

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

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**BY**

**MEHAL KRAYEM**

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## **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

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## 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.

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## 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.

## INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon to hear people speak of a 'post-9/11' world. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 clearly mark a point in history when international relations changed, as did life, especially for Arabs and Muslims around the world. In a post-9/11 world words like 'terrorism', 'fundamentalism' and 'Islamic extremism' or any one of their derivatives are commonplace, with even the most uninformed individual having an opinion on them. So, in 2005 when Fox's *24*<sup>1</sup> aired a series (Season Four) about an Islamic terrorist sleeper cell in the United States, run by Habib Marwan there were ripples of concern. The plot was set to focus on a number of attacks launched against the USA by these terrorist cells, including the public execution of the Secretary of Defence and the launching of a nuclear missile.

One of America's leading Muslim media advocacy groups, the Centre for American and Islamic Relations (CAIR) met with the series' producers and creators in an attempt to find strategies to sensitively deal with the content depicted in order to prevent any further tension between American Muslims and other Americans. What eventuated was a piece to camera monologue spoken by the lead actor, Kiefer Sutherland. Sutherland plays the lead agent of the Counter Terrorism Unit and is thus easily identifiable by audiences familiar with the program as the face of freedom.

Hi, my name is Kiefer Sutherland and I play counter-terrorist agent Jack Bauer on Fox's *24*. I would like to take a moment to talk to you about something that I think is very important. Now, while terrorism is obviously one of the most critical challenges facing our nation and the world, it is important to recognise that the American Muslim community stands firmly

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<sup>1</sup> A fictional series produced by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran, about United States Counter Terrorism Unit agent, Jack Bauer, played by Kiefer Sutherland. The show emulates 'real time', with each one-hour episode representing one hour of the day and each series taking place over the course of 24 hours. *24* aired from 2001 to 2010.

beside their fellow Americans in denouncing and resisting all forms of terrorism. So in watching *24*, please, bear that in mind. (*24* 2005)

This short disclaimer can only be viewed as an overt attempt to counteract the dominant reading of the text, namely that there is a link between terrorism and Islam. While it is unlikely the disclaimer had any real effect on how audiences read the series, it points to a single pertinent issue. Specifically, it highlights the power of representation on screen and the ramifications of persistent negative representation repeatedly disseminated to a sizeable audience.

After the events of 9/11 American Arab and Muslim community members reported over 2000 'backlash incidents' (Panagopoulos 2006, p. 609), with the FBI recording a '17-fold increase in anti-Muslim crimes' across the United States in 2001 (Panagopoulos 2006, p. 609). A Pew Research Centre poll (2007, p. 35) indicated that Muslims in America were primarily concerned with 'discrimination and prejudice', noting that one-third of the American Muslim population had reported experiences of verbal or physical harassment or had been 'treated with suspicion because of their faith' within a 12-month period (Pew Research Centre 2007, p. 35).

Thus, the fear addressed by CAIR and the power of representation in fostering that fear both seem to have legitimate grounds. Said (1997, p. xvi) posits that the work of scholars on the subject of Islam has been overridden by 'journalists making extravagant statements, which are instantly picked up and further dramatized by the media'. Shaheen (2009, p. 2) adds that the media's dramatisation of issues relating to Arabs, compounded by the negative fictional depictions of Arab characters, can alter the way we perceive reality. That is, if we are continuously shown images that depict Arabs as terrorists and criminals, then our reality is eventually comprised of Arabs who are terrorists and criminals, particularly if we have no 'real' experiences to counteract these.

In much the same vein, if we are repeatedly shown Hollywood images of Arabs as Muslims and Muslims as Arabs, we are unlikely to differentiate between the two, and will assume that the two groups of people are in fact one (Shaheen 2008, p. XIII). Hollywood examples of these associations hark back to several decades before 9/11. The 1986 film *Hostage* (directed by Hanro Möhr and Percival Rubens) is set in the city of Nairobi, and depicts Palestinian fighters belonging to 'The Holy Freedom Party of Allah' who hijack and kill innocent civilians, including other Palestinians (Shaheen 2009, p. 270). More recently the 2007 film *The Kingdom* (directed by Peter Berg), set in Saudi Arabia, portrays Muslim/Arab men as 'evil, machine gun-toting' men who 'lurk in the shadows waiting to kill Americans' (Shaheen 2008, p. 26).

