

**Heroes, Villains and More Villains:
Representations of Arab Men on
Australian Screens**

BY

MEHAL KRAYEM

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Technology, Sydney

December 2014

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Name of Student: Mehal Krayem

Signature of Student:

Date: 5 December 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many (too many) people to whom I owe a great deal of thanks. The last five years, and indeed this body of work, would not have been possible without the support and dedication of my wonderful supervisor, Dr Christina Ho. I thank her for taking a genuine interest in this research, her careful consideration of my work, her patience and her words of encouragement when the entire situation felt hopeless. I would also like to thank Professor Heather Goodall for her comments and for stepping in when she was needed.

Much gratitude goes to my research participants, without whom this project would not exist – I thank them for their time and their honesty.

Great thanks goes to Dr Maria Chisari, Dr Emma Cannen, Kelly Chan, Dr Bong Jong Lee, Jesica Kinya, Anisa Buckley, Cale Bain, Zena Kassir, Fatima El-Assaad and Chrisanthi Giotis for their constant support and friendship. The steady progress of this thesis is due to structured coffee dates and long rants.

Thank you to May Fahmi, Dr Chrisoula Lionis, Miran Hosny, Annarose Robinson and Dr Imran Lum for their fresh eyes and constructive feedback on earlier drafts of this thesis.

A huge thank you to my fabulous editor, Nicole Davis, for her attention to detail, patience with my overuse of commas and the never-ending exchange of essay length emails. I appreciate your hearty efforts.

To my friends who were patient in my absence and nothing but loving and supportive in my presence, I love you dearly. Special thanks goes to Shahd Al-Janabi for being my rock over the last two years of this thesis. Thank you for your consideration, your patience and your hilarious commentary relating to the psychosis of PhD life.

My loving husband, Khaled Itaoui, who happily agreed to postponing our wedding so that I could finish this thesis and then happily agreed to just get married because it seemed like it mightn't ever come to an end. Thank you for your patience and sense of adventure that has made these last nine months more than bearable. To the entire Itaoui clan who have been nothing but encouraging despite never having known me in any state but distress, you rock!

I'd like to thank my family for their love, support and understanding. In particular, my mother whose support extends beyond anything words can explain. Without her selfless devotion and sacrifice, this may never have come to an end. My father, who despite not being here to see this work come to fruition, I thank him for instilling in me a lifetime's worth of curiosity and a strong dedication to education. My sister Nadine for the endless supply of chocolate and much needed hugs, my sister Nadelle for the never-ending line of questioning pertaining to the content of my thesis and why it wasn't ready for submission yet, my brother Hisham for his bashful encouragement and genuine support. To my extended family (the Krayems and Rifais) thank you for keeping me grounded and entertained throughout the process and finding a weekly excuse to indulge in cake. In particular to my aunt, Dr Ghena Krayem for her endless inspiration, her spiritual guidance and her unwavering love, not just throughout the duration of this thesis but over the course of my entire tertiary education. I love you dearly.

And finally, perhaps the greatest thanks goes to my grandparents, whose ultimate sacrifice manifests itself in my ability to pursue an education of the highest degree. For this sacrifice and opportunity, I am forever indebted and eternally grateful.

PREFACE

This research is in many ways the answer to select questions I asked of myself as a child. Growing up in a predominantly 'white' suburb, and learning to accept experiences of alienation as a norm, I embarked upon my undergraduate degree in sociology with a strong desire to understand those instances that as a child proved to be sources of discomfort.

This project was sparked by one of these instances of discomfort. When I was ten a friend of mine asked me what nationality I was. Believing I belonged in Australia, I remarked that I was Australian. She told me I wasn't, based on the fact that my parents were born in Lebanon. After much arguing she conceded, 'Fine you can be half Australian', she offered. A status I refused to accept but smart enough to know it was a losing battle, I rolled my eyes and walked away.

