborigines … And they were like … “you fucking wogs!” We were just walking down the street. “You fucking wogs. You fucking wogs”. What do we do? We could have talked back but we just kept walking. We could have smashed them all out.

Valentino: Naah … he done the right thing by walking away. See, if it was someone else he would have gone, “Oh you wanna cause trouble? All right, let’s go … let’s go”. But he done the right thing by walking away, by just ignoring them and walking away.

Deciding to ignore racism has been used by others in the face of hostility. Research by Liv Newman (2004) on African-American experiences of coping with racism in the United States found for example that ignoring racism was a common strategy. Newman (2004, p. 57) writes:

When black Americans ignore the racist speech and/or behaviour that are cast at them, they are undermining the threat. By not acknowledging the threat as important, black Americans can avoid some portion of the harm that racism inflicts.

Such a strategy might not be considered avoidance but might instead be conceived of as actions orientated towards minimising the impact of racism (i.e. to take the “sting out of the racist experience”) and as an attempt to control victimisation. Strategies to this effect that were narrated by interviewees included laughing about the racist encounter (i.e. making light of a bad situation) or laughing at or about the person who made the racist remark. Mia explained how laughing at someone’s racist remark or laughing about a racist experience helps her, especially psychologically, to deal with the stress of racism.

Mia: … I had to like sort of make myself understand that I can’t take everything in, so every time someone says something, like I didn’t take [it too seriously] I’ll laugh because that’s how I’ve trained myself to become, just to block those things out and see the funny side of it. Even when [someone was saying some really hurtful things about Islam or my culture to my face] I’ll look at them and I’ll laugh. I’ll see [something funny in that situation] and that’s how I sort of make myself be. If you take everything to heart then you’re not going to live a very happy life, you’re going to be miserable and [question]
why me? Why me? ... so I had to make that decision and you know...

Kavindi: That’s really interesting how you said you find humour in what they say.

Mia: Yeah [I would see the funny side in] what they’re saying and how they’re reacting, like their facial expressions ... like they’re really angry... but as they were saying it looked really funny on them [the facial expression they had on were so funny and I couldn’t help but laugh out loud].

Mia’s use of humour to relieve the stress of dealing with racism is recognised by other academics such as Samuel Juni and Bernard Katz (2001, p. 120) as a common strategy adopted by those experiencing racism as an attempt to control victimisation. Seeing the funny side is useful in the face of a threat to identity posed by, for example, someone’s attempt to ridicule or put down. The threat can be modified or even removed by laughing at the aggressor and their attempt to cause hurt (Mealyea 1989). Studies, such as that conducted by Liv Newman (2004, p. 57) on how African Americans cope with racism, reveal similarly to my study that a sense of humour is used to cope with racism and to buffer its harmful effects.

“I just tune it out because that’s their ignorance. My mom and dad taught me that everybody is equal,” said Phyllis. This quote is an example of how black Americans deal with racism, by ignoring it. “I laugh it off,” states Walt. Sam advises, “Don’t look at it personally.” When asked how Sam reacts to discriminatory treatment he said, “I’m a slow person to respond to things that actually happen to me. I, cause I, don’t really let stuff get to me that often.” Ignoring racism means more than just not acknowledging it. Ignoring racism means to undo some of its harmful effects by casting it as “nonsense” or buffering one’s emotions against it.

My interviewee Mia, and Newman’s interviewee Phyllis, can reframe a racist encounter that potentially positions them as victims, by seeing the funny side to the racist encounter. Aided by humour, they can reinterpret the meaning of the interaction in a way that is not so damaging to their self-concept (i.e. ‘it is just their ignorance’).

Humour is not the only strategy used by my interviewees to frame or interpret a certain situation (e.g. being told by a stranger ‘to go home’) as something other than as racism. For instance, my interviewee Nuer (who says that racism is not an ‘issue’ in her life)
explains why a situation in which she found herself being
discriminated against was not a manifestation of racism but instead a
revelation of an individual’s ignorance.

I didn’t say he was racist. He was just ignorant. He knew nothing
about the faith, the religion. And mostly he knew nothing about the
game. The rules of the game. And that was one of the sad things.
Given that he was in the area, his position as a top referee for 12
years... you expect them to know the rules. That was upsetting. But
you can’t. That’s the thing. You can’t let these sort of people tell you
that you can’t play [sport] with a headscarf. These people are the
kind of people you need to ignore, just throw them away, put them
aside, just keep going. Because that’s the only way you are going to
achieve and the only way you are going to be happy in life. To this
day I don’t understand why he said that.

As Nuer suggests here, framing the incident not as racism but
instead as ignorance (i.e. a problem with him and therefore not with
her) enables her to not let that particular event affect her too much.
When she says, “you need to ignore, just throw them away, put them
aside, just keep going,” I interpret this as her suggesting that we
should also ignore and ‘throw’ the idea of being victims of racism
‘away’, so that we can ‘just keep going’ with our lives and not let it
affect what we want to achieve or our happiness.

Essed (1991, p. 78) has similarly found, in her study of African
American women’s coping with racism that, while all the women she
interviewed could recall specific events of unfair treatment and
discrimination, some of the women did not categorise these
experiences as racist events. She writes:

From a social psychological point of view, it would seem that the
best way to explain inconsistency in accounts of racism would be
within a framework of cognitive consistency theories. The reason is
that the object of discrimination may be a problematic experience,
which may cause psychological inconsistency between previous
cognitions and the interpretation of new experiences. In sociology
the phenomenon is known as self deception (Douglas, 1976) and in
social psychology as cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957/1976).
[Festinger] … contends that people tend to feel uncomfortable with
cognitive dissonance; therefore, they are motivated to reconstruct
their perceptions in a way that reduces dissonance. People tend to
reduce dissonance in particular when situations are felt to be a
threat to the self-concept, for instance, in situations seen as
negative and inevitable at the same time (Aronson, 1980).
There are other ways to understand the inconsistencies in accounts of racism, and an alternative interpretation is offered in the next chapter. For now it suffices to say that dissonance theories are useful, at least to some extent, for understanding why interviewees like Nuer may not readily categorise instances of discrimination or unfair treatment as racism. In other words, downplaying the significance of racism was a strategy used by some people like Nuer, as it helped her to avoid the traps of having a ‘victim mentality’, is psychologically protective; and enables her to step out of the language of ‘us and them’ (unlike some of my other interviewees who more readily identified racism in their everyday lives). It is, however, doubtful that such an approach is very useful for challenging or confronting more systematic everyday racism, as it promotes ignoring or minimising the significance of racism instead.

It should be noted that not everyone agreed that avoiding racism or downplaying the significance of racist comments was a good option. Some of the young men I interviewed were especially critical of their peers who advocated non-confrontational ways of dealing with racism.

**Fighting back**

Some young people dealt with the often challenging and hostile interactions that followed events like the 11 September 2001 attacks and the ‘Sydney gang rapes’ by talking back or even ‘fighting back’ physically. Coco explained to me that while she was unlikely to physically fight back she would at least fight back verbally. Coco thought that to be silent in the face of abuse and injustice would be to send a message that racism was acceptable. She argued that if the abuse was responded to immediately then the perpetrators were less likely to think they could just get away with it:
With me I am not a very violent person but anger builds up in me and I feel like I have to have a word or something just to get it off my back.

... I would say something back but I wouldn’t get into a punch-up or anything.

[For example] If someone said something to my mum and I’d feel like — mum wouldn’t be able to defend herself, my mum speaks English but not that good and if I don’t defend her that person is going to go to that next person and think it’s all right to abuse them. So by letting them get away with it he is going to do it to somebody else. He probably thinks we’re not allowed to talk while we’re a Muslim and we’re supposed to keep our voices low and not be too loud but still I am going to defend my religion, my culture, my family. I feel like we’re obliged to, you can’t just let it go by.

... Some people take it — like I said they had a big punch-up and it was on the news and this and that but I wouldn’t go to that extent.

I think once I was with my mum and [this other Australian said] something about the scarf and I’m like — they just had something against her and I’m like, ‘what’s it got to do with you? It’s on my mum’s head. If she is wrapping it around you and dragging you down along the street kind of thing [then] you have a right to say something’... I go, “you are allowed to dress however you want to dress, and you walk down the street and no-one comments on you; what gives you the right to harass me just because we choose to be modest and cover our head”?

‘Talking back’ is one way young people like Coco dealt with their encounters with racism or more specifically hate speech. Some writers such as Nat Hentoff (1992) have argued that arguing back is an effective way of dealing with hate speech. Richard Delgado and David H. Yun (1994, p. 877) say that advocates for ‘free speech’ (like Hentoff) claim this strategy is preferential to anti-racism regulations that deal with hate speech with legal processes because:

Racism is a form of ignorance, dispelling it though reasoned argument is the only way to get at its root. Moreover, talking back to the aggressor is empowering. It strengthens ones own identity, reduces victimisation ...

Delgado and Yun (1994, pp. 877-888) counter this claim by arguing that ‘talking back is rarely a realistic possibility for the victims of hate speech’ and may even be a dangerous option. This is why a few young people, fearful both for their safety and the safety of the families and friends, did not talk back as Coco has done. Instead, they walked away from their aggressor, choosing to ignore the verbal assaults or to take other avoidance strategies.
One of the key points that might be made about Coco’s story of fighting back (at least verbally), in the face of racism, is that she indicated that it was driven by a moral impulse to defend her culture, religion and family. Equivalent moral impulses motivated some other young people to take more ‘violent’ actions against those who insulted their faith or culture. They were more inclined to fight back physically if the aggressor had initiated the abuse.

Typically, when young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims have been reported in the media as ‘bashing/fighting’ other Australians, their action has all too often been framed minimally as ‘violent’ and possibly even as ‘criminal’. Causal links are drawn with their cultural or religious background or some other defect like the idea that these particular young people have ‘anger management issues’ (White & Wyn 2004). Rarely if ever are their actions understood as honourable or justified, nor is much effort made to elucidate why they have engaged in the conduct that has attracted a good deal of adverse attention.

This is one of the ideas that make the work of Jack Katz (1988) so important. Katz work is intended in part as a critique of conventional positivist criminology, which he argues has too often been:

Preoccupied with a search for background forces, usually defects in the offenders’ psychological backgrounds or social environments, to the neglect of … those aspects in the fore-ground of criminality that make its various forms sensible, even sensually compelling…(Katz 1988, p. 3)

Katz (1988) argues that those who are defined as ‘criminal’ and who are understood conventionally to have committed acts of ‘violence’ may commit ‘violent’ acts for precisely the same kinds of reasons as those people who conventionally are understood as non-criminal, like police, military and security personnel or even householders defending their house. That is to say, applying the category ‘criminal’ to some acts and not to others has the effect of obscuring what may well be common motivational factors. One set of such common factors are what Katz talks about as ‘moral emotions’.

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Moral emotions are those highly affective states of mind that involve feelings like anger, revenge, or a desire to command respect, elicited in order to protect family, friends and oneself (Katz 1988, p. 3). Bessant and Watts (1993) have drawn on Katz’s (1988) work when they suggest that ‘violence’ may more often be a morally and emotionally driven experience than an action conventionally understood in criminal law terms as an ‘evil act’ driven by a conscious desire to do a wrong, which is understood by Anglo-American law and conventional criminology alike as the ‘guilty mind’ component of a ‘guilty act’. Bessant and Watts (1993, p. 112) have argued:

Moral emotions [include] pride, honour, loyalty, the ‘instinct’ to protect one’s own family, one’s cultural identity, protection of territory motivate nations to war. They are … often the same motives that drive young people to acts of violence.

They make the point that, when young people engage in acts of violence, they often do so on the same moral motivational basis as those who are seen as more authorised to engage in violence (e.g. the police when they use force to subdue protesters or the state when it declares war on another nation). The key difference is that, when those in authority engage in violence, they have the power to legitimate their actions and so these actions are more often perceived as warranted and even honourable. When young people engage in violence, they are more likely to be labelled deviant, delinquent, ‘at risk’ and in need of adult supervision, punishment and intervention (Bessant & Watts 1993).

Michel Foucault’s (1997) thesis on the relationship between “truth” and “power” is useful for understanding the construction of social categories such as ‘youth violence’. Foucault (1977, p. 208) argued that what is deemed ‘true’, in a particular cultural and historical context, reflects power relations, and the capacity of certain groups and institutions to wield more power than others (e.g. young people) in developing and sustaining particular discourses or truths. Furthermore, certain interests (e.g. political and economically driven interests) are vested in the construction of particular “truths”, such as
the categorisation of particular behaviours and actions as ‘socially legitimate’, ‘criminal’ or ‘deviant’ conduct.

Carol Bacchi (1999) and William Ryan (1976) similarly argue, that what is needed is a critical assessment of who has the power to label particular kinds of responses as ‘violent’ and ‘criminal’, or alternatively as ‘necessary and legitimate force’. They urge us to question whose interests are served in the way particular social acts and social groups are framed.

Young people like Rocky are intuitively disposed to ask such critical questions and to delve into the power dynamics at work in the process of labelling people and their conduct. Rocky said he was sick of Lebanese people being labelled as ‘trouble makers’ and Muslims being labelled as terrorists when others (i.e. White Australians and Americans) take similar ‘violent’ actions but are more often forgiven for their violence:

... We’re the trouble makers - that’s our tag in Australia: Lebanese people are trouble makers. How we’re the trouble makers if they’re the ones that said go back to your country? If that report was on the news then they’re not going to say that they said that, all they’re going to say is the Lebanese people started arguing and fighting with these Anglo people ... That’s what they always say, the Lebanese this, Lebanese that.

Why do they tag [the activities of Muslim groups such as those fighting against US invasion in Iraq as] terrorism? It’s not terrorism, they [the West/ the USA] just tagged it terrorism. It’s like, that’s a tree, right, and they tag it firewood. It’s a living tree! They’re just defending their country but [no] they’re [labelled us] terrorists. It’s like someone comes up to me now and punches me in the face. Don’t I have to defend myself? Or, like, is about to punch me in the face and then I block it and I start hitting him. That’s self-defence.

As Rocky put it, the right to self-defence and the right to protect oneself or family and friends are often considered morally acceptable, except when the conduct is enacted by individuals or groups deemed to be outside some social or legal norm. This presumably was the point Max Weber made about states securing unto themselves a monopoly over ‘legitimate violence’. Indeed Weber (1978 pp. 54-56) made it the *sine qua non* that defined the existence of a state that it be an entity ‘if and insofar as its
administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of violence in the enforcement of its order*.

I encountered another example of morally driven justification of violence in another group interview where the participants were discussing why fighting to maintain respect and dignity in the face of racism was understood to be honourable:

Usher: I remember this happened a year ago when they see a lady, like a Lebanese lady with a scarf. They used to like say “take that fucking shit off!”
Axle: Naah bro. It happened a lot. It happened in shopping centres.
Egor: But then I think we got our respect back by telling them off and stuff.
Axle: By bashing the fuck out of them.
Kavindi: Hey, Egor, so you were saying you got your respect by telling them off? So if you tell them off you get more respect?
Egor: Oh yeah.
Kavindi: Yeah?
Axle: He means like full on scaring them and shit and they never want to open up their mouth again.
Kavindi: What do you mean scare them? Like, how would you scare them?
Muly: Threaten them.
Egor: Naah … like whatever. Whatever it takes.

As this conversation makes apparent, some of the young men in this group saw ‘fighting’ as an effective and sensible way of dealing with behaviour that they took exception to, either because they thought it was racist or was an act of incivility towards them or others (e.g. Lebanese women) whom they felt they needed to defend. As Axle put it, ‘full on scaring them’ might effectively discourage those who had been disrespectful to them and prevent them from making further offensive comments. In the face of disrespect, ‘full on scaring them’ by whatever means available (and this seems to have included ‘bashing’ the perpetrators) allowed these young men to win back respect by showing that they were not weak and not prepared to put up with deeply offensive behaviour in a display of meek submission.

Another interviewee, John, who I spoke with in a focus group process, was another young man who saw immediate and desirable effects from ‘fighting back’. For John the imperative to ‘fight back’
was not a violent reaction grounded in blind hate or aggression. It was, as John says here, a response designed to ‘just to teach [the perpetrator] a lesson not to do it again’:

Well, this kid at school, a Year Seven kid, he keeps on teasing me. I was in year nine and then I hit him and then he stopped. Oh ... it wasn’t a hit like – it was just teach him a lesson, it’s like a warning, sort of. It wasn’t like [I wanted to] land him in hospital. It was just a little warning to stop it, just teach him a lesson not to do it again. [It’s] not that I wanted [to really bash him badly] – because even other people started to get annoyed because he was saying bad stuff.

However, not all the young men I spoke with agreed that ‘fighting back’ was the most effective way of dealing with racism, let alone morally acceptable. Valentino, one of the young men in the focus group discussion, went against the general consensus in his group that the best way of dealing with racism was to ‘fight back’:

Naah, Naah ... but if you keep arguing and answering back to whatever they’re saying then it’s actually just going to get bigger and bigger. Rather leave it small and walk away.

David, in another focus group, preferred ‘avoidance’ strategies, saying that ignoring racist comments and walking away from someone who is hostile was the best strategy to adopt:

You just ignore them and they’ll get over it sometimes. If you ignore them, they’re going to get bored by saying the same thing if you don’t react to it and they’ll stop.

Anthony in another group discussion agreed. He reported that he and his friends did not fight back when they were faced with racist comments. They just had a laugh about it amongst themselves:

Anthony: Oh, yeah, I did [experience racism]. You know in the city where the immigration centre is? ... Well, on that road, I think it was on that street. [Me and my friends] we all had beards, some of us had really big [beards], you know, and we’re walking, walking, and we stopped at a light and then this man came, Australian man, he had a beer in his hand and all tattoos and we were talking ... talking a bit loud and we’re just having a laugh and then he came and he stopped us like that, and he looked my Sri Lankan friend in the eye and the next thing [he said] “I heard you back there talking about bombing the London bridge”, yeah, no, the London tube, the London tube, I think that’s where the train, that’s where the explosion happened in London? ... My other friend and me, we looked him in the eye and then he looked us in the eye and he started like, he started saying that we were going to bomb the
London tube and I heard you talking back there and one of youse are with Bin Laden, I'm going to call the police now.

Jack Black: If our friends were there, he would have copped the biggest belting.

Anthony: No, there was police right before us. See where Nando’s is? There was police over there.

Jack Black: He still would have copped the biggest belting. He want to call the cops. He’s saying that we’re going to bomb the London Bridge.

Anthony: No, but we just ignored him. He goes, ‘I’m going to show you where the immigration centre is, if you want to come, you follow me’ and then he just went. That’s it. And he done it in front of a lot of people.

Kavindi: How did everybody else react? They just kept quiet?

Anthony: They just stood there looking and they kept quiet, that’s it.

Kavindi: How did you and your friends react to that?

Anthony: We had a laugh, a little bit of a laugh and that’s it. The guy was drunk, that’s why he was just… We ignored it, that’s it. We spoke a bit about what the London tube is, we spoke a bit about what he said and then, and then [we asked each other if anyone else has] said it before, like, everyone said, ‘no, we didn’t’. And I didn’t even know the London tube, so yeah, that’s about it and then we had a laugh and then that’s it.

Kavindi: So you didn’t talk back to him? You didn’t say anything in response like, ‘we didn’t say that’?