The American film and television scene is particularly relevant to Australian viewers because much of the content that we consume is produced in the United States. This, and the fact that Australia has maintained particularly close relations with the United States since the Prime Ministership of John Howard, continues to influence our perception of a global Other.

While Australia does not boast a significant history of featuring Arab and Muslim Australians in fictional programs and films, images generated by regular news stories construct a limited understanding of *what* they are, not *who* they might be. By reducing representations of Arab Australians and Muslims to the common image of thuggish youth at best and dangerous terrorists at worst, an entire population is dehumanised and placed outside definitions of 'Australianness'. Sadly this negative representation does not appear to be changing, with current Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, recently calling for a tightening of anti-terror laws in the aftermath of the discovery that about 100 Australians are fighting in Syria and Iraq alongside Islamic State militants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The laws would place the burden on people travelling to 'terror hot spots' to prove that they were not engaged in terrorist activity. Some of the greatest concerns have been expressed by members of the Muslim community, who believe that they will be unfairly targeted, and humanitarian aid workers who may feel they haven't substantial evidence to warrant their entry into these regions (Hosny 2014). Coining a now infamous phrase, Abbott declared that he expected 'everyone to be on



While this thesis deals with fictional, not news media, representations, I will argue that a strong element of intertextuality operates in how these texts are read. Although these proposed changes in law took place after the texts in this thesis were produced, they assist in demonstrating the significance of this project. As Muslims and Arabs continue to be objects of scrutiny in Australian politics and media, how we see them in fictional texts is important for understanding how we will continue to deal with them.

Although there is hardly a surplus of Arab and Muslim Australians represented in fictional texts, Australian productions are beginning to be more inclusive of Arab and Muslim characters. Thus, it is important to undertake a critical discourse analysis of *how* these emerging characters and storylines are constructed in order to understand the place of fictional representation in the construction of the discursive Other.

Like the ruthless Italian in *The Godfather*, the barbaric Arab/Muslim<sup>3</sup> is framed as deviant and situated outside of mainstream Australian culture. In both instances their lives are depicted as a thing of fascination, beyond the understanding of 'ordinary' Americans or Australians. This fascination further marginalises these groups by presenting them, as Said (1978) argues, as being beyond our realm of comprehension – something truly foreign and in need of study. News representation of Arabs and Muslims as innately 'foreign' reinforces this. Time and again we see front-page headlines that question the compatibility of Islam with 'Australian values' and we are led to ponder what the inherent problem with Arab and Muslim culture might be. This is in addition to regular news coverage of 'ethnic crime', gangs and violence that typically features Arab and Muslim Australians. The categories of Arab and Muslim are conflated due to the close association of Arab culture with Islam, owing to a long history of secularising the

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Team Australia' (Yaxley 2014). While social commentators, academics and ordinary Australians alike are still debating what exactly this might mean, the consensus seems to be that the term further marginalises and divides.

<sup>3</sup> In this thesis the phrase Arab/Muslim will be used when referencing an instance of interchangeability between Arabs and Muslims. Contrarily, the term Arab-Muslim will be used in reference to characters or instances when the subject is both Arab and Muslim.

Orient (Said 1978, p. 120). Over the years the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities in Australia have come to be almost indistinguishable in public conversations. Recent surveys (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007; Dandy & Pe-Pua 2010; Markus 2013) have determined that the average Australian harbours increasingly 'negative sentiments' towards migrants from the Middle East, despite the obvious diversity among people from this region.