This research therefore is in part a justification of my refusal to accept the 'half' status afforded to me by my ten-year-old companion. In other ways it is a look at how little has changed over the last two decades.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certificate of Original Authorship	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Preface	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Images	x
Abstract	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
The Texts	6
Theoretical Framework	8
Orientalism	8
Whiteness	9
Aims of the Project	9
Methodology	11
The Problem or ‘Gap’ in the Research	11
Thesis Structure	13
CHAPTER ONE – THE PLACE OF THEORY	15
Situating the Research	15
Postcolonial Theory	15
Colonising the Other	17
<i>Orientalism</i>	17
<i>Ambivalence and Mimicry – Limiting Colonial Discourse</i>	23
<i>Whiteness</i>	26
Bourdieu and the Types of Capital	30
<i>Accumulating Whiteness</i>	31
Recognition and Identity	32

Intersectionality	34
Negotiating Complex Identities	36
Identity and Representation – Bringing These Concepts Together	39
<i>The Politics of Representation</i>	40
<i>Burden of Representation</i>	41
Cultural Diversity on Australian Screens	43
<i>Deviant Arabs</i>	44
Arab-Australian Masculinity	47
Methodology	50
Data Sources	51
<i>Cultural Productions</i>	51
<i>Interviews</i>	52
<i>Online Comments</i>	53
Critical Discourse Analysis	54
CHAPTER TWO – CONTEXTUALISING THE ARAB AND MUSLIM AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE	60
Introduction	60
Demographic Profile of Arab and Muslim Australians	62
Muslim Men Attack ‘Our’ Women	64
Asylum Seekers as Terrorists	69
September 11 2001 – The Threat of Terrorism in Australia	73
The Rise of Islamophobia in Australia	76
CHAPTER THREE – THE POLITICAL USES OF CRIME DRAMA: USING FICTIONAL DRAMA TO CHALLENGE MYTHS ABOUT THE ARAB OTHER	78
The Current Screen Landscape	78
SBS	84
The White Mainstream in Australian Television	86
<i>East West 101</i>	90
Everyday Multiculturalism in <i>East West 101</i>	96
Zane Malik, Muslim Detective	102

CHAPTER FOUR – SPEAKING FOR THE MARGINALISED: ARAB-AUSTRALIAN MEN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STORYTELLING	111
Introduction	111
National Identity: Cronulla and the Experience of Australian Masculinity	112
Men on Screen: Changing the Face of Australian Masculinities	117
Writing Yourself Into Existence: Storytelling Through Feature Films	120
The Making of <i>The Combination</i> (2009)	122
<i>The Combination: A Synopsis</i>	125
The Making of <i>Cedar Boys</i> (2009)	128
<i>Cedar Boys: A Synopsis</i>	130
Being Heard	133
The Good/Bad Arab	135
Challenging Australian Masculinity	137
Conclusion: We Exist Whether Or Not You Would Like Us To	139
CHAPTER FIVE – GOOD WHITE ARABS: ACQUIRING WHITENESS	141
Introduction	141
Cultural Capital in the Australian National Context	142
<i>EW101</i> Accumulating Capital – A Character Comparison	144
Malik and Crowley	144
The Influence and Effect of Cultural Capital as Demonstrated in <i>East West 101</i>	156
<i>Malik and Skerritt</i>	156
‘Good’ Muslims as Useful Muslims – A Comparison of Malik and Khoder	173
Conclusion	178
CHAPTER SIX – MAINTAINING DICHOTOMIES: REINFORCING A WORKING-CLASS, CRIMINAL UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB AUSTRALIA	180
Introduction	180
Misinterpellation and the Second Generation	180
Misinterpellating Basha and Caradee	183
‘Us’ versus ‘Them’: Maintaining Binaries Through Genre	185
<i>White Versus Leb</i>	187

<i>The Lebo Hero</i>	196
They Have Their Fun With Us	209
Maintaining Polarities	215
Comparing <i>East West 101</i>	219
Conclusion	221
CHAPTER SEVEN – ‘THIS WAS FOR OUR PEOPLE’: MAKING PRESENT WHAT HAS BEEN RENDERED ABSENT	224
Introduction	224
Who Are Australian Screen Productions Made For?	224
Audience Statistics	227
Audience Profile of <i>The Combination</i> and <i>Cedar Boys</i>	227
Audience Reactions to <i>The Combination</i> and <i>Cedar Boys</i>	230
Active Audience	230
Analysis of Audience Reactions	233
Online Divisions: Choose a Side	240
<i>Self-Definition and National Identity</i>	242
Audience Profile of <i>East West 101</i>	246
Audience Responses to <i>East West 101</i>	247
Analysis	250
Conclusion	257
CONCLUSION – THERE ARE NO HEROES	260
Future Research	266
Final Words	269
REFERENCES	270

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1

Malik (played by Don Hany) and his young family: Yasmeen (played by Lucy Abroon) and Amir (played by George Fayed), and his wife, Amina (played by Tasneem Roc). Image: TasneemRoc, <<http://www.tasneemroc.com/east-west-101-season-1-gallery>>.