Anthony: I went up close to him and looked him in the face and then I think he got scared so he just went – because there was like nine of us and we were all taller than him so we were all staring him in the face and then he was like, ‘oh, I’m going to go and show you where it is’ and he went. He didn’t come back.

The way in which Anthony and his friends dealt with this particular incident could be treated as a form of ‘avoidance’ because they did not physically or verbally fight back. However, the act of going up close to the aggressor, looking him in the face and affectively scaring him off, could also have been categorised as ‘fighting back’. This particular response sent the same message that a physically or verbally assertive response would have signified, namely that we are not willing to passively accept abuse and will not be intimidated by it.

Whilst Anthony and other young men tried to avoid violent actions in response to the racism they encountered, the interviews and discussions indicated that some young men ‘felt pressured’ to deal
with racism by resorting to ‘violence’. For instance, when Valentino said that it was best to ignore racist comments and walk away from those making trouble he was teased by some of the other boys, particularly by Axle.

Axle [referring to Valentino]: But with a little kid like him they’re not going to try and pick a fight with him coz they know he won’t be able to fight back. That’s why he says just walk away [Because he can’t fight].

Comments such as this could also be interpreted as an expression of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. While I will be drawing on and discussing this concept in detail in chapter five, I offer a brief account here for the purpose of analysing Axle’s response to Valentino.

‘Hegemonic masculinity’ can be defined as a pattern of practices that has allowed men’s dominance over women to continue, and is ‘distinct from other masculinities, especially subordinate masculinities’ (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). It embodies, within a particular historical and cultural context, the most honoured way of being a man. For a particular masculinity to be considered hegemonic it needs to be more socially central, or more associated with authority and social power, than other forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 846). The concept also presumes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities. Connell recognises that there is diversity in masculinities and feminities and defines ‘gender in terms of standard rather than normative behaviour, that is, as something that does not precede but is constituted in human action’ (Demetriou 2001, p. 340).

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, pp. 832-833), hegemonic masculinities come into existence in specific circumstances, and are open to historical change. Thus, older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones in the struggle for hegemony.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has received a number of criticisms. Jo Goodey (1997, p. 404) for instance writes:
In presenting a hierarchy of masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is in danger of being interpreted as a bounded catalogue of masculinities which fit neatly on top of one another. The beauty of social groups is that they defy any such categorisation.

Stephen Whitehead (1999, p. 58) similarly argues:

... hegemonic masculinity can only explain so much... its own legitimacy is weakened once we stress the fluidity, contingency and multiplicity of masculinities – and identities.

On the same theme, Dimitrou (2001, p. 354) maintains that hegemonic masculinity needs to be understood as constructed not in opposition to other masculinities (e.g. gay masculinities) but instead as a reciprocal and dialectical appropriation/marginalisation of a variety of masculinities.

Despite the criticisms, many have found ‘that a nuanced understanding of the concept is useful when interpreting masculinities in diverse cultural settings (Connell 1995, 1996, 2000; Phoenix and Frosh, 2001; Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1995)’ (Lee 2003, p. 81). Such an understanding has helped me make sense of comments made by interviewees such as Axle, who as mentioned earlier, teased another young man in a focus group who did not support ‘fighting back’. Axle, like many men (Connell 1995), was disposed to value ‘violence’ and aggressiveness highly, and to treat it as an honourable aspect of ‘masculinity’, especially when confronted by the expression of racial abuse and vilification or when dealing with attacks on one’s own moral status (such as when other Australians evinced disrespect to the young people’s culture, religion or family).

Of course avoidance and fighting back are not the only ways in which young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims engage with other Australians. As I found through my interviews and field work, a number of young people responded to racism, and experienced a sense of wider community belonging, through practices of ‘constructive engagement’.
Constructive engagement

I argued earlier in this thesis that a range of factors contributed to young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims developing a sense of belonging to the wider Australian community. Some of the factors that contributed to this feeling of belonging included when they felt they were being both listened to and valued for what they had to say. It could also involve being given opportunities to negotiate the terms of belonging; being allowed and enabled to achieve what they wanted; being empowered to make a contribution to the social, economic and cultural life of the wider community, or simply having access to a space in which to have an open dialogue. They told me that they certainly felt a sense of belonging when others in the community ‘shared a way of life with them’. Sometimes it was all about having an experience that suggested they had ‘moral worth’ that was acknowledged in the wider community.

Some of the young people I interviewed dealt with often challenging and hostile interactions by moving to engage people who were vilifying or Othering them, with strategies designed to develop mutual understanding and respect. Sometimes this included one-on-one actions aimed directly at aggressors. On other occasions it involved a process of community engagement focusing on projects that encouraged inter-cultural understanding, that helped to break down stereotypes of Muslims, or that were intended to facilitate mutual understanding and inter-action.

One example of how young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims tried to engage with other Australians at a one-on-one level, and in doing so tackle racism indirectly, was provided by Ramsaya:

I’ve had more questions now in my job. I’ve had one Anglo-Saxon woman who has just never met a Muslim before, a physically visible Muslim, in her life and she has just bombarded me with questions ... and I just thought, oh my God! Because I’m still learning up to now about my religion, I cannot say that I’m a hundred per cent know about everything, in my religion because I haven't read that much. But she bombarded me with these questions and that’s when it really
hit me that “oh my God! I don’t know anything and I need to start learning more”.

She really didn’t think much [about Muslims or Islam] until the media has come out with the …. Yeah, no, together we have [been learning more about Islam] …. I’ve been learning more and she’d ask me questions so I have been telling her more and more. I’ve been giving her books to read and stuff. So she… understands more about my religion and she’s also opened up and thought, “okay, so this religion exists and it’s not what, this religion is not what the media says it is”. So it’s good. And one of the books she loved was Does My Head Look Big in This? She just loved that. Which I think is a good illustration of what a lot of Lebanese-Muslims or Arab-Muslim girls go through, we do fall in love, we do have …. I would love to go climbing and do not stick out like a freak. Yeah, I really would just like to just …. It’s just everything in that book is exactly what …. 

I have shown in this chapter that one way that the young people I spoke with developed a sense of belonging was by undertaking to engage with other Australians. As Mia’s story illustrates, actively participating in projects such as Youth Parliament, where there was an opportunity to engage in dialogue with other Australians and have one’s ‘moral worth’ recognised, was a very important way that young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims could begin to feel valued and to develop a sense of belonging:

Being able to participate in things [such as] the Youth Parliament I felt a sense of belonging because I was able to voice my opinions and because everyone else was the same [as in we were all in it to make a positive difference] …. I remember [Youth Parliament] was pretty much one of the main things that boosted my confidence and made me the person I am now because everyone was just so encouraging and we were in it together, you know, and they were so understanding and I just felt like I belonged, you know, and yeah, like I really did.

[I felt a sense of belonging because] I was heard and I didn’t have to pretend to be someone else… I was just free to be myself and not have to worry about, oh [what if I act like or make a mistake, will they think all Muslims are like this]. You know, they were so supportive and I felt like, wow, people actually accept me for who I am and it just felt so good. I belong. Finally.

Being ‘in it together’ is one of the notable phrases articulated by Mia. It captures the point that through wider community participation by working together towards a common goal those involved in the activity can share a sense of ‘being the same’, and in that way carve out a sense of belonging. It is a bit like the ‘way of life’ notion of belonging, only not so exclusive, because sharing the same goal still
allows for diversity (i.e. different beliefs and ways of living). There is a unifying point (i.e. the idea of ‘being in it together’) but in working towards a common goal there is more interest in hearing different voices and accepting all those in the group for who they are and embracing what they each bring to the table.

Conclusion

I have argued that there are three key ways that the young people I interviewed dealt with the often challenging and hostile interactions that emerged following events such as the 9/11 attacks and the ‘Sydney gang rapes’. The three key ways identified I called ‘avoidance’, ‘fighting back’, and ‘constructive engagement’.

Actions that fitted the category of ‘avoidance’ included strategies such as avoiding places where they were more likely to encounter challenging and hostile interactions, and limiting interactions with those perceived as very different, ignoring racist comments and walking away from aggressors. It also included strategies aimed at minimising the impact of racism, for instance by using humour to make take the sting out of racism, and interpreting what could be counted as racism as something else.

The second key way they dealt with racism was through actions that can be understood as ‘fighting back’, which is essentially verbally fighting back or physically fighting back but can also include other actions of resistance.

The third key way that the young people dealt with racism was by what can be understood as ‘constructive engagement’. This included actions at a more immediate one-on-one level of interaction with other Australians, or broader community-level involvement. These actions are typified as ‘constructive engagement’ when the interaction is anti-racist in nature, and incorporates goals such as
developing mutual understanding and respect across difference and tackling misunderstanding. I proposed that interviewees who were more involved in actions that can be perceived as ‘constructive engagement’ tended to report a greater sense of belonging to the wider community. At least more so than interviewees who more often adopted actions that can be classified as ‘sticking together’ or ‘fighting back’ in an effort to deal with their experiences of racism. More research however, is required to explore the relationship between wider community belonging and participating in activities that might constitute as constructive engagement. Further research is needed looking into other factors that might contribute to a sense of wider community belonging. That is, factors like having more positive interactions with members of the wider community than negative interactions (as has been suggested to be the case in my study).

In the next chapter, I examine how some other young people of Arabic-speaking backgrounds dealt with racism, using the digital technology ‘YouTube,’ to create new public spaces, which they were able to use to invoke a sense of collective place and belonging.
... the predominant representations of young people as passive objects upon which the criminal justice agencies impose their own images and control mechanisms... Young people use subcultures as one way to forge the category of 'youth' and its attendant images. They do this by taking on, latching onto consuming and/or inventing artefacts that express their feelings or define their stance in relation to the world ... By definition the active nature of this expression almost invariably brings them into conflict with the world ... the stage is set for an intergenerational war of resistance...

(Omaji 2003, pp. 40-41)

There is little doubt that, like so many young people, many Arabic Speaking Background (ASB) young people have become ‘digital natives’ and have actively engaged with many forms of the so-called Web 2.0 (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007; Carrie et al. 2009; Lange 2008). Media commentators such as Gibson (2007) and Bolt (2009) have deemed problematic the ways in which some of these young people are using the internet. They have given particular attention to the way ASB young people in Sydney and Melbourne have turned to the production of videos for posting on YouTube (Houlihan & Cameron 2008; Tinkler & Hastie 2007). Gibson (2007) for example, commented as follows:

A YouTube video that glorifies notorious gang rapist Bilal Skaf shows there’s a small, antagonistic sub-section within the Lebanese Muslim community, Prime Minister John Howard says. Mr. Howard today described the video as a "shocking exercise". "It's a reminder that there is undoubtedly within a section, a small section of the Lebanese Muslim community, a group of people who are antagonistic to the values and the way of life in this country," Mr. Howard told the Nine Network. A YouTube user today removed from the website several of the controversial videos, including the Skaf one, called Lebo thugs, and another that shows a man being bashed by a gang ...

The videos have generally been interpreted by the mainstream media commentators as: expressing and inviting ‘anti-Australian sentiment’, celebrating ‘gang culture’ and a ‘we will do as we please in Australia mentality’ (Bolt 2009; Gibson 2007; Tinkler & Hastie 2007). The concern has extended to the suggestion that some of
these videos were designed to incite violence (Gibson 2007; Tinkler & Hastie 2007). In observing the various responses to this matter, it appeared that some journalists, community leaders, police, and those working closely with ASB young people, were making certain assumptions about the young people involved in the production and broadcasting of the videos (Gibson 2007; Tinkler & Hastie 2007). While some of this expression of concern is in a sense ‘predictable’ and not always well-informed, some service providers working with young Lebanese Muslims also began voicing concerns about the young peoples’ use of YouTube. In 2008, while I was working for Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS), the staff were advised by a young person that several YouTube videos were being produced by ‘gangs’ of young men who, like him, came from Arabic speaking backgrounds. He told staff at VASS that the YouTube videos were being created to ‘stir up’ rival gangs and even to schedule ‘fights between gangs’. In coordinated exercises involving VASS and the police, some of the offending videos were removed from YouTube and several planned fights were prevented.

My own encounter with these videos between 2008 and 2010 suggested that, while some of this concern was warranted, a number of YouTube videos created by young Lebanese-Muslim and other ASB young people, seemed to point to other more interesting dynamics at play. I decided that this body of video material deserved some detailed attention even though this involved extending the parameters of my research to include non-Lebanese-Muslim ASB young people. I therefore accessed and analyzed a number of these YouTube video postings to address one of my key research questions, namely how do some young Lebanese-Muslim Australians (as well as other ASB young people) deal with often challenging and hostile interactions that followed the mobilisation of racist sentiment against Muslims after 2001? I was also interested in exploring the YouTube content to see if it revealed anything about these young people’s sense of belonging to the wider community. An analysis of some of the content enabled me to address the related questions of
whether YouTube might also be understood as a medium for young people to create a sense of belonging and to deal with their experiences of racism.

I begin by looking at what the literature says about young people’s use of the Internet. As will become clear from my review of the literature, young people from a range of different backgrounds use the Internet for a variety of reasons, and this includes using it to create new and distinct political spaces. In the process they can be said to create what deserve to be called ‘spaces of belonging’.

Drawing on the analytical categories developed in the previous chapter, I analyze a few YouTube videos that can be classified as ‘fighting back’ against racism. I also examine to what extent concepts such as ‘capitalizing on Othering’ (Jensen 2009), ‘resilience’ (Ungar 2004, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2008; Ungar et al. 2008; Ungar et al. 2007) and ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’ (Noble, Poynting & Tabar 2003) are useful for interpreting these videos. Next I look at the YouTube videos that can be categorised as ‘constructive engagement’. I argue that these YouTube videos are being created and used by Lebanese and Muslim young people, and by others who engage with these media, to ‘constructively’ deal with their experiences of racism and to negotiate their sense of wider community belonging.

Young Peoples’ Use of YouTube

There is plenty of empirical evidence that young people are increasingly appropriating and using online communication media. In 2008 the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) reported that 15 to 17 year olds went online on average for two hours and 24 minutes per day (ACMA 2008, p. 4). Sixty-four per cent of (8 to 17 years old) young people’s total Internet time was spent on
social networking and online communication activities (e.g. on sites such as FaceBook, MySpace and YouTube). Even more interesting, ACMA found that over 80 per cent of young women aged 14 to 17, and 65 per cent of boys aged 15 to 17 had their own material online (e.g. an online profile or a video uploaded by themselves).

The use of online sites like YouTube points to the attractions of interactivity and a shift away from the older norm of passive consumption of media (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007; Carrie et al. 2009; Lange 2008; Stuart 2001). YouTube is an Internet portal site that, as researchers note, ‘allows thousands of audio-visual content creators and gatherers to upload, at no cost, clips and video blogs’ and offers the ‘opportunity for communication between video-posters and viewers through textual and video responses as well as video rating systems’ (Milliken et al. 2008, p. 1). According to one Australian study of young people’s use of information communication technologies, YouTube was one of young Victorians’ favourite websites (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007). The study argues that online communication provides an opportunity for young people, through sites such as YouTube, to both explore who they are and develop a sense of identity. The authors argue that identity production takes place:

... on the web: young people are documenting, informing and engaging in online conversations to make sense of who they are. Increasingly it is in an online context that young people are developing a sense of self in relation to their broader social context, making sense of social issues and social boundaries (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007).

The authors of the ‘Good Play’ project report (Carrie et al. 2009) add that the Internet provides young people with various opportunities to ‘play’ with their identity. It also greatly increases the opportunities they have to participate in public discussion or political processes and in the creation and distribution of knowledge and information (Carrie et al. 2009). These authors point out that young people are often limited when participating in ‘real world’ contexts because of constraints like the implicit or explicit standards of behaviour required in formal spaces like schools, which are often created and enforced
from the top down by those in positions of authority (Carrie et al. 2009, p. 68). They argue that in:

... such settings roles, responsibilities, and sanctions for rule violations are typically explicit which limits young people from participating in ways outside of the parameters set by adults. Also, young people’s ‘amateur creations’ (such as writings, music, and photography) can be shared locally in offline contexts but are not easily distributed to a broader audience (Carrie et al. 2009, p. 68).

For reasons such as these, young people might not feel they have a voice with regard to public issues in the offline realm (Carrie et al. 2009, p. 68).

Other researchers (Bell 2001; Dodge & Kitchin 2001; Smith & Kollock 1999), who have explored the way young people use online media, agree with that assessment. They argue that the Internet can provide opportunities for people who may be experiencing discriminatory behaviours, or who are the object of stereotypes, to experience and enjoy being freed from social markers such as gender, ethnicity and age, or even the suburbs in which they live. The anonymity that going online offers can therefore assist those experiencing marginalisation to transgress the stigma and discrimination they face in their everyday face-to-face relationships. Further to this point, Philippa Collin (2008), Judith Bessant (2000), and Richard Hil and Judith Bessant (1999), argue that young people have been able to use the Internet to create new and distinctive political spaces. Cyberspace provides opportunities and resources for new forms of public spaces that can enable young people to organise socially, culturally and politically. For many young people, cyberspace offers unparalleled access to boundless information, as well as the capacity for collective action based on anonymous and presumed equality (Giroux 1997; Rash 1997; Whittle 1997). As Hil and Bessant (1999, p. 48) put it:

The ability to communicate quickly, to retrieve vast amounts of detailed information at relatively low cost has a democratising influence in terms of the dissemination of information and extending the ability of young people to shape knowledge-bases and discussion... access to an electronic medium like the Net allows young people to respond to certain representations of themselves, and others, such as those found in the mainstream media ... Access to the Net allows young people to participate without their age, or relative inexperience being identified or becoming a barrier.
Others (Blanchard, Metcalf & Burns 2007; Wyn et al. 2005) are equivalently optimistic about the opportunities the Internet gives young people, especially marginalised young people, to explore new ways of engaging their social context. Wyn et al (2005, p. 19) claim that the Internet provides:

... a medium through which dispossessed or marginalised young people, who are not necessarily connected in physical space, can create a sense of belonging and identity, drawing on and appropriating cultural representations (e.g. texts, images, music). This use of ICTs is an extension of the use that marginalised groups of young people have traditionally made of popular culture to construct political identities and a sense of belonging.

However, some academics like Alecia Wolf (1998) and Karen Evans (2004) are much more sceptical about the ‘opportunities’ that the Internet provides. Evans (2004, p. 13) for instance argues that:

... many of the problems which plague physical community are present in their virtual counterparts. This is hardly surprising given that virtual communities are forged and maintained by people living in the material world and that their users will bring problems, prejudices and limitations experienced in the physical world into their cyber-communities.

Wolf (1998) and Evans (2004) along with Jessie Daniels (2009) and Yaman Akdeniz (2009) contest the now largely conventional utopian view that the Internet is a new social space that enables those who go into the virtual world the opportunity to escape racism, sexism or other forms of discriminatory behaviour. They argue that the Internet has instead simply added new avenues for people who want to promote or disseminate racist views. It is clear that the Web, unlike other media, presents unique ways to disseminate hate messages, facilitated by factors such as the relative anonymity it offers to users and the fact that the Web is currently far less regulated and policed than most other mediums of communication (Akdeniz 2009; Daniels 2009). Young people from a Muslim, Lebanese or Arabic-speaking background, as well as experiencing racism in their offline encounters, are also likely to experience it online on sites such as YouTube. This is well illustrated by responses to a video clip posted on YouTube by some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims from Sydney, who had been discussing the Cronulla riots.
In the video titled ‘Lebanese Boys Speak the truth about Cronulla Riots part1’ (cronullariots 2007) two young men, who introduce themselves as Ahmad Sabra and Ahmad Said, begin their video by saying:

Ahmad Said: We are here to discuss, what we have discussed previously.