I therefore hypothesise that these popular culture productions reinforce a similar mode of Orientalist thinking, centering on the division between Arabs and Islam in opposition to the White West. Examples of this already exist in Australian television, with the true crime television series *Underbelly: The Golden Mile* reinforcing an already problematic understanding of the Arab Other. The series tells the story of Lebanese Kings Cross nightclub owner and entrepreneur John Ibrahim. Although the show illustrates real police corruption that led to the 1995 Wood Royal Commission,<sup>4</sup> it also portrays young Arab men as being involved in organised crime and illegal drug deals – images that once again reinforced the deviance of Arab men. Yin (2013, p. 138) argues that '[p]opular culture is equally, if not more, powerful [than news media] in the creation and perpetuation of the negative cultural/racial Other'. She posits that popular culture has 'ethnographical power in constructing non-Western cultures'. In other words, she suggests that audiences perceive an element of truth to the representations that they view on screen and become emotionally invested in them.

On the other hand, reality television in Australia has recently allowed for more positive images of Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities. Series such as *The Amazing Race Australia*<sup>5</sup> and *MasterChef Australia*<sup>6</sup> arguably offer opportunities to

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<sup>4</sup> Justice James Wood oversaw the commission, which investigated the extent of police corruption in the New South Wales police force. The final report was released in 1997 and included many recommendations, one being that a permanent commission be set up to investigate police misconduct (Police Integrity Commission, 1997, p. 494).

<sup>5</sup> *The Amazing Race* is a series where teams of two travel the globe in search of clues that assist them in completing set challenges in a specified period of time.

<sup>6</sup> *MasterChef* is a program where talented home cooks are required to compete in a number of cooking challenges in order to determine who is Australia's best home cook.

see members of these communities as individuals with personalities, rather than as members of a demonised collective. *The Amazing Race* (2011) featured two friends of Arab-Muslim backgrounds, Mohammed El-leissy and Mostafa Haroun. The pair became known as Mo and Mos. Although they were eliminated early in the series, the two won the hearts of many Australian viewers (Quinn 2011). The boys developed a reputation for being equal parts self-deprecating (usually making jokes about their weight), and embracing of whatever comes. Similarly, Amina El-Shafei featured on *MasterChef Australia* in 2012 where she soon became ‘everyone’s best friend’ (Yaqoob 2014). With an obvious passion and talent for cooking, El-Shafei became one of *MasterChef’s* most successful and recognised contestants. As this research will highlight, fictional television and film have attempted to humanise the Arab and Muslim Other, while also bringing to light alternative Australian narratives.

The creators of the three case studies explored in this thesis – *East West 101* (*EW101*), *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* – claim that they were attempts at challenging the Orientalist construction of the Arab/Muslim Other. Through a critical discourse analysis this research will explore how these texts in fact ultimately reinforce the Orientalist/assimilationist dynamic, despite their conscious effort to resist this narrow construction of Arab and Muslim Australians.

### **The Texts**

*EW101* tells the story of 30-something Iraqi-Australian Muslim detective Zain Malik, referred to by his colleagues as ‘Malik’. The series first went to air on Australia’s Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in 2007 and, as I will demonstrate, sought to function as a peephole into Australia’s Muslim community in a post-September 11 world. It served to highlight the layers of prejudice that Australia’s Arab and Muslim communities deal with on a daily basis. This thesis will unpack the various ways in which the series did this and will also point to the limitations

of such a show. It will then explain how *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* seek to operate in a similar manner.

*The Combination* (2009) was written and produced by Lebanese-Australian actor George Basha. The film follows the story of two young brothers, John and Charlie Morkos, who have grown up without a father figure and learn the hard way the consequences of drug dealing. John has just been released from jail, while Charlie seems to be on a sure path to incarceration, as he discovers the luxurious lifestyle associated with drug dealing and consumption. George Basha, writer of and actor in the film, explained that it attempts to offer an account of the various reasons that young Arab men find themselves in the world of drugs. He sees this film as a chance to reclaim 'Lebaneseness' stating:

I was fighting for what my parents stood for ... because their generation never caused any of these problems ... You know all this stuff that's happening here ... It's an Australian problem. But the minute they know he's Arab or he's Muslim, it's on the media and it's the first thing they talk about and I want to change that. (Basha 2013)

Basha claims that this film is mostly autobiographical, unlike Serhat Caradee's *Cedar Boys*.