Figure 2

Sergeant Ray Crowley (played by William McInnes). Image: IMFDB <http://www.imfdb.org/wiki/East_West_101>.

Figure 3

Agent Richard Skerritt (played by Gerald Lepkowski). Image: Madman <<http://www.madman.com.au/series/home/15181/east-west-101-series-2>>.

Figure 4

Detective Malik. Image: *East West 101*, Season Two, The Lost Boy (DVD Screenshot).

Figure 5

Amin Khoder (played by George Kanaan). Image: *East West 101*, Season Two, Episode Seven, The Lost Boy (DVD Screenshot).

Figure 6

Charlie, Nipper, Zeus, Mo and Tom in *The Combination*. Image: Hotflick <http://www.hotflick.net/pictures/009TCN_Rahel_Abdulrahman_001.html>.

Figure 7

Scott and his friends confront Charlie in *The Combination*. Image: <https://moviespictures.org/biography/White,_Vaughn>.

Figure 8

The Combination promotional cover. Image:

<<http://solodvd2007.blogspot.com.au/search?q=The+Combination>>.

Figure 9

Zeus (Ali Haider) points a gun at his classmate Scott in *The Combination*. Image:

<http://www.hotflick.net/flicks/2009_The_Combination/009TCN_Ali_Haider_007.jpg>.

Figure 10

Amie and Tarek at a bar in *Cedar Boys*. Image: *Sydney Morning Herald*,

Photographer: Mark Rogers, A Question of Where You Belong, 7 July 2008.

<<http://www.smh.com.au/news/stay-in-touch/a-question-of-where-you-belong/2008/07/06/1215282652064.html>>.

Figure 11

Sam, Tarek and Nabil in *Cedar Boys*. Image: *Cedar Boys: The Making Of*, Serhat

Caradee n.d., <<http://serhatcaradee.com/cedar-boys>>.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representation of Arab male protagonists in three Australian crime drama productions: *East West 101*, *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*. Since 2007 Australia has seen a notable increase in the inclusion of Arab and Muslim male characters in various serials and films, particularly as their visibility increased in news media after September 11, 2001. As popular culture reflects and shapes opportunities for belonging within the nation state, this thesis aims to understand whether or not the inclusion of Arab and Muslim minorities is a sign of greater acceptance of these community groups.

East West 101 garnered significant media coverage for its realistic portrayal of multicultural Australia. Most notable was its positive depiction of (fictional) Arab Muslim police detective, Zane Malik. Through Malik, *East West 101* effectively demonstrates how religion, class and culture can intersect, not to the detriment of a society, but to create skilled and savvy individuals uniquely positioned to contribute to their communities and professions. It further displays the *kind* of difference that is considered acceptable within a multicultural society; that is, the kind of difference that does not compromise the dominance of the white majority.

Likewise both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, although lesser known, were reported in Sydney Metropolitan newspapers as 'edgy' and importantly were made with the intention of rectifying the image of young Arab and Muslim men, often tarnished in the Australian media. Unlike *East West 101*, which delves into the struggle of a Middle Eastern man with access to resources and social mobility, these films discuss the realities of life of young Arab males with little social mobility and a strong desire to acquire it, leaving them feeling they have no option but to resort to crime. In choosing to tell these stories in this way, writers George Basha and Serhat Caradee bring their own, often polarising experiences, to the screen in a way that seems to reinforce the existing discourse of Middle Eastern men as thugs and criminals.

By drawing heavily on the concepts of Orientalism and Whiteness this thesis attempts to explain the feeling of (un)belonging as experienced by men of 'Middle Eastern appearance'. It asks how they experience a lack of belonging as depicted in these films/series and enquires into the pursuit of whiteness as an assimilative approach to belonging in a multicultural nation. Furthermore, it asks what these depictions tell us about national identity.

These questions point to the central question of this thesis, 'to what extent do cultural productions such as *EW101*, *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* open up space for new understandings of the place of Arab and Muslim Australians in contemporary Australia?' It is argued that, while representations in these three case studies are a much-needed addition to current voices in Australian cinema and television, in one form or another these products still conform to Orientalist discourses.