Ahmad Sabra: About being Arab-Australian and about the Cronulla riots.

Ahmad Said: And the revenge attacks.

Ahmad Sabra: Most of you have watched [the videos we have made previously] and we have received an overwhelming response. Numerous comments.

Ahmad Said: We got a few of them here that we are going to put forth to you guys. Um we got over here for example, Dry River [who made the comment]:

I wish everybody were like that brother. I hope racism ends but I know it won’t. Anyways nice effort guys. Count me in for fight against racism.”

What do you reckon?

Ahmad Sabra: That’s a good comment. And that’s the message we are trying to send out you know? To fight racism. To go against it.

Ahmad Said: Oh but hold on, he goes “I hope racism ends but I know it won’t” what do you think of that?

Ahmad Sabra: I mean it’s true. Racism is always going to exist no matter where you go or where you are. It’s always going to be there.

Ahmad Said: I don’t believe so.

The discussion continues like this, between the two men. They discuss and debate the comment made by YouTube video poster ‘Dry River’, and other comments about previous video postings made by other online users.
This video elicited strong responses from YouTube users as the examples included below suggest. One response by ‘JSMyst’ who said he had an Arabic background, wrote:

... u know what I am an arab u fuking moron and my whole family was killed by that disgraceful pathetic religion u call islam. Fuk u, fuk ur religion my family has been in Australia for 2 generations and u people are fucking it up for every1 (JSMyst 2010).

Another calling himself ‘TynanH72’ from New Zealand posted:

JSMyst I totally agree with you 110% Arabs and Muslims ruin the Earth. Hell look at London, I was there 3 months ago. They are the ones who Carry out Knife attacks on innocent People. Fuck You Arabs and Muslims. We don’t have em on the Coastal cities in NZ. Our councils ban everything From them (TynanH72 2010).

The comments in response to this video posting suggest that it is not only someone like TynanH72, who was happy to indulge in virulent anti-Muslim and anti-Arab commentary, but also people like ‘JSMyst’, who identified as an Australian of Arabic (Egyptian) Christian background and was willing to target Muslims with hate speech.
There were of course other comments posted by those identifying as ‘wogs’, ‘Lebs’, Arabs or Muslims who made equally vitriolic observations about Anglo-Australians. This reminds us of the importance of directing anti-racist educational campaigns at communities outside the Anglo-Australian mainstream as well as towards White Australians (Hage 2003, p. 119). As Hage (2003, p. 119) writes, ‘Often some very virile racism flourishes in spaces that are seen not to be in need of anti-racist ethos because they are subjected to white racism.

Hage asks us to keep in mind, that while ethnic minorities do hold racist attitudes and engage in racist practices, ‘White racism’ continues to be more important than other kinds of racism. White racism is more significant for reasons such as the unequal distribution of political, cultural and economic resources that are implicated in the pre-eminent position of Anglo-Australians. The dominance of ‘White racism’ was reflected in my observations that the ‘anti-White’ comments posted on YouTube by Arabs and Muslims were drowned out by the sheer volume of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and anti-Lebanese postings. Hage (2003, pp. 118-119) points out, that while Australia’s ethnic minorities such as Greek and Aboriginal people can and do engage in racist sentiment and behaviour:

... their power to activate their racism and use it for discriminatory purposes is not the same as the power that some Anglo-Australian have. Furthermore, white racism is entrenched in the very make-up of Australian institutions – other racisms remain individualised and scattered. But let us be clear about this. This does not mean that migrant and other forms of racism exist in a power vacuum. Asian business owners have power within the space of their business, and can use this power to discriminate against their employees if they are so inclined ... migrant working-class kids can also develop a micro spatial power within their neighbourhoods or their schools and can use this to discriminate against other people. However, regardless of these micro-spaces, the salient point is that macro Australian public national space remains a space where whiteness gives one most power to discriminate ...

This acknowledgement is important because it makes us realise that the primacy given to white racism ‘is based on a political critique, not a moral critique, of white people...’ (Hage 2003, p. 118).
With this in mind I turn now to several different kinds of ways young people from an Arabic background have used YouTube to claim back some cultural space for themselves.

**Fighting back through YouTube**

One of the more common elements in the representation of young men of ‘Middle-Eastern appearance’ has been a preoccupation with Lebanese gangs. It has proved to be a theme susceptible to any number of prejudicial treatments. In one typical news article, Herald Sun reporters Chris Tinkler and David Hastie (2007) pointed to the problem they believed was represented by Lebanese gangs fomenting violence, gang warfare and even murder:

Freely available on the internet phenomenon YouTube, the images and messages are contained in homemade videos that depict ethnic gang warfare, violence and gun-toting. The videos incite racial attacks -- even killings -- and bait Melbourne police. A video posted last week, titled *DA nEW AUS*, shows Lebanese youths posing with firearms, footage of bashings and robbery and illicit drug use. The screen shows the slogan, "This is our new home and there’s nothing you can do about it", all to the tunes of gangsta rap...

A cursory survey of YouTube content suggests that there are many videos posted on YouTube that appear to celebrate gangs, violence and promote anti-white sentiments. A question that is worth asking is, ‘why’? Assuming for example that the videos in question are projecting violent even possibly criminal intentions, we might first ask, why are these being broadcast to the world? Parenthetically this raises the question of how we should think about the idea of gangs. It is unlikely that the young people featured in the videos, or creating the videos, are part of some highly structured, organised and criminally motivated gangs associated with, for example, the supply of amphetamines. Furthermore, organised criminal gangs would not be making so visible their identities and illegal activities to the police
and others via the Internet. As Santina Perrone and Rob White (2000, p. 1) have argued:

American style criminal gangs are not prevalent in this country... the phenomenon of “criminal youth gangs” is largely a media myth... While “youth gangs” as such do not constitute a significant social problem, there is nevertheless evidence that young people on the street are engaging in activity that occasionally includes anti-social behaviour, criminal activity and group conflict.

Second, and granting the point made here by Perrone and White, why are ‘gang’ related identities being projected to a wider audience through video posts on YouTube by young ‘Middle-Eastern’ and Muslim men? Third, and assuming that the projection of ‘gang’ identity is to be taken seriously, what does ‘gang’ membership mean for these young men and what needs can it meet for these young men?

Working within a tradition of cultural studies influenced by the Birmingham School, Cheryl Simpson and Richard Hil (1995) argued that behaviour labelled as delinquent (including ‘gang activities’ such as graffiti tagging ‘gang names’ in public spaces and property) can be understood as acts of political defiance, resistance or reassertion. Rob White (2007a) has likewise argued that many young people either form or join a ‘gang’ as one way to overcome marginalisation and alienation by affirming their social presence. As White (2007a, p. 71) says:

From this vantage point, gang membership is significant, not because of its presumed criminality, but because it is a way of valorising their lives and empowering the young men in the face of outside hostility, disrespect and vilification. Not all young people who experience marginalisation or who engage in violence end up in street gangs, but these do have a major bearing on gang formation and membership.

Drawing on a social ecological approach to resilience Michael Ungar (2008) similarly contends that young people’s forming or joining a ‘gang’ need not be viewed as maladaptive behaviour. Instead it can be seen as collective project in which young people are finding a resourceful way to deal with threats from others: it can be viewed as a sign of their resilience. As Ungar (2008, p.27) puts it:
In the case of immigrant and other youth who experience systemic prejudice because of race, ethnicity, or class, gang membership may actually resolve some of the tensions caused by their marginalisation. This interpretative framework indeed seems to catch something of the expressive value of the videos posted on YouTube by Lebanese and ASB young people. Like graffiti, some YouTube videos created by young Australian men from ASB and Muslim backgrounds, which project ‘gang’ affiliated identities, can be seen as ‘assertions of a right to be-in-place’, representing resistance to exclusion (Bruno & Wilson 2000, pp. 42-43). The screen shots featured in the following two pages (extracted from the YouTube video created by a user who goes by the name ‘Aussiekillaonstandby’) captures this notion of resistance and ‘claim to space’.

The image (above) depicts the ‘gang name’ Broady Boys’. It is overlayed with several photos of ASB boys ‘taking over’ various local places and spaces including train carriages and local shopping centres. This image can be read as projecting a claim to local spaces (i.e. the suburb of Broadmeadows).
The young men featured in these videos and the creators of the videos, who may or may not be part of ‘gangs’ (understood as a well-defined criminal organisation) are, however, fashioning themselves as ‘gangs’ who control ‘their territories’ (e.g. the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne) because there are certain benefits that come with this identity performance.

On the face of it these young men seem intent on constructing a threatening appearance by displaying ‘symbols of terrifying evil’, for example, weaponry and posing in fight stances (Katz 1988, p. 115). In ways such as this, the young men present themselves as rulers, or as Katz (1988) puts it, as ‘street elites’. Katz suggested that groups of young men in his studies of American inner city ‘gangs’ constructed the appearance of being ‘street elites’ in an attempt to
claim sovereignty over certain places (such as their local neighbourhoods) through physical intimidation.

The ‘gang names’ of the various ASB and Lebanese youth gangs in Melbourne’s northern and western suburbs certainly suggest a desire to be seen as rulers, and as a ‘force’ or a ‘power’ not to be argued with. Some of the gang names appearing on the YouTube videos include, ‘Broady Boys’, ‘Crazy Arabian Knights’ (C.A.K), ‘Newport Lebo Crew’ (N.L.C) and ‘Brotha Hood Soldiers’ (BHS).

In this respect YouTube can be understood as a medium for projecting a ‘fantasy’ of ruling over certain local spaces that these young people can then claim as their own. Here I use ‘fantasy’ in the commonsense meaning of the term: something one yearns for, but which is considered to be either unrealistic or difficult to achieve (Hage 2000, p. 68).

As you can see here, the video created by Aussiekillaonstandby (2008a) has been titled in honour of one the various Arab and Lebanese ‘gangs’ in the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne.
Some (Noble, Poynting & Tabar 2003) may argue that it is precisely because these young people don’t ‘rule’ places such as Broadmeadows (or even the Broadmeadows shopping centre or the train station) that it becomes important for them to find ways of somehow making this fantasy more real or at least credible. ‘People tend to resort to such ideology precisely when they do not ‘rule’ and when they resent being ruled over’ (Noble, Poynting & Tabar 2003, p. 142). It might be supposed that those who rule – who have power that is legitimate and relatively secure – are typically more confident in their rule and do not have to brand it as their territory, or constantly remind others who threaten their rule that they are in control.

An alternative perspective with a good deal of backing by scholarly research might, however, suggest that these young people’s persistent attempts to assert control and rule over place, is quite like the police use of ‘governmental technologies’ – like traffic lights, CCTV camera and billboards about speeding and drink-driving. These are the technologies by which police power and control over place is signalled and asserted. Equally, the point made by ‘realist’ scholars in the international studies area is that even states are engaged in an endless project designed precisely to brand and defend their territorial integrity (Molloy 2006). This need to assert control and rule over place comes with the recognition that places are always contested spaces, and different actors (especially those who have peripheral identities) challenge, subvert and resist power relations and strategies of governance (Mitchell & Kelly 2010). Hence, even if young ASB or Lebanese men truly do believe they control places like Broadmeadows and even the nation, they still need to assert their power and control, through means such as graffiti tagging their ‘gang’ name in the places that they vie for power with others.

19 The concept of ‘governmental technologies’ is used by Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (2010, p. 281), who draw on the works of Michael Foucault to refer to the ‘strategies, techniques and procedures through which different forces seek to render programmes operable, and by means of which a multitude of connections are established between the aspirations of authorities and the activities of individuals and groups’. In other words, ‘governmental technologies’ refer to the means by which people are regulated and made governable.
The boys in the YouTube videos draw on the power of fear to assert their rule and control over place. Symbols of fear and power used by the young men include images, like the ones shown in the next page, of the young men toting weapons, standing and posing for pictures wearing masks and looking like dangerous ‘gang’ members or ‘suburban terrorists’.

The video screen prints in this page and in the next (Aussiekillaonstandby 2008b) illustrate the sorts of images used by young men to further their status, sense of power and desire for social respect, through the manipulation of fear and the threat of violence.
As can be seen from looking at the image above and in the previous page, these young men are linking symbols of ‘Lebanese pride’ (for example by depicting the Lebanese flag and the Lebanese national emblem of the cedar tree) with symbols of masculine power (by inserting images of the young men holding weapons and posing menacingly for the camera). The editing of these videos emphasises the conjunction of ethnic identity and powerful masculinity, enabling them to achieve a sense of social power via respect gained through fear (Noble 2007, p. 331). Linking back to my discussion on Othering in Chapter One I argue that these symbolic practices can be viewed as a means by which the young men are able to embrace and capitalise on their position as Others (Jensen 2009). In this way, these young men, who are often positioned in the national field as marginal to the dominant Anglo-Australian cultural majority, can
project and fashion an identity that capitalises on a fear and fascination with the ‘Other’.

It is not a coincidence that many of the YouTube videos that vividly represent a certain antagonism to ‘White Australians’ were posted on YouTube by young ASB and Muslim Australians not long after the Cronulla riots. There are several YouTube videos that represent this antagonism and are worth taking some time to interpret.

One example of anti-White racism communicated on YouTube after the Cronulla riots is the YouTube video entitled ‘AussieDiss 2 – Thug Love’ (Aussiediss69 2010). The video has no images other than that pictured below. The soundtrack features a rap song and the hip-hop beat of their song is accompanied by sounds of gun shots. It is the kind of video clip that was ideally suited to be selected and subjected to commentary and criticism on Australian current affairs programs, radio-talk back shows, or featured in news articles: it seems almost designed to encourage reporting on the antagonistic ‘nature’ of young Arab and Muslim Australians towards ‘mainstream Australians’. Some of the lyrics from the song are provided in Appendix C.

(Aussiediss69 2010)

It has been well established that rap music of this kind is imbued with a cultural politics that, according to Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (1989, p. 2), is:
... the complex process by which the whole domain in which people search to create meaning about their everyday lives is subject to politicization and struggle. The central issue of such a cultural politics is the exercise of power in “both institutional and ideological forms” and the manner in which “cultural practices” relate to this context.

We can take this conceptualisation of cultural politics and apply it to the ‘Aussie Diss’ rap song. This process of interpretation involves placing the song in the context of events such as the Cronulla riots – which the song explicitly refers to. As one of the lines from this rap asks, ‘You Aussie Mutha Fuckerz, Why you always got to hate for?’ This is a context in which the dominant narrative of belonging is one that discursively positions Anglo-Australians as rulers and managers of the national space and relegates young ASB and Muslim Australians, at best, to the margins of belonging.

As Tricia Rose (1991, p. 277) argues, ‘Ideological power and resistance is exercised through signs and language’. When viewed in this frame the ‘AussieDiss’ rap can be seen as discursive resistance to those who lay down a prior claim to being authentically ‘Australian’ alongside claims to ‘governmental belonging’. As the lyrics say, ‘Don’t call it your own. God put us here, so this is my home! … ‘This aint your country, It’s mine too. Deal with it, you Faggots’.

The young rappers also position themselves as having more ‘governmental belonging’ than ‘white Aussies’, with words such as ‘just stop the racism, then you might just last in this land’. Read in one way, this line in particular, suggests that young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims might actually have the power to exclude (and perhaps even extinguish) ‘white Aussies’ from the nation. This fantasy is not dissimilar (even if it is more fantastical) than the traditional White-Australian fantasy of controlling and managing ‘Others’ in their national space: of ‘containing the increasingly active role of non-White Australia and in the process of governing Australia’ (Hage 2000, p. 19).

Just as some White Australians have threatened to get rid of those who do not abide by their criteria for ‘belonging’, like having or
demonstrating a commitment to ‘Australian values’, these young rappers advance the political claim to be managers of the national space through their rap. This threat is communicated with lines such as ‘Coming out of Bankstown killing Aussie Mutha Furkerz…’ and ‘Just stop the racism and then you fucken’ might just last in this land’.

The lyrics of this rap also suggest, as Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2009, pp. 25-26) has argued, that these young men are ‘capitalising on their Othering’ as a form of cultural agency and empowerment. That is, if we apply Jensen’s interpretative point, this would suggest that the rapper’s lyrics are actually using ‘Aussie’ fears of Arabs and Muslims and the typical claim made by critics of ‘Islamic culture’ that it is a violent culture with little respect for ‘Aussie’ women. That is, these young men are ‘accentuating those dimensions within the ambivalent gaze of the majority which can be ascribed value’ (Jensen 2009, p. 20). Being perceived as dangerous is one of the few culturally available identities that these young men can advance a sense of their self with, and which can then be used to confer a certain amount of power and cultural capital.

This way of ‘fighting back’ and ‘capitalising’ on the status of ‘Other’ is also reflected in other videos that have been posted on YouTube and that ostensibly celebrate ‘gang culture’. Indeed, I have found some videos featuring ‘gang names’ such as ‘Newport Lebo crew’ and created by YouTube users who go by pseudonyms such as ‘Aussiekillaonstandby’. This notion of YouTube videos being used to project identity (including gang-affiliated identities) to affirm social presence, as way of fighting back and as a means to overcome marginalisation, is explored next.

It seems that the producers of these videos want to both tease and play on White Australian anxieties. They seem well informed about the historical legacy of ‘White Australian fears, and capitalise on these fears by playing up contemporary concerns that certain minority groups like the Lebanese have become too prominent and that ‘White’ Australians are in danger of losing their capacity to secure their borders from external threats like terrorism, Islamism or
drug imports (Hage 2003). These videos play on ‘White’ fears while making claims about being respected or being feared (Jensen 2009). Images such as the ones shown below and in the next page indicate that YouTube is being used by people who may feel they have been pushed to the margins, to re-imagine themselves at the centre of belonging and as having some kind of sovereignty in the national space.

(Puls3 2006)

Above: mock newspaper article features the headline, ‘Australia is now owned by ArAbs!’

(ibi2nv 2007)
The YouTube video screen prints, shown above and in the previous page, make their own semiotic point. In the video, produced by ibi2nv (2007), there is a picture of the Australian flag re-styled with images of the Lebanese cedar tree. There is also a picture (presumably) of the flag’s artist that has been incorporated into the flag, to project the fantasy of Lebanese-Australians (which include the identity of the artist himself) as central to the nation’s cultural identity. In another video (pictured above), the Australian map has been overlaid with the Lebanese flag and the words ‘Under New Management’ emblazoned across it. The images in the previous page and on this page depict a claim to governmental belonging, which is about the belief that one has certain legitimate claims over the management of the national space. This includes a right to control and shape the national character such that it feels like one’s ‘home’ (Hage 2000).

In short, through their lyrics and their images these young men have made quite bold claims as they project themselves via the medium of YouTube to both belong and be taken seriously. Yet this interpretation hardly begins to exhaust the interpretative possibilities.
Protest masculinity and male identity insecurity

Apart from the overtly public and political dimensions of the signs and significations of these videos, many of these videos also work to make a different point about identity in which quite basic questions of gendered identity are at stake. One of these dimensions involves what has been called ‘protest masculinity’. According to Raewyn Connell (1995, p. 114):

Protest masculinity is a marginalised masculinity, which picks up on themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in the context of poverty.