*Cedar Boys* (2009) was written and directed by Turkish-Australian actor Serhat Caradee. The film is in a similar vein to Basha's *The Combination*, but features a greater contrast between life in Sydney's eastern and western suburbs. The film tells the story of three friends who stumble upon the criminal underworld and naively believe they will get away with deceit. Like that of Charlie, the story of Tarek, Sam and Nabil ends with the death of the lead protagonist (Tarek). Caradee disclosed that his intention in producing this film was similar to Basha's, in that he hoped to demonstrate why young men fall into this lifestyle. His narrative was influenced by the stories he saw on the nightly news about young Arabic-speaking men.

I think I wanted to give an insight into this world and at the time I started writing it the Middle Eastern boys were portrayed in a very negative way and they were only on the news when they did something wrong. And no-one asked why they were doing things wrong. No-one asked how or who their role models are and how and why they make these choices to fall into this world. (Caradee 2011)

Both of these films will be critically analysed in order to gain an understanding of whether or not they successfully achieved the goals that their creators set out to achieve.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research will draw heavily on the work of postcolonial scholars, including Said and Hage, who have analysed how modes of representation shape how 'we' come to understand 'them'. While the thesis also draws generally on the classic works of Fanon (1986), Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1996; 1997), it homes in on the literature produced by Noble, Poynting, Collins and Tabar (Poynting et al. 2004; Collins et al. 2000; Noble 2007; Noble, Poynting & Tabar 1999; Tabar 2010) in particular. These scholars offer a focused and contextualised understanding of how and when Orientalism operates in Australia and the effects that this has on young men from Arabic-speaking and Muslim backgrounds. Importantly, it also considers how these young men negotiate masculinity and belonging in the face of marginalisation. This literature is used in this research to make sense of the onscreen characterisation of the young Arab men in each of these texts.

### ***Orientalism***

Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), was an exploration of how texts – written, spoken or visual – brought the Orient into existence and defined it in terms of Europeans. Said explored how language has been used to construct ideas of the Oriental Other in a way that reinforces the superiority of Europe. The history

of Orientalism will be further explored in the following chapter. Said's work has subsequently been used to understand a number of media texts, including news and popular culture. It has therefore proven to be a useful concept for understanding how power dynamics play out in fictional and non-fictional texts. Importantly, it allows us to see these texts as reflective of the period within which they have been constructed, influenced by their social and political contexts.

### ***Whiteness***

Inspired by Said's work on Orientalism, the concept of 'whiteness', as discussed by Hage (1998), is used in this thesis as a means of explaining the desired cultural affiliations within the Australian context. Rather than using the term 'Anglo', this thesis mostly uses 'whiteness' or 'white' to describe what might also be seen as Anglo culture as it implies and recognises a particular power dynamic, one that is absent in use of the term Anglo.<sup>7</sup>

As Hage (1998:19) notes, use of the term Anglo or Anglo-celtic often would exclude those who are not Anglo but identify as white and relate strongly to the 'White nation' fantasy. Thus the term 'whiteness' is used to signify, not an experience, but an 'aspiration' (Hage, 1998:20). This experience of whiteness includes fantasies about cultural domination premised on the assumption of cultural superiority 'born out of the history of European expansion' (Hage, 1998:20). This fantasy is obviously not exclusive to those who are Anglo-celtic and thus the term whiteness becomes an all encompassing label for those who aspire to cultural domination through assimilation or otherwise.