Connell’s notion of protest masculinity draws on what Alfred Adler (1927) called the ‘masculine protest’, which is a form of exaggerated masculinity associated with anxiety over childhood powerlessness in which the dynamic at work is a form of overcompensation. Connell distinguished her concept of ‘protest masculinity’ from Adler’s more psychologistic concept of ‘masculine protest’. The difference for Connell is that the masculine protest is a ‘collective practice and not something inside the person’ (Connell 1995, p. 111). According to Connell, some marginalised young men respond to their powerlessness, defined for example in terms of their class and economic position, by claiming a gendered position of power via exaggerated displays of stereotypical ‘masculine’ behaviour such as ‘gay bashing’, binge drinking, or participation in ‘street machine’ culture (Connell 1995). Through interaction in a social milieu, with tensions created by poverty and an ambience of violence, young marginalised ‘men put together a tense, freaky façade’, making a claim to power where there are no real resources to power’ (Connell 1995, p. 111).

Greg Noble, Scott Poynting and Paul Tabar (2003) have reworked Connell’s theory to develop the concept of ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’. They argue that young people, who are positioned as marginal ‘others’ (i.e. because of their cultural, religious and status position in relation to the ‘mainstream’) fulfil desires and achieve
needs such as respect, visibility and a sense of power, by engaging in displays of exaggerated masculinity. Noble (2007) explains how young marginalised men meet their desires and needs:

The strategy for achieving respect through intimidation entails performances of exaggerated masculinity that demand attention, especially through ‘tests of identity’ in which they are recognised by significant others - peers, police, shopkeepers - as a threat.

However, as Polk (1995, pp. 183-185) argues, ‘contests of honour or reputation’ can have dramatic consequences that make them central to male criminal behaviour. Like other forms of youth sub-cultural activity, they involve strategies of visibility that seem to challenge social hierarchies of respect and offer alternative codes that entail their own hierarchy of respect (McDonald 1999, pp. 145, 151).

The image from the YouTube videos featured in this chapter can be read as signs of an ‘ethnicised masculine protest’. The young men attempt to achieve human needs and desires, such as sense of power, respect, visibility and belonging, by performing an exaggerated masculinity, including holding weapons and posing menacingly for the camera. As Noble (2007) says, it is through such expressive performances that the young men are able to achieve a sense of social power via respect gained through fear. Another notable way in which the young men featured in the YouTube video perform ‘ethnicised masculine protest’ is by showing off their bodies in ways that seem to embody their potency, even their sexual value.

(Call911ifucme 2008)
The young men in these videos seem to be preoccupied with their bodies, especially their musculature, and this can be seen as tied to their identity: how they see themselves and how they want to be seen by others. In short, their sense of identity is at stake.

Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 75) has argued that a feature in all cultures, to varying limits, is the value placed on the individual’s ability to build/rebuild a coherent and rewarding sense of identity. He argues that the relatively modern obsession with mastery over the body, through practices such as dieting and exercise, is an extension of a ‘reflexive-self’ project. Giddens (1991, pp. 77-78) says:

...we are not who we are, but what we make of ourselves ... the reflexivity of the self extends to the body, where the body is something to be worked on ... ‘Experiencing the body is a way of cohering the self as an integrated whole, whereby the individual says ‘this is where I live’.

The rise of various bodily regimes or practices like dieting, buying clothes, body building, aerobic exercise or repeated use of cosmetic surgery suggest the value of Gidden’s observation. Women diagnosed as having anorexia nervosa, can be treated like body builders, as being obsessed with achieving mastery over their body by way of a process of strict and persistent disciplining of their body. Gordon Tait (1993), has attempted to shift the focus away from individual pathology when making sense of young anorectic women’s fasting practices. He argues that the young women who are restricting what they eat, can be understood as exercising their personal agency and self-governance, in the project of ‘shaping themselves both ethically and physically’, in certain ways and for certain ends’ (Tait 1993, p. 16). Exercising self-control, personal agency and self-governance are most often viewed as not only acceptable but highly valued and admirable qualities. In the case of anorexia nervosa (because it is pathologised) these self-governing practices are instead seen as ‘deviant’ rather than ‘normal’.

Body-building, like anorexia, illustrates how the body is seen as a reflexive project, ‘operating around an axis of self-identity and bodily appearance’ in which being seen as masculine, in control and tough,
plays a preponderant role (Giddens 1991, p. 105). Giddens (1991, pp. 106-107) explains that anorexia can be seen as a form of protest where the individual, rather than simply despair at not naturally having the ideal body, by adopting an ascetic body regime that, although extreme (such as engaging in long hours of exercise with little food), can bring on a sense of achievement and empowerment. In a similar vein, Wiegers (1998, pp. 147-148) argues that body-building:

...has become a popular means by which people, particularly men, can assert their self-identities... body-builders are able to make powerful public and personal statements about who they are.

Social changes which strip individuals of real power may lead to the denial of powerlessness in which flamboyant displays of cultural symbols such as muscularity offer some men compensatory means by which they can construct and validate a particular masculine identity.

We can say, drawing on Wiegers (1998), Tait (1993) and Giddens (1991), that the young men pictured in the YouTube videos I have been analysing are showing off their muscles in order to state their mastery over their bodies. In doing so, they and are making a statement about who they are – that they are not to be trifled with. Considered semiotically the message is that they are ‘hard’ enough to withstand the injuries of a racist society. The sexual connotations for men of being hard are possibly also being referred to. By working on themselves to develop their physique they can project the idealised body form as ‘hard’ men and by extension they are able to imagine themselves as commanding respect and as achieving a heightened sense of power. This reflects Wiegers’ (1998, pp. 159-160) thesis that body-building enables men ‘to construct a superior identity ... premised upon ideals of hyper masculinity including power, authority and domination’. This imagining can be sourced to certain cultural views of masculinity that ties the mesomorphic form, and the ideas of sexual virulence, to notions of men being ‘powerful, strong, competent and in control of their environment’ (Wiegers 1998, p. 2). In the self-reflexive project of creating a more muscular build, these young men portrayed in the videos are also building a self-identity and projecting this self-identity.
Like those body-builders interviewed in studies of masculinity, the young men pictured in these videos are able to feel more self-assured in commanding attention and respect by showing off their mastery over their bodies (Wiegers 1998, pp. 153-155). In some ways the ‘desire for muscles reveals men engaged in a passionate battle with their own sense of vulnerability’ (Wiegers 1998, p. 7). As Pleck (1982, p. 106) says, body-building is ‘perhaps the archetypal expression of male identity insecurity’.

From a sociological perspective, it can be argued the body is a text on which culture and the struggles for social power are inscribed. The body, as Kevin McDonald (1999, p. 158) has argued is ‘a symbol and instrument of communication’. With this perspective in mind we can read the muscular male body ‘texts’ displayed on the YouTube videos as communicating certain ideas of masculinity (Wiegers 1998).

Another cultural stereotype these young men have embraced in the song ‘Aussie Diss’ (which I discussed earlier) is the stereotype of young Muslim and Arabic men as sexually potent or dangerous. This motif draws on the long-standing European fetishism and sexualisation of the ‘dark stranger’ imbued with big genitals or unlimited sexual potency, combining fear and fascination (Aly & Walker 2007; Jensen 2009, p. 211; Redmond 2007, p. 345). Drawing on this theme, the rappers attack Australian White masculine pride by suggesting in their lyrics that Aussies are sexually perverse (e.g. by calling them ‘Aussie Mutha Fuckerz’ and ‘faggots’). They also attack ‘Aussie’ masculine pride by attacking the honour of ‘their’ women. To add insult to injury they add that, as Lebanese and Muslim men, they are more sexually desirable than ‘Aussie’ men (even in the eyes of ‘their’ white women). These points are illustrated in the following lines from the rap:

Don’t start on your women. They all know they want us. Maybe if you circumcised your dick and lost your beer guts, you might just get some.
Other images illustrate how protest masculinity can literally be inscribed on the body. Take, for example, the following image from a YouTube video created by Aussiekillaonstandby (2008a). The words ‘Cop Killer Just 4 U’, coupled with pictures of a machete and a gun inscribed on the young man’s back, carry a clear message of antagonism towards the police. This anti-police sentiment is not uncommon among young men, especially those who experience (often unjustified) persistent targeting by police (White 1996).

(Aussiekillaonstandby 2008a)

A young ASB man shows off his ‘battle scars’ for the Today Tonight (Noonan 2010) video documentary about the ‘Middle-Eastern youth gangs’ of Melbourne. The scars, which this young man acquired through physical altercations with others, symbolically represents’ his toughness – suggesting that he has suffered and survived pain. The scars communicate his fearless masculine identity and his status as fearsome.
Dutton (1995) and Inckle (2007) claim that body-marking (of the kind depicted in the images above) is gendered, and carries symbolic messages that can function to denote membership of a particular group or status within that group. For men, tattoos and body-scarring can be public assertions of masculinity (Inckle 2007, p. 177). We can also see in these videos quite overt forms of political resistance and it is to this aspect that I turn next.

**YouTube as a medium for protest**

The images in this page and the next, extracted from YouTube videos, can be viewed as a form of resistance to racist policing, reflecting anger at racial profiling (see image 2 and 3), but in contradictory terms there is also a sense of pride and achievement in creating fear and in developing a larger profile of themselves in the community (see images 1 and 4). Pride in being seen as criminally notorious is illustrated by the video clip image which features a newspaper article about the gangs (see image 1). One of the videos even displays the creation of a newspaper article headlined with the group’s ‘gang’ name (see image 4).
Image 2 - above: (RoxyBloodz 2007)

Image 3 - above: (lebosouljah 2007)

Image 4 – above: (Fisher86 2008)
The question is, how can we make sense of these seemingly contradictory representations of identity? The answer can be drawn from Anna Yeatman’s (1990) thesis that our identities are never coherent because identity itself is both a performative matter and the consequence of what she called ‘interdiscursivity’. The point Yeatman is making is that identity is never a singular matter grounded in only one dimension, like ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender, religion or the like. As Yeatman (1990, p. 164) says:

... each subject is positioned across several discourses, and this positioning provides multiple points of identification and discursive differences which ensure that the tendencies for a discourse to become a genuinely as distinct from an illusorily closed system are never realised. The subject’s interdiscursive position ensures that when he or she speaks within a particular discourse contradictions and incompatibilities are introduced which reflect the position, and which change the discourse.

Applying Yeatman’s argument to the interpretation of YouTube images shown in the previous two pages, we can say that the creators of these video clips are positioned across at least two discourses. One discourse reflects anger at police targeting of young people of a certain appearance. This discourse signifies resentment directed at instances of state-sponsored racism. The other discourse they inhabit is one that reflects the practices of protest masculinity. Within this discourse the young men can position themselves as dangerous and as a threat to social order by capitalising on representations of young people of their background as intimidating and menacing ‘Others’.

The anti-police messages and the symbols of mixed pride and anger in being represented or treated as ‘criminal’ are amongst some of the most common themes at work in YouTube videos created by young Lebanese, Muslim and ASB young men. These repeated themes can be interpreted in light of the fact that these young people use YouTube for the same reasons as other young people.

One of the motivations they and other young people have for using this site is to maintain and build social networks by sharing their videos with friends, including those they meet in cyberspace as well
as in their regular face-to-face encounters. Like other social networking media, the YouTube site can be used by these young people to comment on each other’s videos. They can also include in the videos, materials intended to appeal to their shared affinities (Lange 2008). Apart from connecting on the basis of sharing a certain anti-police sentiment and pride/anger in being identified as ‘criminal’, the other more obvious of these shared affinities is a sense of ethnic pride. Australian-Lebanese users appeal to the ethnic pride of their social networks (which include other ASB users) by including, for instance, Iraqi, Assyrian-Chaldean and Lebanese cultural symbols in their videos. Some examples of these are provided next from a video created by Aussiekillaonstandby (2008a).

The image: Aussiekillaonstandby has copied a Herald Sun news article about the YouTube gang problem into his own YouTube video. The newspaper article has used images from YouTube videos such as the Lebanese and Iraqi flags, knifes, and the text from the videos such as ‘Fukk the South Boys’.
The creators of these videos appeal to ethnic pride in their footage because it is a point of connection within their social networks. Let me take the example of the YouTube video entitled *B.H.S FT A.S.A.D AND C.A.K*. It can be inferred from the images used in the video that the creator of the video (who goes by the name ‘Aussiekillaonstandby’) is a young Australian of Lebanese-Christian background who lives in the suburb of Broadmeadows. I have made this inference from observing the range of images included in his video, such as Christian symbols (e.g. images of the cross, pictures of Jesus and rosary beads) Lebanese cultural symbols (e.g. images of the cedar tree and the Lebanese flag) as well as images that refer
to an identification with the suburb of Broadmeadows (e.g. with pictures of the Broadmeadows shopping centre and the Broadmeadows train station). Whilst ‘Aussiekillaonstandby’ identifies as a Lebanese-Christian who lives in Broadmeadows, he wants to both appeal to and be inclusive of a far wider audience who fit into the cultural category of ‘wogs’ and who reside in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. As these images indicate, those included under the banner of wogs are, for example, young men of Iraqi, Assyrian-Chaldean and Greek ancestry. It does not include (White) Aussies or those ‘wogs’ who live in, say, the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

Other materials that are included in the young men’s YouTube videos, to promote a sense of connection, are images of Tupac – a Black American rapper who was murdered in a gang-style drive-by killing in 1996 and whose music everyone in their network connects with. Points of connection (with those who are regarded as part of the ‘in-group’) are also made by inserting in the video images of ‘street machines’, and symbols such as the Playboy bunny, which is overlayed with the Lebanese flag in order to communicate the message that young Lebanese men are ‘real’ men (i.e. not ‘faggots’) and sexually desirable.

Street machines are more than just cars. As Katz explains, ‘All cars are literally machines for transportation over streets, “street machines” are especially designed for the challenges of drag racing and are figuratively “bad” ’ (Katz 1988).
The images in this page and in the next are from the YouTube video created by Aussiekillaonstandby (2008a). The picture above features legendary rapper Tupac. Also featured in this picture are the ‘gang names’: Broady Boys, YBS and CAK, along with pictures of the ‘gang’ members.

The above image, of the Playboy Bunny symbol overlaid with the Lebanese flag, has been featured in many YouTube videos, communicating a sexualised ethnic identity.
As Linda Forrester (1999, p. 27) has proposed, ‘Street machines are cars that have been reconstructed to represent a person’s character and they change the street from bitumen to theatre’.

In this theatre, young men stage themselves as reflections of their car’s power and style. What they are doing by ‘showing off’ their street machines to others is ‘performing identity’.

The car pictured here, draped with the Lebanese flag and with the number plate ‘RACIST’ can be read as a symbol of ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’ (Noble, Poynting & Tabar 2003). It communicates the owner’s pride in his Lebanese cultural identity and that he is not ‘tolerant’ of certain (most likely White Australian) ‘Others’.

Unconstructive vs. constructive use of YouTube?

As I highlighted earlier in this chapter, there are some who are worried about young Muslim Australians’ use of Internet sites like YouTube. Acknowledging that young people today are ‘the digital generation’ (Buckingham 2006; Livingstone 2003, p. 148) and that
they represent the future, they are, however, also ‘seen as vulnerable, at risk from new information and communication technologies (ICT)’ (Livingstone 2003, p. 148). Some journalists, politicians, service providers and the police, for instance, are concerned that some of these young people are using the Internet as a vehicle for propagating anti-white sentiments and for celebrating deviant lifestyles or violence. My analysis and discussion so far in this chapter has been designed to grasp the more complex intentionalities at play as well as to go beyond pathologising these young people. In particular, I have tried to show how these videos work as creative platforms enabling young people to fulfil needs for respect, enjoy a sense of power or to express and explore a sense of belonging.

I do, however, recognise that so far I have focused on videos that might be considered by some people as ‘unconstructive’. It might of course be objected that the very idea of constructive/unconstructive is an unhelpful binary. The creators of these videos, for example, might not see what they have done as ‘unconstructive’. They may even ask the more pertinent question: who gets to decide what is constructive? Granting this, it is still possible that there are other YouTube videos created by Australian Muslim and Lebanese young people that would be more widely recognised as socially acceptable – as providing an instance of constructive engagement. I turn now to look at these ‘constructive’ YouTube videos.

**Constructive engagement through YouTube**

One instance of constructive engagement might, for example, include videos conceived of as part of an anti-racist campaign. Such videos, created in the spirit of fighting racism, include those posted by Salam Café, a Muslim-produced television show that was available to view on public access television on channel 31 between 2005 and 2007.
and then on SBS for a brief period in 2008. Some segments from the show are also available to view on YouTube.

Peta Stephenson (2008, p. 2) has written about Salam Café, arguing that the program uses humour to ‘humanise Islam’, to dismantle many of the myths and clichés that are currently circulating about Muslims and Islam, while giving an insight into the lives of young Muslim Australians. She argues that Muslim youth-initiated projects, such as the Muslim hip-hop group ‘the Brothahood’, stand-up comedy performers ‘Fear of a Brown Planet’, and ‘Salam Café’, are ‘creative and positive community-building strategies … that they play a valuable role in breaking down the “us and them” rhetoric’ (Stephenson 2008, p. 2). ‘Salam Café’ actors and presenters, and ‘Fear of a Brown Planet’ comedians, use mainly satire, sarcasm and irony to break down stereotypes. As Stephenson (2008, p. 6) points out, ‘irony breaks down binarisms because it attacks every literalist point of view’ (Stephenson 2008, p. 6). So by ‘taking extreme points to the extreme’ (whether they come form hardline Muslim clerics or right-wing Anglo nationalists) stereotypes are undermined (Stephenson 2008, p. 6). This is done not by attacking or opposing them, but by adopting and inhabiting stereotypes (Stephenson 2008, p. 6). Phong Kuoch (2005, p. 38), discussing the strategy of sarcasm and irony, writes:

Sarcasm, which traditionally has been viewed as oppressive due to its sneeringly and sharply cutting qualities, can ironically function progressively here. Often satirists utilise sarcasm not for silencing and suppressing, but rather for emphasizing and highlighting well-hidden injustices. The rawness and bluntness of sarcasm are effective for stirring up controversies, subsequently opening up doors for discussion and debate.

Salam Café’s mocumentary about ‘Uncle Sam’ (a fictitious Imam) campaigning for the position of mayor of Camden illustrates how satire can be used to ‘emphasise and highlight hidden injustices’ (Kuoch 2005, p. 38) by ‘taking extremes to the extreme’ and by ‘adopting and inhabiting’ stereotypes (Stephenson 2008).

The Salam Café episode that features Uncle Sam’s campaign to become the mayor of Camden has had over 62,428 YouTube views.
between 28 May 2008 to 28 May 2010 (salamcafe 2008). The documentary is a spin-off from the furor that began in 2008 following publicity about a proposal to build an Islamic school in Camden. As the ABC Lateline program on the issue revealed, many residents in Camden were fearful that their town was being ‘Islamasised’ (Iggulden 2008). The next page has some quotes from the Lateline program transcript, which highlights some of the resident’s concerns and anger (Iggulden 2008).

CAMDEN RESIDENT 2, CAMDEN RESIDENTS’ GROUP: We just don’t want…Muslim people in Camden, we don't want them not only here, we don't want them in Australia.

CAMDEN RESIDENT 4, CAMDEN RESIDENTS’ GROUP: My kids can't read Islamic, how are they going to go to that school? It's all crap, next thing there will be a mosque, then there will be the little town that comes with it. It's not appropriate for the area at all.

Stills from the documentary by Salam Cafe, as shown below, clearly poke fun at some Camden resident’s (disproportionate) fear that the proposal to build an Islamic school in Camden is a sign of Muslims trying to make the town ‘Islamic’ (salamcafe 2008). The ‘funny’ side of Islamaphobia is given useful satiric treatment.

However, it should be acknowledged that while comedy can be used as an anti-racism tool as the Salam Cafe example suggests, it can also be used by racists to mobilise hate. Sometimes the line between anti-racism and just plain racism can blur. Some would say Salam Café and the Fear of a Brown Planet, on occasion, smudge the line between providing a critique of Whiteness and that of just criticizing
white people. The difference is that the former (a critique of Whiteness) is ‘based on a political critique, not a moral critique, of White people’ (Hage 2003, p. 118). Take for example the Salam Café episode about a visit to the Melbourne suburb of Frankston (lugzlebo 2006). Characters from Salam Café such as the show’s presenter Nazeem Hussein and Uncle Sam interview ‘ordinary’ Frankston residents to gauge their understanding and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. (See Appendix H for some transcript from that episode.) It could be argued that this particular episode is antiracist in that it exposes white racism as well as cultural and religious ignorance – which are too often assumed to be no longer a problem in Australia. On the other hand, representing white Australians (especially those who live in Frankston) as ‘redneck’, ignorant and racist, does not necessarily serve an anti-racist agenda. Therefore, it could be argued that, although it does provide a political critique of Whiteness, this particular episode swings more towards a moral criticism about white people, and this particular representation of ‘Aussies’ serves to demonise ‘them’ and further cement a dichotomy between ‘us and them’.

There are of course plenty of other young Australian Arab and Muslim comedians who are sharing their experiences of Othering and challenging the assumptions made about them via YouTube. I have only discussed two of the most popular Australian Muslim comedy acts – Fear of a Brown Planet and Salam Café – whose work is being widely circulated on the YouTube website. See Appendix D for another example of comedy used for ‘constructive’ engagement. In this appendix I discuss Maysa Abouzaid’s comedy. Although her comedy is not being circulated on YouTube, I thought it important to examine her comedy style, because, although her comedy tact is not as controversial as Fear of a Brown Planet and

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21 For instance, Aamer Rahman (one of the comedians in Fear of a Brown Planet) developed a skit about conducting a workshop for white people has had over 9415 views between 18 January 2010 and 4 October 2010 (foabrownplanet 2010). The Salam Café episode featuring Uncle Sam’s bid to become the mayor of Camden has had over 69, 233 views between 28 May 2008 and 4 October 2010.
Salam Café, she nevertheless manages to use humour as a tool to share and explore her experiences of Othering, as well as a vehicle to encourage her audience to think more critically about the assumptions they make about Others.

It is not only Australian Arab and Muslim comedy that is challenging and exploring stereotypes. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, hip-hop is another creative anti-racism tool that is being embraced by these young people in their online and offline realities. Earlier in the chapter, I discussed the rap song circulated on YouTube entitled ‘AussieDiss’. I argued that the AussieDiss rap song could be interpreted as a medium used by young marginalised men to meet their needs and desires, by capitalizing on Othering. That is to say, the young men, through their rap lyrics, were imbuing value onto their position as Others (i.e. by fashioning themselves as sexually powerful and willing to assert their right to national belonging through violence). This capitalisation of Othering was used as a means by which to resist and subvert White racism, assert governmental belonging, and gain respect and power, via intimidation and fear. I also mentioned that this kind of rap song would not be considered widely as socially acceptable. There are, however, other rap songs being produced by young ASB Australian Muslims, and being circulated on sites such as YouTube, that are more widely accepted as a constructive way to deal with experiences of racism and exclusion.

Australian-Muslim hip-hop group ‘The Brothahood’ is one that would fit the ‘constructive engagement’ category. The Brothahood MySpace website (TheBrothahood 2006) makes a clear and articulate declaration about its political and cultural objectives:

The Brothahood are five young Australian conscious rappers who use hip-hop as a tool to smash down stereotypes and misconceptions of ‘Muslims in the West’. They created a whole new theme to the Australian hip hop scene whilst maintaining hip hop’s core essence: taught and intelligent rhymes and production skills that are sharp and always on point.

Disillusioned with modern hip-hop’s celebration of gun play and misogyny, the Brothahood tracks are reflections on real life and on
the struggles of real people who are deemed ‘outsiders’ by their society.

The results are socially conscious tracks such as The Silent Truth – which topped the JJJ Unearthed Hip Hop Chart in 2007 – in which Brothahood members Jehad Dabab, Moustafa Dabab, Ahmed Ahmed, Hesham Habibullah and Timur Bakan describe everyday life in Australia post-September 11 and Cronulla: From beer I refrain / Prayers I maintain/ Can’t get on a plane without copping all the blame/ People can’t ya see that we are all the same? / Children of Adam but playing the blame game.

The Brothahood are resisting racism not by embracing stereotypes or capitalising on stereotypes like the AussieDiss rappers. Instead of reifying the ‘us and them’ binary, they try to break it down with lyrical rap lines such as: ‘People can’t ya see that we are all the same? Children of Adam but playing the blame game’ (TheBrothahood 2006). As articulated on the group’s MySpace website (TheBrothahood 2006) and in the SBS documentary about them (lugzlebo 2008), The Brothahood use hip-hop as a tool to break down stereotypes and misconceptions of ‘Muslims in the West’ (TheBrothahood 2006). As the lyrics from one of their most popular song ‘The Silent Truth’ indicate (see Appendix E) their rap is also a way of fighting racism and sharing their experiences of being treated as outsiders in the country they call home: Australia22 (lugzlebo 2007).

As the lyrics of ‘The Silent Truth’ indicate, The Brothahood members have a strong sense of belonging to Australia, but they express their connection and assert their right to place differently to the way in which the AussieDiss rappers communicate theirs. Needs such as a desire for respect and feelings of belonging are being met by both the rappers of AussieDiss and The Brothahood through the creative process of developing and sharing music but, while AussieDiss embrace Othering, The Brotherhood rejects it.

22 I have included only some of the lyrics from the song in Appendix E. There are a few lines, which I haven’t included in the appendix, that do emphasise (rather than challenge) the “Us and Them” binary. The video clip for the song, and full lyrics to the song can be accessed from the following URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dqmenwbeTY
There has been some persistent concern about the way some young Australian Muslim and ASB people use the online video sharing site YouTube. Yet, to date, no research has been conducted on the question of whether some of these videos might be being developed and uploaded onto YouTube, as a way for these young people to respond to and negotiate their experiences of racism, and to carve out spaces of belonging. My study has made a contribution to filling this research gap.

An analysis of YouTube videos created by these young people reveals that they are using YouTube to meet a range of needs and purposes. In the first few sections of this chapter, I argued that YouTube was being used by some young people to achieve respect,
feel a sense of power and express and explore their feelings of belonging. They were also using it as a way to resist and subvert White racism, to fashion and project identities (including ‘gang’ identities) and to affirm their social presence. It was also apparent that YouTube was being used by some young people to play with power relations, particularly in relation to contested spaces such as governance over the national space, as well as more localised spaces, indicated by their claim to ‘rule’ the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne. I argued that insights into the ways these young people have met various needs and desires, via YouTube, can be gathered by applying analytical concepts such as ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’ as well as the notion of capitalising on or embracing ‘Othering’, which is a concept that has been used to interpret the experiences of Muslim young people in Denmark, but up till now has not been applied to the Australian context. By applying these concepts, I have found that young people’s YouTube videos can be viewed as a sign of their resilience rather than as indications of pathology. They can be interpreted as a creative medium to meet needs and desires, such as the opportunity to be seen, heard and to create a new politics of belonging, which they may have more difficulty achieving in their offline realities.

I acknowledged that such videos, in which young people style themselves as gangs, promote or express hostility to white Australians and to police personnel, and reflect ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’ and ‘a capitalisation of Othering’ are unlikely to be seen widely as socially acceptable. Furthermore, these aren’t the only kinds of videos that deserve attention. There are, for instance, YouTube videos that resist racism, explore and share experiences of racism and belonging but do so in more ‘constructive’ ways, exemplified in YouTube videos of Salam Café, Fear of a Brown Planet and The Brothahood. By examining the differences between these ‘constructive’ videos, and the previously analysed ‘un-constructive’ videos, I found some similarities and some differences. Through this analysis I found that both ‘un-constructive’ and
‘constructive’ videos met needs such as standing up to racism and challenging accusations such as White nationalist’s claims that ASB and Muslim Australians don’t ‘deserve’ to belong in the nation. However, these same ends can be achieved in different ways using different approaches. For instance, the creators of the ‘unconstructive’ videos generally emphasised their Otherness and attempted to gain respect via fear and intimidation and by employing an ‘ethnicised protest masculinity’. The creators of the ‘constructive’ videos generally took a different approach. They instead tended to challenge the construction of ‘them’ as ‘Others’ and attempted to break down the binaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’.

The next chapters explore how youth workers might employ these research findings, as well as several of my other research findings, in their youth work practice.
Chapter Six: Research into Action

Yeah, you get looks and you get greasies and people saying something under their breath. You ignore it. You don’t make it a big deal or nothing. You just keep walking, and keep your head up high.

Nuer, female interviewee

Michael Ungar (2001, 2004, 2005b, 2005d, 2008) is a leading international researcher exploring what enables young people to be resilient when confronting major challenges to their health and wellbeing. Ungar has identified the kinds of resources, both personal and collective, that young people draw on when facing challenges thrown up by experiences like poverty, ill health, family stress, social injustice and cultural marginality. Ungar’s work belongs to a tradition that emphasises the social-ecological character of resilience. This means that Ungar does not treat resilience as an individual or ‘psychological’ quality, but rather emphasises the social relationships and social habitat including the role played by the people and organisations found in any community available to support young people to rise to these challenges. Ungar’s (2004, 2005b, 2008) work has been useful to my research in a number of ways. It has helped to point to the need to reflect on how research can be used to inform the development of practical services and programs that will resource young people.

Putting ‘research into action’ is important because, as Ungar observes, academic research often remains disconnected from the work of service providers and policy makers. Ungar (2008, p. 18) laments that those who do research or develop theory may fail to reflect on how their work might inform practice:

The grunt work of bringing about change is left to lay community members, frontline professionals, policy developers or, worse, politicians. Busy schedules and client demands often prevent these people from delving deep into academic literature of outcome studies and theory-driven discussions of what should work and why.
As ideal as it would be to ensure robust theories inform interventions and policies, more often they remain disconnected.

Mindful of this problem, I explore here how my research findings, in conjunction with the literature on young people and resilience, might be used to assist young Australians who have experienced prejudice and cultural marginalisation. How might my research findings be used to inform the development of programs and projects designed to strengthen young people’s sense of belonging in ways that go beyond their immediate community?

I begin the chapter by reviewing the literature on ‘resilience’ and the ‘strengths-based approach’ to youth work. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections, each of which links to one of my key research findings. In the first of these sections I consider how some young people draw on their faith to give meaning to and deal with what they describe as ‘negative’ interactions with other Australians. I discuss how religious beliefs of young people can be drawn on by youth workers and used as a resource in their practice. In the second section I refer to my finding about how some interviewees used violence to deal with racism. Here I question why they ‘chose violence’ and suggest that youth workers have an important role to play in promoting alternatives to violence.

In the last section I focus on the finding that young people are developing creative ways to deal with racism and describe how they are carving out their own spaces. I suggest how youth workers can support and build on these developments in ways that promote anti-racism and strengthen young people’s connections to the wider Australian community.
From a resilience perspective

There is a large and expanding literature on resilience and young people (Abbott 1998; Delfabbro & Harrvey 2004; Kowalenko et al. 2002). However, as Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998, p. 270) have argued, youth studies and youth work historically have not paid as much attention to young people’s voices as they might have, meaning that the history of youth work:

... is a history of well meaning adults deciding that some children and young people have problems, that they need help and that some kind of organisation and service delivery will address that need. This is really a version of welfare work with a foundation originally in charity work.

Michael Ungar (2004, 2005b, 2008) has also been critical of some of the dominant ways of responding to ‘marginalised’ young people or young people identified as problematic in one way or another. The value of listening to young people and empowering them to build on their capacities is highlighted by academics such as Ungar as one way of helping young people to deal with the problems they come up against, such as experiences of racism and exclusion from the national community. As Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998) and Ungar (2008, p. 138) have argued, too often mainstream approaches to thinking about or responding to ‘youth problems’ has relied on a mixture of medical and deficit models which end up affirming the value of a ‘blaming the victim’ approach (Ungar 2005b, p. 5; 2008, p. 138). While these models remain a dominant feature of much of the recent ‘risk’ paradigm, we have also seen a number of attempts to move away from the pathologising discourses that have been so popular in professional practices such as youth work, social work and allied disciplines.

These alternative initiatives have paid attention to young people’s perspectives, which has resulted in the emergence of alternative explanatory frameworks and practices (Ungar 2005d) including what can be generally described as a ‘strengths-based’ approach or a resilience perspective. If nothing else this approach signals the
evolution of a more humble disposition based on the principle that there is value in listening to insider accounts, and that experts may learn a great deal from young people if they choose to. According to Ungar (2005b, p. 138) the premise of the ‘strength-based’ approach is that young ‘people possess inherent strengths, or assets, that hold the key to their ability to cope with stress and trauma’. Instead of ‘discovering’ deficits, often without even talking with young people, and then prescribing ‘treatments’ or policies, those who work from a strengths-based perspective have a different approach. They help young people to identify what they already do well and what their strengths and supports are, and then help them work out ways of building on those capacities. As Ungar (2005b, p. 138) explains:

Such strengths include not only internal attributes but also supports from the social environment. Thus an important aspect of strengths-based practice is the identification and mobilization of natural supports.

Dennis Sallebey (2000, pp. 127-128) agrees:

The work of the strengths approach is the work of empowerment – helping individuals, families and communities see and utilise their capacities; recognise the options open to them; understand the barriers and scarcities they face; surface their hopes and aspirations; and align them with their inner and outer resources to improve their quality of life.

The strengths based perspective recognises the capacity people have to live positively, to understand and make sense of their environment and to triumph over difficult circumstances (Stewart & McWhirter 2007, p. 489). It recognises that many young people who face ‘risk factors’ such as illness, poverty and abuse, cope with these adversities and in some cases even flourish. It makes sense to pay attention to what enables people facing adversity to cope with the risks they face (Ungar 2005b, 2005d). By paying attention to young people’s stories of resilience (and this includes the stories shared by young people who have been labelled as dangerous, delinquent, deviant and disordered) we can build on the strengths inherent in the young person.
Ungar (2005d) warns that concepts such as resilience can be used by professions such as youth work to inadvertently reproduce social values that are opposed to enabling young people to flourish. For instance, young people who find ways of coping that are not socially acceptable (in a particular historical and cultural location) may be categorised as vulnerable, while those who find ways to cope in socially approved ways are labelled resilient. Ungar (2005d, p. 91) writes that the arbitrary categorising of young people as either resilient or vulnerable:

...overlooks how both populations employ the same generic strategies to cope with difficult life events (i.e. spending time with friends, exercising control over aspects of their lives, seeking meaningful involvement in the community, attaching to others, avoiding threats to their self esteem.

One difference may be that those usually labelled as ‘vulnerable young people’ may be achieving resilience in ways that are not generally approved of even though it involves drawing on the same kinds of social resources as everyone else. For example, young people defined as ‘vulnerable’ may spend time with friends doing things that are not ‘socially approved’, such as bullying others, using drugs or doing graffiti. As Ungar (2005d, p. 91) explains:

> Both labels of ‘resilient’ and ‘vulnerable’ can be thin descriptions that are unhelpful when they cast the helper into the role of agent of social control, applauding only the child’s conformity rather than unique pathways to survival.

Ungar’s point is not that service providers adopt an ‘anything goes’ framework, but that we need to be more attentive to the actual qualities of the social networks available to young people, and to value a wider array of social resources than has been common.

For youth workers, who see their role as empowering and advocating for young people, the challenge offered by the strengths-based and resilience model of youth work is to listen carefully to young people’s accounts of how they have coped with stressors in their life and achieved a degree of personal and social power (Ungar 2004, p. 13).

Rather than looking for the deficits in the young person and focusing on so-called ‘pathologies’ in their lives, the point is to see the young
person’s strengths and the resources they have access to in their community, and to ask how they can be harnessed to help them live a good life. This requires youth workers to think critically about conventional categories (like ‘anti-social conduct’ or ‘delinquent behaviour’) and to see that in certain contexts, and from the perspective of the young person, that recourse to socially frowned on behaviour might actually be a reflection of the young person’s strength rather than a sign of their pathology. This requires the practitioner to take a ‘post-modern’ perspective, to accept that his or her way of seeing the world is just one truth and those who are being helped are likely to explain their world in other ways (Ungar 2004, p. 30). For instance, some young men I interviewed spoke of ‘bashing’ those they described as being racists. When asked why they bashed the racists, one interviewee, John, explained: ‘He pissed me off so then I hit him’. Other interviewees who spoke about why they bashed or ‘told off’ racists had the following to say:

Egor: I think we got our respect back by telling them off and stuff.
Axle: By bashing the fuck out of them.
Kavindi: Hey Egor, so you were saying you got your respect by telling them off? So if you tell them off you get more respect?
Egor: Oh yeah.
Kavindi: Yeah?
Axle: He means like full-on scaring them and shit and they never want to open up their mouth again.
Kavindi: What do you mean, scare them? Like, how would you scare them?
Muly: Threaten them.
Egor: Na like whatever. Whatever it takes.

As these narratives reveal, some young men responded violently to people they saw as racist for reasons that may be described in terms of moral emotions, which include anger, honour and dignity. The explanation they gave for their actions was that they ‘wanted to get more respect’ and to discourage those who were harassing and taunting them from doing so. So, how can youth workers respond to such stories?

While those working with young people cannot and ought not condone dangerous and violent acts (Ungar 2004, p. 203), there is
nonetheless an obligation on practitioners to respond to young people in a ways that are respectful. This includes listening to them, and hearing from them why they do what they do, and how they see the world. This can mean joining with them in finding alternative ways of achieving their needs, but in ways that do not bring harm to themselves or others (Liebenberg & Ungar 2008, p. 14). In taking this perspective, practitioners can talk with young people about the consequences of their actions. In this way they can work with young people to develop alternatives to violence as a way of dealing with racism. This can involve identifying the range of options, the consequences, the costs and the benefits. I now turn to a discussion about how this might be achieved, by drawing on my research and specifically material that came from the focus group discussions I had with young men.

In group discussions, some of my interviewees identified what they saw as the benefits of fighting back. They said that violent responses worked to discourage further attacks and abusive comments. It also made them feel strong because they ‘stood up’ for themselves and their culture and this helped restore a sense of self-respect. Not everyone agreed. Some of the young men I spoke with did not think fighting was a valid response to racist attacks. One reason for this, they argued, was because it could easily escalate into more violence. Some of the young men who expressed this concern said there was a real risk of retribution. They said that those who were bashed might return later with a group of their mates. They would seek revenge on their friends and family. They also warned that stories of such violence would spread and will be used to stereotype young people and Muslim and Lebanese communities more generally. This they said would lead to even more discrimination.

How might the research literature on resilience, and insights offered by these glimpses into the life-world of my interviewees, assist practitioners who work with young people? To begin, I suggest they provide a basis for appreciating what can be gained by listening to young people and by reflecting on our own assumptions. Specifically,
I refer to importance of thinking critically about the taken-for-granted assumptions and responses many youth experts have to the ways young people manage difficult situations, which typically involves immediate condemnation and censuring followed by instructions on how to respond ‘properly’. As Ungar has argued, there is value in having patience and in not being so eager to judge and label and condemn actions like stealing and fighting. By listening carefully to the way young people are fulfilling (or trying to meet) their needs with the resources they have at hand, youth workers can better tap into young people’s capacities and, if needed, identify alternative ways to meet their needs.

Establishing a respectful relationship and dialogue with the young people is critical. This provides a basis for identifying their capacities, and is an important first step because often the strengths that young people have are not recognised as such by them (or others). Naming their capacities and discussing how they can draw on them is one insight that comes from my research and the relevant literature. Further discussions about the nature of their context, which includes naming and reflecting on the actions of others and the suitability of their own ways of seeing and feelings and conduct, is what I would suggest as the next step. This includes working together to develop good judgment and to establish whether there are alternatives ways of responding.

Some of the participants in this research project argued that they would never fight or at least tried not to resort to violence because such a response was counter to the teachings of Islam. In the next section of this chapter, I turn to my research finding that some young people drew quite heavily on their religious beliefs to help make sense of racism.
Faith as a resource

Research has documented that spirituality and religiosity is one of the many cultural-psychological resources that people can draw on when facing adversity and the stress of prejudice and societal marginalisation (Bryant-Davis 2005; Koeing 2006; Mattis 2002; Mellar 2004b; Shorter-Gooden 2004). As Thema Bryant Davis (2005, p. 153) has argued, religion can be a ‘positive source of coping, inspiration and hope’. Similarly, my research has found that some of the young people I spoke with drew on their faith to help them deal with experiences of racism in ‘constructive’ ways.

A number of the young people I spoke with were keen to point out that one of the key tenets of Islam is the value of peace. They said that their actions as Muslims ought to reflect the ethics of non-violence and cooperation central to Islam. Thus, when confronted with racism some interviewees tried to think of how to respond by thinking about how the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would act in the same situation and how their actions would be judged by God. Some of the young people referred to stories about the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a guide to how they could deal with racism. One of the stories they referred to is a story about the Prophet (PBUH) and his Jewish neighbour. John, one of my young male interviewees told me the story:

…about the Prophet (PBUH) and this Jewish neighbour. Everyday this neighbour would throw rubbish on his doorstep. Then the rubbish stopped appearing and the Prophet (PBUH) found out that it was because his neighbour was ill. He immediately went to visit his neighbour to make the neighbour feel better. This story tells us that even if someone is mean to you that you should show kindness to them.

Stories about the Prophet (PBUH), and Islamic teachings from sources such as the Koran, were used by some interviewees as a guide for how they should live their life. This research finding

23 PBUH is an abbreviation of “Peace Be Upon Him” and is a common blessing given to him by Muslims (Bedar & Matrah 2005, p. 8). I will be using the initials (PBUH) following the mention of the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) name in this thesis, out of respect.
parallels research by Jacqueline Mattis (2002, p. 316) who found that forty-three per cent of the African-American women involved in her study indicated that they:

> Live within a set of religious and/or spiritual informed principles (e.g. being non-judgemental, forgiving, and compassionate) that guide their behaviours. These principles helped women to navigate between expedient choices and spiritually responsible or appropriate choices...

Interviewees like Nuer reported that they found their religious faith particularly helpful. Like many of my interviewees, Nuer said that Islam informed the way she related to and interacted with others and approached life’s problems. Nuer believed that her understanding of Islamic teachings was central to her ability to develop intercultural and interfaith understanding and to develop caring relationships with people different to her. She explained how Islam played a key role in her life:

> Islam has made me the person I am now … Islam doesn’t allow you to judge people. It teaches you: don’t judge a person because of his family background, because they could turn out to be a totally different person. You don’t judge them because of the culture… Islam teaches all that and I think the way I am now is because of the religion and how I am practising [my faith] now…

> I’m not going to not help you because you’re not a Muslim. That’s not how it works with me. Islam itself doesn’t work like that as well. We have to help our neighbours. We have to help our family and friends. You have to show the beauty of Islam. Be a respectable person. In your heart, you know? Be a good friend at the same time.

Nuer referred explicitly to her faith when she talked about how she wanted to lead her life and how to respond in constructive ways to difficult experiences. She said to me:

> … religion tells you that it’s not worth sort of pondering around saying, that’s bad times, you’re not going to achieve anything. You got to sort of translate [negative experiences] into a positive thing and go from there.

In a similar way to the African-American women in Mattis’s (2002) study who drew on their religion, Nuer also explained how her religious beliefs helped her to see racist experiences as an opportunity to achieve personal growth. According to Mattis (2002, p. 314) fifty-seven per cent of the participants in her study said that:
... In times of adversity spirituality functioned by highlighting a crucial set of questions, answers and life lessons ... However stressful events also may reveal lessons that are intended for others. Efforts to discern who the lessons are intended for, what the lessons are, and how to actualise them mark religiosity/spirituality as interpretive enterprises.

Other young people in my research spoke about how Islam taught them the importance of being patient, especially when dealing with other people who were being intolerant of them as Muslims. They believed that they were responsible for teaching others about the ‘beauty of Islam’. As Nuer said, this did not necessarily mean preaching to others but rather required them to lead by example and answer questions when asked, so that those around them had a good impression of Muslims and therefore of Islam. Nuer spoke about some of the dominant images of Muslims:

Women with scarfs. A lot of people think we are oppressed. Isolated. Got no freedom. That's really a big problem at this point. You've got people looking at you from top to bottom. Feeling sorry for you. And it's like "I don't want your pity". ... If you ask us Muslim sisters, “Why do you wear it? Do you choose to wear it?” Then I'm sure you're going to get a beautiful answer ... That's probably one of the main reasons why I'm out there trying to educate people as well. Being a Muslim, playing soccer ... girls with scarfs can play. We are not isolated. We are not oppressed at all. We do have the freedom like you do to achieve our goals. So yeah ... that's the message I want to get across to a lot of people.

A number of the young people I spoke to make a slightly different point. They said that, after the terrorist attacks in the US, and the subsequent intensification of prejudice directed at Muslims, they became more conscious of their own behaviours and the impressions they made. They said that they been sensitised to the problem that non-Muslims might judge their behaviours as representing Islamic teachings and Muslims more generally. An example of this heightened consciousness of being representatives of Islam and the Muslim community is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with Anthony, who explained that some of his friends wanted to ‘bash’ a person who was being racist towards them but he dealt with this situation peacefully by drawing on the teachings of Islam:
That’s why me and my friends didn’t [bash the guy who was being racist] – they wanted to – some of us wanted to – but then I said ‘no’… because that’s not what Islam teaches. And then if we were to do that everyone around us will perceive Muslims like that [as vengeful and violent people] so I said ‘no’…. [Violence is] not what Islam teaches. Violence is a big no. So either take it in the face and, you know, just settle everything down or that’s it, you’re not allowed to use violence.

An even more interesting example of how the Islamic framework reflected a source of resilience occurred when one of the young men instructed a friend of his about the proper Islamic view of violence. This occurred in the course of a discussion between Jack Black, Anthony and me. This extract from that conversation captures the point nicely:

Jack Black: … there was these Pakistani-Muslims and this guy, he came up to them and he goes, “Have you heard the Muslim jokes”? and they go, “no, tell me”. [The guy said:] “What do you call a Lebo that’s drunk”? He goes “hammered” and then they [my Pakistani-Muslim friends] started laughing … Then he goes, “what do you call a Lebo that’s more drunk”? and he goes, “More-hammered, Mohammed”. And then he goes, “you know the new aluminium inventor”? He goes, “Allah-minimum” and then he started laughing [and that’s when we got angry and we bashed him and ended up hospitalising him].

Kavindi: So you and your friends were okay with the first joke but the second and the last joke were really not okay?

Jack Black: Yeah. That’s what triggered them to hit him. Because they couldn’t take anymore. [My friends] they were religious.

Anthony: No, they weren’t religious.

Jack Black: They weren’t religious?

Anthony: No, because Islam doesn’t teach that.

Jack Black: They were religious and they go, “we can’t hear that, we can’t hear that”.

Anthony: But you’re not allowed. In Islam you’re not allowed… you can call the authorities. Let them handle it. But you’re not allowed. That’s totally wrong to do that.

Jack Black: No, no. I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that.

Kavindi: Oh, you didn’t know that [Islam does not allow you to retaliate in those kinds of situations with violence]?

Anthony: Yes, you did. What do you mean? That’s common [knowledge].

Kavindi: So you didn’t know that?

Jack Black: No.

Kavindi: But even if you did know that, would you still do that?

Jack Black: No. No I wouldn’t hit him. No.

Anthony: If those friends… if they like the Prophet… if they love the Prophet and the Prophet saw them do that, the prophet would be disgusted. I don’t think they’re religious because if they were
religious they would not hospitalise the guy. Because if everyone wants to do that, then no-one will be safe. True? Because if everyone wants to react the same way, imagine what the world would be. It wouldn’t be a nice place.

In this discussion Jack Black ended up concluding that if he had known that violence was forbidden in Islam then he would not have condoned his friends punching another person who was making jokes that were not very respectful of Islam. This ‘rethink’ on the part of Jack Black occurred because Anthony provided a way of interpreting Islamic teachings about how to deal with bigotry. Jack Black agreed that violence should not be used to deal with bigotry even or especially when invoking Islam. This conversation illustrated how some young people drew on religious teachings to help them work out how to respond to difficult situations by engaging in processes of ethical reasoning.

For welfare organisations concerned about young people getting into fights, particularly in response to racism or religious discrimination, my research suggests that religion can provide a framework of guidance for young people. It can help them think about and deal with conflict in ways that are more likely to produce positive outcomes for themselves and for others. If young people like Jack Black are motivated to be ‘good Muslims’, and if one consequence of this is that they become ‘good citizens’, then it makes sense for welfare organisations to draw on this intrinsic motivation. Islam is a source of identity and a framework for thinking well, which enables young people to deal with difficult situations and live flourishing, ethically competent lives. Other researchers such as Philip Gilligan and Sheila Furness (2005) and Leola Dyrud Furman, Mari-Anne Zahl and Perry W. Benson (2007) similarly argue that there is value in service providers being respectful of their clients’ beliefs, particularly if religion is central to their lives. Gilligan and Furness (2005, p. 617) write:

Social workers need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs of all service users, including those for whom religious and spiritual beliefs are crucial. ‘Culturally competent’ practice depends, amongst other things, on an understanding and appreciation of the impact of faith and belief.
Secular welfare organisations of course may face some constraints in this dimension of their work. The social workers or youth workers they employ will not find it all that easy to draw on the resources of particular faith communities. Those employed by such organisations will not be disposed, for example, to ‘promote’ particular religious perspectives. What they can do, however, especially if the young person they are working with says that religion plays a significant role in their life, is to work to understand better the valuable role this attachment to a particular faith community plays. Ungar’s (2005b) work for example reminds us that resilient communities engage young people in a variety of ways including religiously; his work also reminds us that nothing can damage the resilient communities more that concerted attempts to devalue or abolish their language, culture or religion.

That said, there is also a need to be mindful that some members of a given faith community may engage in promoting particular interpretations of their religious tradition, texts and teachings in ways that are not necessarily conducive to fostering community harmony or helpful for young people in finding ways to live well. As Zahava Solomon and Avital Laufer (2005, p. 241) point out, rigid and extreme religiosity can have adverse consequences and ought to be discouraged. The promotion of hate and violence by some religious leaders which, in the current climate, has been picked up quickly by sections of the media, does not help community relations or promote an informed understanding of Islam (Fife-Yeomans, Watson & Farr 2006; Harris & Hart 2005; Kearney & Ong 2007; Sheridan 2007). Comments like the following which were reported in the national newspaper The Australian, are what I refer to:

Sydney-born Sheik Feiz Mohamed calls Jews pigs and urges Muslim children to find fulfilment as jihad martyrs (Sheridan 2007).

In this context it is understandable that some service providers are cautious about drawing on the support of religious leaders. Having said that, I argue that it is critical for mainstream service providers to connect with the relevant community groups, including religious
groups, when working with young people for whom faith and spirituality is important.

Equally important is the proviso that (like any other youth project) all such projects need to create the opportunities for young people to play a major role in shaping the project. There is a need to ensure a strong ‘youth voice’, including a strong sense of ownership, control and direction by young people in developing and implementing the project, along with the support and resources that the youth workers and the broader community can provide to the young people. The Australian Youth Research Centre (Taylor et al. 2010) strongly supports the proposition that successful youth projects are characterised by a strong ‘youth voice’. Their report found that if youth projects are to be successful then young people need to feel they have a major degree of ownership (Taylor et al. 2010, p. 10). This does not necessarily mean that young people have to run the whole thing on their own, because in many cases young people don’t have the time or the resources to do so. What it does mean is that young people’s interests, experiences and values are both heard and acted on (Taylor et al. 2010, p. 10).

**Fighting back and viable alternatives**

One of the findings from my research is that some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims deal with their experiences of prejudice by ‘fighting back’ physically against those they believe are hostile to them or to Muslims and Arabs more generally. I have argued (in chapter four) that one way we can understand this reaction is to appreciate the role of moral emotions, such as the pursuit of respect and dignity, the rush to protect friends and family and the integrity of one’s community. I argued that there needs to be recognition from the broader population (including service providers) that these moral
emotions which drive young people to engage in acts of physical violence are equivalent to those moral emotions found at work on the part of organisations like the police, or of nation states when they resort to ‘violence’. There also needs to be recognition that, historically, young people’s engagement in activities not approved of by adults (such as violence) has been understood in ways that pathologise those young people by drawing on labels like ‘delinquent’, ‘anti-social’, ‘dysfunctional’ or ‘at risk’. Such discourses have not always worked generally to the benefit of young people.

An alternative perspective acknowledges that young people may be engaging in forms of violent activity because, given the limited alternatives they have available to them, they see it as the best or only way to deal with problems such as the prejudice or the racism they experience. More controversially we may say that while this activity may be considered harmful to themselves and to others, it may also be a sign of their resilience. In other words, certain kinds of violence may offer certain young people the best way to achieve ‘healthful outcomes’ and fulfil their needs. This includes achieving a sense of personal control and power to author their own identity on their own terms.

According to Ungar many young people are also well able to challenge and reject descriptions of themselves they do not like. Ungar (2004, p. 165) found that many ‘high risk youth’ use violence as a way of ‘managing difficulties’. This was clearly evident in my own research. John, who was one of my interviewees, assaulted another boy at school because he saw it as the only way to stop the taunts and bullying. In responding to racism in this way, John said he was able to gain a sense of personal control, and restore his integrity. John also acknowledged that his action was not something that Islamic teachings supported, and he would have preferred taking a different course of action if he had access to viable alternatives.

This highlights a major challenge for youth workers. As argued by Ungar (2004, p. 203) we cannot
...side with teens and argue that dangerous or self-destructive acts are health-promoting. While the onus is on those intervening to understand the alternative discourses of youth, we need not act to empower these discourses further if we find them personally in conflict with our own values and beliefs. Nor can we, in good consciousness, allow youth to define activities as power-enhancing or healthy that are good for them but harmful to their community. In such cases it is incumbent upon helpers to join youth in a search for other ways of constructing similarly powerful identities, but ones which do not risk harm to themselves or others.

Ungar is proposing that there is value in youth workers listening to what young people say, and in deconstructing ‘the relative power of conventional understanding of what is and what is not acceptable in a particular social context’ (Ungar 2004, p. 204). He says that we may not like what the young people are telling us, but it is imperative that space is given for young people to speak and share with us their stories and accounts of their identity. Doing so allows a space for negotiating alternative identity stories, that are ‘sufficiently resourceful to allow the young person to get from it what he or she hopes to achieve, while possibly decreasing the threat that the young person’s former self posed’ (Ungar 2004, p. 204). The challenge for youth workers then is to engage young people in deliberative processes, which will help young people to identify and express moral emotions like righteous anger, and fulfil needs (such as the need to protect one’s integrity), but in ways that do not harm themselves or others. These deliberative process obliges youth workers to assist young people in constructing alternative self narratives; that allow them to experience the same power and control they find when they act in ways that trouble us (Ungar 2005a, p. 5).

Ungar’s call to help young people explore alternative stories of themselves, draws on ‘narrative therapy’ developed by clinicians such as Michael White and David Epston (1990). Narrative therapy is based on,

... the notion that persons are rich in lived experience, that only a fraction of this experience can be storied and expressed at any one time, and that a great deal of lived experience falls outside the dominant stories about the lives and relationships of persons. Those aspects of lived experience that fall outside of the dominant story provide a rich and fertile source for the generation, or re-generation, of alternative stories (White & Epston 1990, p. 15).
The generation of alternative stories does not necessarily have to be done through formal counselling. It can also be achieved, for example, through a variety of art forms such as film, theatre, music, text, and new media, to name a few. These provide as mediums in which young people can explore different ‘self narratives’ and it also allow others to witness their stories. These mediums can also be used to uncover young people’s hidden resilience and allows the young person to experience a new self that fulfils their needs in a different way to their former self.

What this might look like in practice is illustrated by some of the youth projects coordinated by ‘Big hART’ – a not for profit and non-government organisation. As stated on the Big hART website:

> Big hART partners with artists and communities to run projects that empower communities to change through the arts... Big hART projects tackle a wide range of serious issues... Too often, we encounter these issues framed as narratives of despair with no way out... Big hART is there to help communities change the story. (Big hART 2011).

Peter Wright (2009, p. 10), who has completed an investigation into Big hART’s work, writes:

> Broadly speaking, what we see in Big hART’s work is that the narratives of community and selfhood are not closed or self-sufficient social units but flexible and dynamic social practices. More importantly, they are produced and reproduced through interaction with others. It is this imaginative and creative process that provides opportunities for participants to enter into different communities through dialogue and with reciprocity.

> This processual and performative work draws on the work of Freire (2002) and Boal (1993) where members of the community are encouraged to reflect on their experiences as individuals and to use their ideas to imagine new ways of being and develop new forms of social action. For individuals, this means that creative process of giving form to feeling is an ‘act of knowing’ where participants re-order, reshape and re-evaluate the stories and knowledge they already possess to gain insights into their own situation.

> In short, Big hART uses cultural strategies that encourages participants to reflect on their own experiences by finding connections with others, and potentially (re)construct new identities and revitalise communities.
Notably, projects such as those developed by Big hART draw “external” audiences in to witness and participate in the (re)construction of young people’s identities, and in the imaginative and dialogical process of finding new ways of being. White and Epston (1990, p. 17) argue that bringing an audience in (for example the young person’s parents and peers) to witness identity performance, can aid the process of transformation in several ways.

The endurance of new stories, as well as their elaboration, can also be enhanced by recruiting an “external” audience. There is a dual aspect to this enhancement. Firstly, in the act of witnessing the performance of a new story, the audience contributes to the writing of a new meanings; this has real effects on the audience’s interactions with the story’s subject. Secondly, when the subject of the story “reads” the audience’s experience of the new performance, either through speculation about these experiences or by a more direct identification, he or she engages in revision and extensions of the new story (White & Epston 1990).

For young people who are categorised as ‘problems’, ‘at risk’, ‘disengaged’, or tagged with some other disempowering and deficit laden label, the opportunity to showcase what the categories placed on them leaves out – to reveal their hidden resilience – is a chance to re-author their lives.

Creative mediums, such as theatre, can also be used by young people to: reflect on the decisions and actions they have taken; to think through the consequences of the actions that they are considering taking; and to identify alternative ways of achieving needs and desires (e.g. the need to respond to racism in ways that retain personal dignity and maintain respect in the eyes of their peers) in ways that are meaningful and viable to them.

Take the example I gave earlier (of John assaulting a school yard bully who was taunting him with racial comments) as the basis for a theatrical piece to promote creative reflection and deliberation. Through their performance, actors could re-tell and reflect on the decision John took to assault the bully. It could be used to explore alternative ways of responding to the issue of racial bullying (for example, John using assertive communication to stop the bullying
instead of physical means). The performance could also work through the consequences of John’s actions on the bully.

As mentioned before, theatre is one of many art mediums which can be used to engage young people in reflection and deliberation. Another popular medium is cartooning. For an example of how this might work in practice see the following website: http://www.racismnoway.com.au/gamesroom/cmics/ (Racism. No Way! 2005). The suggested web link showcases some comics that explore the consequences of certain actions, and the different options young people have in how they respond to racism. It could be used by service providers and young people as inspiration for their own creative projects, to explore options in responding to racism and to enable critical reflection on particular actions.

Excerpts from a comic available to view from the ‘Racism No Way!’ website (Racism. No Way! 2005).
‘Us and them’ and the media in-between

All of the young people I spoke with believed that many ‘non-Muslim-Arab Australians’ had a negative view of Muslims and Arabs and attributed this in large part to harmful media representations. That said, it also seemed to me that many of the young people I spoke with were not very self-reflective. They did not seem to give much attention to the ways the media shaped their own views, identity or the feeling of being ‘Other’. Aly (2007, p. 28) in her research found the same thing:

The information gathered in the focus group and qualitative interviews suggest that Australian Muslims subscribe to a propaganda view of the media in terms of its influence on the opinions of the broader community, but are often unaware of their own role as active agents in the media communication process and the consequences of this. Respondents expressed a common belief that the media discourse strongly influenced public opinion against Muslims. At the same time however, respondents have actively developed a framework for understanding the media discourse that actually mirrors the underlying message that situate Muslims as ‘out
of place’. Yet they were less likely to recognise their own role in deconstructing and internalising this message or the impact of this on their own self-perceptions.

According to Aly (2007, p. 35) some Australian Muslims used the anti-Muslim discourses to ‘reconstruct’ themselves and their Muslim identity in terms of being victims identity and treating ‘the problem’ as one of injustice:

The victim identity is rooted in a notion that Australian Muslims are being victimised because of their religious beliefs. While it can be argued that there is much truth in this observation given the dominant messages in the popular media discourse, the fact remains that religion is the primary basis for constructing the victim identity. In this sense the victim identity corroborates the media discourse which recognises Australian Muslims wholly and solely as a religious entity and, importantly, as adherents of an ideology that is incompatible with the values of liberal secularism.

She argues that some Australian Muslims engaged with alternative media discourses with a view to reinforcing the victim identity. Like Aly’s study, my research also shows how some of the young people I interviewed played into the dominant media discourses to establish a shared sense of injustice. Many of the young people for example used alternative media to reaffirm their experiences of being victims. This was illustrated in the following extract from my interview with Rocky, who talked about the way he made sense of news that was critical of the American military intervention in Iraq, which was circulating on the alternative media source YouTube24:

You know what, Australia is against Muslims, that’s all I can say … pretty much it’s everyone against Muslims… Everyone just looks at us and says, ‘why should you hang around them, they’re someone completely different, their beliefs are different to us and they should go back to their country, they shouldn’t come here”. And everyone thinks, “Oh, Muslims aren’t allowed to have fun and Muslims aren’t allowed to do this” … they just see what the media wants them to see … Yeah, so that’s how they’re seeing us, that’s why, like, people are so racist, because the media sees all Muslims as like one person, like whatever a Muslim does, all a Muslim does is the same as … that’s what all these people have got it against us, because of the media…

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24 I realise that ‘YouTube’ could be defined by some people as ‘mass media,’ rather than my characterisation of it in this thesis as ‘alternative media’. I have categorised it as a form of ‘alternative media’ for two reasons. First, while material on ‘YouTube’ is widely available, not all of the many videos shared on this site are viewed by everyone who uses this site. Furthermore, most videos are created and posted on the site by individuals, and non-government and non-commercial/independent bodies.
I was watching a video on YouTube today and [it was about what happened in] Fallujah [in Iraq]. I have not heard of any death toll from Fallujah and then all of a sudden there’s a secret reporter [who has] gone and taken videos of all the dead bodies. The [video showed that the Americans had] killed nearly everyone and [even] the wives, they killed them. [When they found] injured people lying on the floor, they would shoot them. Kids were missing arms from a bomb or something, they would shoot them. It was a massacre…And they call Muslims the terrorists…And there’s one [American] soldier that confessed [that this really did happen] and they call us the terrorists.

And there was [another YouTube video I saw] a guy in America, a politician, goes “Muslims, we have to wipe them out”. He went to a college in America and he told [the college students]: “what we have to do is get every Muslim student out of America and send them back to their country’. And everyone’s just applauding him.

Rocky was not the only young person who used alternative media sources like YouTube to reaffirm his narrative about ‘everyone being against Muslims and Arabs’. Some young men in another of my focus groups said that after they observed the mass media blaming Muslims for the September 2001 terrorist attacks they started to look for alternative stories. They found the alternative stories they were looking for on the Internet. They found stories, for example, that blamed the Jews for the September 2001 terrorist attacks and stories built around a theory in which America was conspiring to turn the West against Arabs and Muslims, so that they could get access to the oil resources in Arab countries.

Aden: Did you know that when the World Trade Centre happened there was not one Jew in that building? And that day there was meant to be 2000 Jewish people working?
Usher: 8000 Jews.
Aden: Sorry, he’s right … 8000 Jews.
Usher: Yeah, 8,000 Jews and not one of them came to work. Have you seen Fahrenheit 911?
Kavindi: Nah… I haven’t yet.
Aden: Go watch it. Coz if you watch it you will believe every single word.
Salim: So America was saying the Muslims are doing this and that, and I’m thinking to myself… we look up to Osama Bin-Laden, he’s living a hard life, he’s living like the prophet, you know, we look up to him and then he sends people to go blow up the towers?
Valentino: They just blamed him.
Usher: [Then we thought] Is that possible [that it could be Osama – the person we look up to]? And that’s why we started thinking na,
it’s not him. That’s why we started to look for different options and then we started to find out that 8000 Jews took a day off work.
Kavindi: So, how did you go and find out this information?
Aden: It was all on the net and all on the news.

Salim: America tries to get people to hate Muslims… they think of a reason why Kuwait needs to be invaded then they will invade it and take the oil…. And then there will come a time when…The western region… will turn around [and] say no more Arabs … no more Muslims [in our countries] you know what I mean?

As this discussion indicates, there were three primary sources of information for these young men. One was the documentary film Fahrenheit 911. Another source was what they heard from others in the community. The third were Internet resources, all of which they uncritically accepted as ‘credible’ and reliable sources. It seems that, while most of the people I spoke with were well able to interpret ‘mainstream western’ news stories critically, they were not so critical of news (especially news produced by Muslims and Arabs), which often reproduced and reinforced their existing prejudices.

One of the people in Aly’s (2007, p. 33) research entertained similar ideas to those of some of the young men in my focus group. They argued that Muslims and Arabs were victims of a larger conspiracy aimed at undermining Islam. The person Aly spoke with said:

They [the West] are aiming to destroy us and we are not aware of it but now we are under attack we are being destroyed. What about realising we are being attacked by purpose not by our people. And now there are terrorists – all these crimes that are happening under the name of the Muslims. Who are really behind them? (Aly 2007, p. 33)

Aly (2007) and I have found from our respective research that not all the people interviewed played into the media discourse of ‘us’ against ‘them’. Instead some interviewees have renegotiated their identity on the basis of shared or common values with the broader community. They have actively rejected the victim identity and refused to position themselves in opposition to ‘other Australians’ or non-Muslims. I suggest that service providers have a role to play in working with young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims (and others who may buy into ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourses) to find a way out of the ‘Other’. As Aly suggests, ‘they will need to challenge the perception
of the Australian Muslim diaspora as a monolithic religious entity in order to secure representation in the public spaces of citizenship’ (Aly 2007, p. 38). They will need to disengage with the victim identity and re-engage with the broader community as equal citizens – as being ‘in place’ as Australian citizens (Aly 2007, p. 38).

A way for service providers to join young people in this challenge is to start by first looking at how young people are already renegotiating belonging as equal citizens, working their way out of the ‘other’ and fighting racism and stereotypes using mediums such as YouTube. In chapter five, I argued that, through mediums such as YouTube, young Lebanese and Muslim Australians are creatively engaging with a wider audience, to deal with racism and to negotiate their sense of belonging in respect to a broader Australian society.

Peta Stephenson (2008) has also been looking into how Australian Muslims have found creative ways to break down the ‘us and them’ rhetoric. She has argued that:

A growing number of Muslim youth are actively creating spaces in which Australian Muslims, particularly young people, can be heard ... These young Muslims, whether writing and staging a panel show, a stand up comedy sketch, or performing as hip-hop artists, say they are motivated ... by a desire to encourage societal education and change. They want mainstream Australians to see Muslims as human beings, and to recognise them as fellow Australians. They also want the Muslim Australian community to show leadership, to engage confidently in both public debate and with non-Muslim Australians in their daily lives. To this end a growing number of young Muslims are adopting a community leadership role. They are using the media to serve and engage the community and are not only negotiating their place in the ‘West’, they are fulfilling their Islamic duty and service in a positive social role.

The young Muslims that Stephenson has spoken with are motivated to develop and participate in projects such as Salam Café by the desire to serve and engage the community, to be heard, to encourage social education and change, to get ‘other Australians’ to see them as not radically different and to serve their Islamic duty and service in a positive social role. These same motivations were also reflected in my interviews with young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims. Identifying what motivates young people to take part in projects is
important for the success of youth projects that service providers wish to deliver.

As scholars on youth work like Alan Prout, Richard Simmons and Johnston Birchall (2006, p. 77) have argued, identifying young people’s motivation to participate is one of several elements to effective practice in developing young people’s participation. Other elements to effective practice include removing social, economic and political obstacles that young people face in trying to participate (Bessant 2004, p. 388). If youth projects build on young people’s motivations and remove obstacles for participation, it is more likely to draw in participants, maintain young people’s continued involvement in the project, and better deliver on intended outcomes. I discuss next how this insight might be put into practice, by taking the example of YouTube videos created by young people.

In chapter five I noted that young Arab and Muslim Australians were creating YouTube videos that were seen as problematic by other people. The ‘problem’ itself has been framed in terms of a proposition that the videos were designed at the least to express ‘anti-Australian sentiment’ or to ‘celebrate gang culture’. At the worst these sites have been understood as designed to incite violence (Gibson 2007; Tinkler & Hastie 2007). I argued that the videos could also be seen alternatively as reflecting these young people’s need and desire to create a sense of belonging and as a way to deal with their experiences of racism. The videos could also be understood as acts of resistance that helped the young people to experience a sense of power and control that buffered the effects of the social injustice they experienced (Ungar et al. 2007, p. 302).

The challenge for youth workers is to see the videos (even those defined as violent or negative in some other way) as a means by which young people are accessing ‘health resources’, such as the exercise of personal agency, on their own terms. The videos, although some people might be highly critical of them, could also be treated as demonstrating these young people’s strengths and resilience (Ungar 2005c, p. 10; Ungar 2006, p. 55; Ungar et al. 2008,
Apart from high level video editing skills, some of the strengths demonstrated through the videos include, an imaginative ability to carve out spaces of belonging and develop narratives that speak to other young people through creative use of music and images. The challenge then is for youth workers to join with the young people to develop alternative identity stories that can be communicated through creative mediums such as YouTube videos. The alternative identity stories will need to be sufficiently resourceful to allow the young person to get from it what they hoped to achieve through their original identity stories (Ungar 2004, p. 204). For example, instead of a video projecting a story of taking control over Australia (and thus making a claim to space) through visual images such as the one below, perhaps an alternative story of place and belonging could be negotiated and told via media such as YouTube? Perhaps a story of belonging that engages with the broader community as equal citizens – as being ‘in place’ as Australian citizens – with an overarching and binding commitment to honouring all members in the national home.

(Aussiekillaonstandby 2008a)
Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that a social-ecological approach to resilience can be used to inform the development of projects and programs that are anti-racist and can strengthen young people’s sense of connection to the wider Australian community. Using arguments put forward by Ungar (2001, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; 2006; 2008; 2008; 2007) I argued that an application of the strengths and resilience perspective to youth work practice requires listening to young people. It means accepting that some of the ways young people deal with prejudice and issues of belonging, such as creating YouTube videos that carry anti-white Australian messages, is not necessarily a sign of pathology. It means considering that such actions by young people may reflect the young person’s strengths and their resilience – a sign of their resourcefulness in the face of limited options to do this in more socially accepted ways. It requires also recognising that young people are already finding ways to cope with the stressful effects of racism without requiring the intervention of more structured and formal youth projects.

One collective resource that is available and being used by these young people is their religion, Islam, which my interviewees drew on to guide them as they interpreted and responded to their experiences of racism. I have argued that youth workers have a role to play in tapping into religious resources if young people find this is a meaningful way to deal with challenges such as racism. The next mechanism that some young people used, namely recourse to physical violence, is clearly a more difficult one to sanction. As I showed, there was a tendency on the part of some of the young men I interviewed to think that bashing those they perceived as racist was a logical and necessary response. On moral grounds we need to tread carefully between valuing ‘legitimate’ violence (e.g. police or military ‘force’ is happily accepted by most in the community) and ‘illegitimate’ violence, which can attract serious legal sanctions. I argued that one role for youth agencies may be to work with these
young people to find alternative ways to satisfy the ethical and social imperatives that moral emotions like the desire for revenge or justice seem to require. I argued that youth workers could help young people to think through the costs and benefits of different kinds of responses to racism. I explored some options for doing this, like collectively designing and producing a comic that explores the consequences of certain actions, and the different options young people have in responding to prejudice or racism.

The last section of the chapter looks at the role of media. In this section I argue that young people are already using the media and other creative mediums to meet their needs and fulfil desires. I propose that youth workers can tap into what motivates young people to participate in actions such as creating online videos, and build on these motivations in the development of youth programs. They can help young people to fight racism, carve out spaces of belonging and achieve a range of other outcomes by building on young people’s demonstrated strengths and abilities in using new media.
Thesis Conclusion

I began this study in 2003 at a time in Australia when various ‘moral
panics’ about Muslims and Lebanese young people were erupting.
Some of these moral panics were expressions of concern about
‘Islamist’ terrorism. There was mounting concern about asylum
seekers, many of them Muslims arriving from the ‘Middle East’ which
climaxed in 2001 with the Tampa crisis. A succession of terrorist
attacks beginning in September 2001 with the bombing of the twin
towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon
building in Washington were followed by the Bali bombings of 2002
and terrorist attacks in London in 2005. Locally concern was being
expressed about young Muslims implicated in ethnic gang rapes of
‘white’ Australian women in Sydney. Media coverage of the resulting
trials spanned five years from 2001 to 2006. Then there was also the
so-called ‘Cronulla race riots’ in Sydney during December 2005,
organised as an expression of anger over what was perceived to be
young Lebanese Muslims’ encroachment on the ‘Australian way of
life’. These events and public and media reactions to them helped
create a hostile context for young Muslims, particularly those of
‘Middle Eastern appearance’ growing up in Australia.

I was interested in understanding better how these events were
affecting young Muslims, and particularly young second-generation
Australian-Lebanese-Muslims who lived in the northern and western
suburbs of Melbourne. I did some preliminary research to understand
better how events like the ‘9/11 attacks’ were critical in the
construction of Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as ‘terrorists in the
making’, and how these meshed in with accompanying moral panics
(e.g. about ‘Lebanese gangs’) and drew on long-standing discourses
(e.g. the dangers of young ‘ethnic’ men), all of which contributed to a
framing of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims as a serious
‘problem’.
I eventually decided that there were four key questions I wanted to address. First, how did young (12-25 year old), second-generation Australian-Lebanese-Muslims living in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne both experience and make sense of their interactions with other Australians? Second, how did these young people deal with often challenging and hostile interactions with some other Australians following events like the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks and the ‘Sydney gang rapes’? Third, how did these young people experience a sense of belonging to the broader Australian society? Finally, I wanted to establish what how my research findings might be put towards youth work practice.

To answer these questions I decided that I needed to get an insider’s perspective. To achieve this I interviewed thirty-one young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims.

In my interviews, I paid particular attention to making sense of the everyday aspects of the lives of some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslim men and women. In listening to the stories of my participants, I discovered they experienced various kinds of prejudice that merit the use of the category ‘racism’ and that they experienced racism both directly in their personal encounters with other Australians and indirectly as mediated or vicarious experiences.

My interviewees’ direct experiences of racism included encounters such as being called ‘terrorists’, often by complete strangers, because they had been identified as ‘Muslim’ or ‘Arab’. I also found that my interviewees experienced racism vicariously via reports conveyed to them by other people and or through the media. These indirect experiences included, for example, hearing about prejudice or racism encountered by their friends and family, as well as hearing about and responding to the negative experiences of other people who they did not know personally, but who were identified as of ASB and/or as Muslims. It was also experienced in more abstract ways via the mass media when, for instance, my interviewees observed that Arabs and Muslims were being negatively stereotyped on radio and television and in the press.
I also discovered that vicarious and mediated experiences of racism had a significant impact on people and how they interpreted their social context, affecting both how they made sense of their face-to-face interactions and their relations more generally with ‘other Australians’. Indeed, for some of the people I spoke with, vicarious and mediated experiences were often more significant than their more direct encounters with racism. For example, as I reported in chapter four, young people like Nuer stayed at home for a week following the 9/11 attacks, not because she had personally encountered prejudice immediately after the terror attacks, but because she had heard via the media, and through her friends and family, that going onto the streets was dangerous because ‘Muslims’ were being vilified and physically attacked. This finding addresses a gap in the existing Australian research literature because, up until now, it has not been identified that a substantial part of young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims’ experience of racism was shaped vicariously. In other words, one need not have many personal encounters with racism to feel a sense of being ‘Other’. My research therefore tended to support the work of international researchers (e.g. Essed 1991) who argue that people’s ‘everyday experiences of racism’ are typically multi-dimensional. This understanding along with my findings about the significance of mediated and vicarious experiences of racism highlight the need to include more abstract expressions and experiences of discrimination in the design of any policy or program interventions designed to promote belonging and tackle racism. In this way, my research supports the case for taking a holistic approach that goes beyond addressing individual racist behaviours and attitudes, and which is inclusive of other ways in which racism is transmitted and experienced (Essed 1991, 2002).

In addressing the research question about belonging to the broader ‘Australian society’, I found that my interviewees tended to adopt an ambivalent approach to the idea that they ought to feel ‘connected’ to ‘mainstream Australia’. As they talked about their feeling of belonging to ‘Australia’ it became clear that whatever they meant by being
‘connected’ or ‘belonging’ was contingent on their sense that they were being recognised or acknowledged by others in that broader community as being ‘one of them’. Typically their overall experience tended to suggest that they were not often recognised as part of ‘mainstream Australia’. The message they often heard was that as Lebanese-Muslims they were not ‘real’ or ‘deserving Australians’, but, instead, were ‘Other’ and even possibly a threat or ‘the enemy’ (El-Zein 2002, p. 229). This is a key reason why the young people I spoke with were ambivalent about belonging to the broader ‘Australian community’. In this way my research complemented the work of other researchers such as Noble (2010, p. 114) who for example has pointed out how:

Crucially, our ontological security is founded on our ability to be recognised. Our ‘fit’ in an environment requires the ‘acknowledgement’ of other actors … that we fit …

The people I spoke with did not feel that they fit the ‘national norm’ because they were too often being represented as ‘Other’.

The construction of young Lebanese Muslims as ‘Other’ occurred in a wide array of social spaces and processes. The process of Othering certainly does not only occur during the face-to-face interactions between young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims and ‘other Australians’. Othering for instance also takes place when politicians, policy makers, media workers, advocates and experts engage in debates on immigration, asylum seeker policy or multiculturalism. Building on the work of others (Ang & Stratton 1998; Hage 1996, 2000, 2007; Jakubowicz 2002; Joppke 2004; Jupp 1996), it is possible to say that, in the Australian policy and political context, ‘belonging’ to Australia is often imagined as a need to have a ‘correct fit’ with the characteristics of ‘mainstream Australia’. People included in the category ‘mainstream Australia’ are those who typically are white, heterosexual, ‘able-bodied’, ‘middle-class’, and Christian, or at least a certain kind of liberal, secular humanist. Excluded were those who are considered members of a ‘minority’, be they environmentalists, welfare recipients or young, dark-skinned ‘Arab-

Given that the feeling of belonging to a group or community depends whether or not the other people in those groups recognise that you ‘fit in’ or are ‘one of them’, it came as little surprise to discover that some of the people I spoke with felt a strong sense of belonging to communities that were predominantly or exclusively Muslim and/or Arab. These were environments such as their Islamic school or certain suburbs where there was a high proportion of Arabs and Muslims (Suburbs such as Broadmeadows and Coburg). Through shared cultural and religious practices the message was clear: they belonged.

I also found that one way some young Australian-Lebanese-Muslims attempted to feel they belonged to the wider Australian community was by engaging in practices that some such as Hage (2000, pp. 49-55) have described as ‘accumulating national capital’. National capital can be accumulated in many ways and one strategy is to play down any prejudice or racism that may be encountered (Hage 2000). It includes, for example, supporting claims that Australia was once a racist society but is no longer, and that now ‘we’ are a multicultural, inclusive and tolerant society. In this way developing a sense of ‘belonging to the nation’ required, in the case of some of the people I spoke with, that they deny the racist context in which they live, and that they interpret and name their racist encounters as something else. Some interviewees told me how they were subject to quite vicious discrimination, how upset those experiences made them and how different they felt they were to ‘Aussies’, but then they would say that racism was not a problem for them and that they were no different to Aussies. The disjunction between these contradictory stories may give the impression that my interviewees were talking about two different and distinct realities. How did I make sense of this? A more traditional ‘objectivist’ social science account might reach for a concept such as ‘identity crises’. My own interpretivist framework however, allows me to appreciate that we all can and do
assume what may be seen as quite contradictory positions or aspects of our identity, because we are all positioned across various and often incompatible discourses (Yeatman 1990).

As I also hope has become clear, there is not one way of belonging but rather an array of different kinds and mutable forms of belonging, some of which are not dependent on being able to ‘fit into dominant cultural norms’. For some of the people I spoke with, ‘belonging to Australia’ had a lot to do instead with a commitment to honouring and caring for all its members (Hage 2003). This is a mode of belonging that has fortunately been experienced in places – as interviewees like Nuer described – like in ‘good multicultural schools’. In these spaces belonging as interviewees reported was characterised by evidence that they were being listened to, valued, had a sense of human agency and space for open and safe deliberative dialogue and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of being accepted ‘for whom you are’.

In answering the question of how young people deal with the often challenging and hostile interactions that followed events such as the 9/11 attacks, I found that the people I interviewed tended to respond in a range of ways. Sometimes they dealt with racism by trying to avoid racist encounters or by trying to minimise the impact of the racist experience. Sometimes they ‘fought back’ or responded in ways that I have called ‘constructive engagement’. As discussed in chapter four, avoiding or minimising racist encounters included strategies like ‘sticking to themselves’ (i.e. hanging out with other Arabs and Muslims and avoiding ‘White spaces’) and ignoring or denying offensive commentary and actions. ‘Fighting back’ could involve strategies such as ‘bashing racists’, ‘talking back’, and embracing and capitalising on Othering (Jensen 2009) through various mediums including YouTube. ‘Constructive engagements’ taken up by the young people were those activities that were generally seen to be more socially acceptable ways of dealing with racism and experiences of Othering. Examples of these responses included ‘Salam Café’ and stand-up comedy designed to breakdown
stereotypes. I argued that activities of this kind can provide a basis for further intercultural dialogue, and for developing a sense of belonging that is based on an ethics of care for the ‘Other’.

In considering how the research findings of this thesis can be applied in program development and youth work practice more generally, I argued, drawing on the work of Ungar (2001, 2004, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; 2006; 2008; 2008; 2007), that a resilience framework was useful. This framework requires those working with young people to not only listen to young people, but also reflect on ‘our’ own assumptions and prejudices. This entails, for example, resisting the powerful tendency to pathologise young people who act in ways that provoke the ire of ‘socially accredited experts’, who then ‘guard the barricades’ to protect ‘all that is good and virtuous’. This approach, which requires reflective practice, helps ensure ‘we’ do not wittingly or unwittingly vilify ‘youthful transgressions’, which after a little sober assessment may lead to the realisation that certain commonalities exist between ‘them’ and ‘us’. I refer, for example, to the realisation that ‘we’, as practitioners and ‘socially accredited experts’, can act on the same kinds of moral emotions and provide the same rationales as ‘they’, that is, those who are constructed as ‘problems’.

Recognising the role of moral emotions like righteous anger, pride in place and culture, humiliation and shame is critical for those interested in developing anti-racist and similar youth programs. With this recognition comes the acknowledgement that moral emotions can move politicians to campaign for ‘righteous murder’ in the form of war or to engage in public deception, and it can move those who are often seen as respectable, hard-working people, to carry out white-collar crime. These same moral emotions have on occasion moved some of the young people I interviewed to engage in ‘anti-social behaviour’ in forms such as ‘bashing’ those they saw as racist, and creating videos that expressed racism towards white people. I argue that recognising this improves the prospect of developing good professional practice and working relations.
Drawing on Ungar’s work I found that attempting to understand young people’s life-worlds (including why they took certain responses to problems such as racism) from their perspectives, offered invaluable insights into the dynamic processes that contribute to positive development. Understanding the meanings they attribute to their experiences – whether they be socially approved or not – assists in recognising the young person’s strength and resilience. I argued that resisting the impulse to make normalising judgments, and instead looking for signs of resourcefulness in the face of limited options and adversity, provides basis for successful program development. Given the difficulties most of us have in recognising our own assumptions and prejudices, such a disposition does not usually come easily. This is particularly so when what we witness is radically ‘different’. My discovery, for example, that the teachings of Islam provided a source of resilience for many of my interviewees may be a research finding that some professionals have difficulty in recognising and building on. I argue that whilst there may be challenges for service providers in engaging in ways that are meaningful to young people, and whilst I acknowledge that there obstacles to building on the pathways of resilience that young people have already been paving, it is nevertheless essential for good youth-work practice. At least it is essential for those of us interested in empowering young people to meet challenges such as racism and negotiating their relationship to ‘mainstream Australia’.

That all of this matters is suggested by one final and sobering point. In 2010 as I complete this research, young people from Lebanese and Muslim backgrounds continue to be constituted as a serious ‘problem’ and are still being subjected to negative representations in the Australian mass media.
Appendix A: CDATA

Australia and Religious Affiliation (RELP) by Ancestry 1st Response (ANC1P)

Data Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing

**Counting: Persons, Place of Usual Residence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ancestry 1st Response (ANC1P)</th>
<th>Lebanese Ancestry</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation (RELP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Christianity 82,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Islam 61,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Australia)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Druse (Other Religions) 2,176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Number of Lebanese Australians 143,890

© Commonwealth of Lebanon of Australia 2007
Appendix B: An Illustration of Hollywood Movies Has Contributed to the Othering of Arabs and Muslims

One way in which Orientalist understandings of the Arab and Muslim Other are disseminated and become part of an everyday commonsense is through the apparatus of popular culture, including Hollywood movies. The documentary ‘Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People’, which was screened in 2006, illustrates and discusses the pervasiveness of antiquated stereotypes of Arabs (Media Education Foundation 2007). The movie is based on the 2001 book by the same title authored by Lebanese-American academic Dr Jack Shaheen (2001).

Sheehan found that only 5 percent of more than 900 Hollywood films he reviewed could be considered positive towards Arabs – ‘that is casting an Arab as a regular person’ (Shaheen 2001, p. 33). The other 95 per cent depicted Arabs and Muslims as violent, calculating, misogynistic people, and as fanatically religious or nationalistic terrorists. In sum, these movies positioned Arabs and Muslims as ‘Other’. Such pop-cultural depictions project powerful messages to its audience. These symbolic representations of Arabs and Muslims become part of a public common-sense and instrumental to the ‘West vs. the Rest’ discourse, which we have seen come to the fore following events such as the 9/11 attacks.

Orientalised depictions of Arabs and Muslims is so widespread in Hollywood movies that they are considered normal and invisible to viewers who grow up with these stereotypes (Attum 2007). With very few alternative representations that humanise Arabs, Shaheen is not surprised that Americans find it psychologically easier to support their government to invade Iraq and Afghanistan, and have little empathy for the innocent Arabs that killed as part of the war (Attum 2007).
The images presented here are from the documentary ‘Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People’, which screened in 2006 (Media Education Foundation 2007). In a review of the movie, Omar Attum (2007) wrote:

It would be convenient to think that these negative portrayals became prevalent only after September 11, 2001, but this powerful documentary illustrates that degrading stereotypes of Arabs have been the norm since the first silent films in the 1880s...

For example, instead of Hollywood depicting the 19 Arab and Muslim terrorists of September 11 as a lunatic fringe, movies regularly attribute these characteristics to the greater Arab and Muslim community. At the same time, Shaheen notes that the other fringe groups or individuals, such as the Ku Klux Klan or Timothy McVeigh, are not made to represent their larger community.

According to the documentary, the political ramifications are enormous. Shaheen makes the argument that these movies closely follow Washington’s foreign policy and that “politics and Hollywood’s images are linked and they reinforce one another.” He claims that some of the most offensive movies are created in cooperation with the Department of Defence, often showing US armed forces killing Arabs at random.

Further to the points raised in this movie review, it can be added that the stereotypes propagated through movies, such as Disney’s Orientalist Aladdin, shapes the lived experiences of Arabs and Muslims, public opinion and policies.
Appendix C: Lyrics to ‘AussieDiss 2- Thug Love’

For all you Faggot Racist Aussie MuthaFuckerz.
This aint your country, It’s mine too.
Deal with it you Faggots!

You Aussie Mutha Fuckerz,
Why you always got to hate for? …

I took a stroll to the shire...
You were once safe there
But now you’re rolling fire,
But where the fuck were ya’s?
I was up in Bankstown,
Waiting for you pussies but youse didn’t even make a sound.
We fucked ya’s Bro!
Broken glass everywhere.
Broken arms on the floor.
What you want, another war?
Don’t bother, unless you coming down this time…

Talking about the Koran.
Muslim or Christian Arabs we are all one here.
Talking about the veil, and what our women wear?
Muthafurkerz look at Mary, what does she have on her hair?
Talk about our men, and how they grow the beard?
Muthafurkerz look at Jesus, if he was only here he would say: fuck u cuntz.
What you want, to be Christ like?
Just stop the racism and then you fucken might just last in this land.
Don’t call it your own.
God put us here, so this is my home! …

Don’t start on your women.
They all know they want us
Maybe if you circumcised your dick
And lost your beer guts
You might just get some.

They’re sluts. It’s known.
Right now, I’m getting blown by a little Aussie brat,
While having sex on the phone
With maybe your sister, daughter or your mother…

Coming out of Bankstown killing Aussie Mutha Fuckerz

(Aussiediss69 2010)

Aussiediss69 2010, Aussie Diss 2 - Thug Love 04/10/10,
Appendix D: A Different Approach to Comedy

Melbourne based Maysa Abouzaid, is one of the young stars of the VASS youth project A.R.A.B (Anti Racism Action Band). She uses comedy to break down stereotypes and for getting people to think more deeply about the assumptions they make. Her comedy is based on sharing the funny side of her personal experiences of being treated as the ‘Other’. Maysa herself points out that she is positioned and even embraces her position(s) as Other, by comically capitalizing on her very hyphenated identity.

I describe myself in my routine as a blind, Italian-Egyptian, Muslim, female comedian learning sign language who can also do salsa dancing (Harford 2007).

Abouzaid tends to avoids the ‘us and them’ binary in her comedy because to play into this would be antithetical to her hyphenated identity. Journalist Saeed Saeed (2007) points out how Maysa prefers to metaphorically sit in the ‘grey area’ between ‘us and them’.

Abouzeid was 13 when the twin towers went down in New York. In fear, she locked herself in her home during that entire school term holiday. Returning to Preston Girls Secondary College, she recalls an immediate change within the classroom. "It was like all the Lebanese, Afghans and Egyptians were on one side of the classroom and then the other side was Anglo-Saxons, Italians and Greeks," she says. "I'm half Italian-Egyptian and Muslim – I ended up sitting in the middle of the class" (Saeed 2007).

Abouzeid explains in the video documentary ‘It’s a Blind Chick Thing’:

I can’t deny it. But I have to live with what I have. And comedy helps me live with it. Like growing up with a disability. Growing up as a Muslim. Growing up as an Italian. Growing up with... what ever I grow up with. Whatever comes my way. Like going to uni... or just being me pretty much. I do it with a sense of humor (Gillick 2008).

In other words, Abouzaid deals with her otherness and the challenges it brings (including dealing with racism and discrimination for being blind) by employing humour.
Appendix D: A Different Approach to Comedy (Continued)

Above: Poster promoting short film featuring comedian Maysa Abouzaid. This picture was obtained with consent from Abouzaid via her Facebook page.
Appendix E: Lyrics from ‘The Silent Truth’ by the Brothahood

This is the silent truth man. Racism everywhere man. Cronulla riots.
I can feel your eyes on me but I aint in the wrong…
Label me a thug coz I'm from Lebanon.
But you're wrong.
I'm like any other Aussie.
Try to ride the train but you always go to stop me.
Coz of 9/11 now you all want to drop me…
Australia's mine too so I'm going to put up a fight.
You want to send me back. Yo send me back where?
Australia's the place that I let down my hair…
I'm a peaceful kind of guy come sit with us.
Haten on me coz television got you brainwashed…
Peace be upon him. Peace be upon you.
Black, yellow, white or blue.
I'm a man, understand I respect you…. You can't tell the difference? I'm human too….
All that I ask is that we are all treated equally.
And that my name won't make you scared to speak to me….

(lugzlebo 2007)
Appendix F: Children Overboard

In 2001 Liberal Party members claimed that asylum seekers threw their children overboard in an effort to coerce the Navy to offer them sanctuary. The leader of the Liberal Party, John Howard, was quoted in Australian newspapers as saying, ‘I don’t want in Australia people who would throw their own children into the sea’ (Macken-Horarik 2003). Statements like this created the impression that it was the cultural background of the asylum seekers that had led them to treat their children so callously (Griffiths 2004, p. 2). Through statements such as this, the Liberal Party leaders, and sections of the media, framed asylum seekers as having very different values, and as being a threat to ‘us’ (i.e. White or ‘mainstream’ Australia). Together they led the public to believe that ‘we’ Australians have a love for our children, which is qualitatively different to the cultures of asylum seekers. It is important to note that leaders of the Liberal Party would not have fed these lies to the media if they thought the Australian public would not buy into it. They knew that many Australians were willing to believe that some ‘Other’ cultures were depraved enough to even kill their own children so as to secure a place in Australia. As Justice Marcus Einfeld AO QC said so eloquently at the 2002 Annual Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture:

Did anyone stop to think then, do they think now, whether they know any parents anywhere who would struggle to get their kids away from terror and torture and out of wretched refugee camps of misery and horror, and then celebrate their freedom by drowning their own kids in the sea? Yet that is precisely what large numbers of Australians bought at the last federal election when the authorities knew it was not true. Are there no limits to our willingness to connive in evil (Einfeld 2002)?
Appendix G: ‘Background Details of Participant Form’

‘Background Details of Participant Form’

Why I would like some details about you and how this information will be used:
• To contact you when necessary
• Allocate you into age and gender specific focus groups
• To find out a little bit about you and other participants before the interview sessions
• To get some background information about the people participating in this study.

This background information will be used to help me answer my research questions. For example, from this background information I will be able to find out whether young people from the western suburbs raise different issues to the participants living in the eastern suburbs.

Keep in mind that you are welcome to call or e-mail me if you want to ask about anything relating to this form or to withdraw any information that you provide on this form (prior to the submission of my thesis).

---

**Essential Information:**

NB. Make sure you answer all the questions in this box.

Your name: ..............................................................
Your code name: ........................................................

NB. Pick any name you want, but please do not pick a name which might allow someone else to guess your real name. For example, it is best not to use a nick name that some people know you by. Your code name, instead of your real name, will be mentioned in publications or conferences.

What is your date of birth? .................
Are you male or female? .................
Your contact phone number: ..........................................
Your Email address: ..........................................
Your postal address: ..........................................

---

**Additional Information:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Birth (i.e. Australia)</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Your Mother</th>
<th>Your Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where in Lebanon is your family’s origin? (e.g. Bsharri)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your parent’s route of migration (e.g. from Beirut to Sydney then to Melbourne)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of arrival in Australia (e.g. 1979)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you and your parents live (e.g. Broadmeadows)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please say if you and your parents are employed at the moment and what you are studying (e.g. studying engineering at RMIT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please say if you are currently studying at the moment and what you are studying (e.g. studying engineering at RMIT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tell me a little bit about yourself:

NB: You can say anything you want. Maybe you could, for example, tell me why you decided you wanted to participate in this research.

---

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745. Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hec
Appendix H: Transcript from Salam Café
Episode about a Visit to the Melbourne Suburb of Frankston

Nazeem Hussein: What do you know about Muslims?

Frankston man: Muslims. Oh not a lot but I know that their beliefs and religions are pretty dangerous to the rest of the world.

Nazeem Hussein: What's Ramadan?

Frankston Woman: Is that like a Papadum?

Uncle Sam: You know John Howard is saying to do to become Australian you need to learn English? Do you agree with this?

Young Frankston man: One hundred Percent!

Uncle Sam: He is saying you need to do the spelling test. I don’t get it! Do you understand this?

Young Frankston man: Yeah he is saying you need to spell in English.

Uncle Sam: Okay now let me ask you a few questions about the spelling test. Can you spell for me beauty?

Young Frankston man: No.

Second Frankston young man: B.E.U.T.I

Uncle Sam: Get out of my Country Please!

Second Frankston young man: It’s not your country anyway! I’m not going anywhere!

(lugzlebo 2006)
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