### **Aims of the Project**

While many questions arise concerning the fictional representation of Arab and Muslim Australians, this research focuses on three interrelated aspects of representation. Primarily it seeks to understand *how* these representations are

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<sup>7</sup> Whiteness is used in this thesis in instances where a power dynamic is implied or evident. When, however, describing a position of neutrality, the term 'Anglo' or 'Anglo-Celtic' will be used.

constructed and whether they are as progressive and edgy as producers have claimed, or whether there is still a strong underlying current of Orientalist discourse evident in each of them. It then takes this one step further and considers online responses to these texts as a way of offering a holistic understanding of the way that they are read and understood. Thus, this thesis deals with the question:

To what extent do cultural productions such as *EW101*, *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* open up a space for new understandings of the place of Arab and Muslim Australians in contemporary Australia?

This thesis will argue that the representations of Arab/Muslim men in each of these three case studies are positioned in terms of Orientalist binaries, which only further reinforce the ideal of Australia as a 'White Nation' (Hage 1998). Despite reinforcing this ideal, this thesis further argues that, despite the Orientalist undertones, these stories ought to be recognised and told. In the case of *EW101* the series deserves attention because cultural producers present depictions of cultural and religious minorities as a rich multicultural experience. However, closer examination reveals that these claims to a rich multicultural experience are superficial and that the series ultimately sustains a cultural hegemony that acknowledges diversity without disrupting the existing cultural hierarchy. The films also offer insight into how resistant forms of Australian masculinity are being developed and understood. With a continuing realisation that there is no single Australian 'masculinity' but instead Australian 'masculinities', the films will allow the wider community to see these expressions of masculinity and hopefully generate wider acceptance of these young men, creating a greater sense of social cohesion. Such a contribution arguably makes these films valuable, despite their polarising portrayals of white Australia and Arab Australians.

## **Methodology**

This thesis uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to understand how representations of the Arab and Muslim Other are constructed in these productions. A more detailed explanation of how this was undertaken will be explored in the following chapter.

CDA sheds light on how texts, and the language used to construct or produce them might be read in specific social contexts. CDA 'takes consideration of the context of language use' (Wodak 2001, p. 1), giving prominence to the concepts of power, history and ideology (Wodak 2001, p. 2). CDA recognises that no text is free of the social and historical period in which it has been produced. Therefore CDA takes into careful consideration structures of power, recognising that not all interactions take place on equal terms but acknowledging that sometimes subordinate groups can also exercise power through resistance (Wodak 2001, p. 2).

CDA and Said's concept of Orientalism offer distinct but complementary ways of analysing the texts. CDA offers a process for analysing the texts, while Orientalism sheds insight into how we might explain these power dynamics.

## **The Problem or 'Gap' in the Research**

Orientalism looks at the history of the discursive construction of the Arab and Muslim as Other. Several previous CDA research projects of television programs and films produced in the United States and Canada (see Shaheen, 2008; Shaheen, 2009; Hussain, 2010) have discussed this very construction. These studies have argued that such series offer what is still a very limited portrayal of Arab and Muslim Americans and Canadians. Overwhelmingly the researchers have concluded that the series represent Arab and Muslim characters as dangerous. Shaheen (2008, p. XV) notes, however, that there has been a slight improvement in some these representations since 2001.



While there is a growing interest in these fictional depictions, in Australia the literature is still very limited. Research on the characterisation and representation of various other minority cultural groups, particularly Greek and Italian communities, has provided valuable insights into the representation of both Australianness and Otherness in recent decades. This research will build on and add to this area of inquiry. In particular, it will take the few existing pieces of literature written about these case studies and offer a more in-depth analysis of their findings, using them as a springboard for the premise of this thesis. The findings of these articles will be discussed in the following chapter.

This research reinforces the idea of hegemonic approaches to national identity. It will argue that, while these approaches are themselves problematic, they are necessary stepping-stones if a more mature phase of cultural production is ever to be reached (Hall, 1996). In Hall's understanding, this means that they allow us to move from a simple set of 'bad' representations to a set of 'good' representations and ultimately to representations that are neither exclusively good nor bad. In that final phase the complexity and distinctiveness of individual characters will be the main emphasis, rather than an overly racialised portrait of 'ethnic' characters. This thesis will reinforce the claim that the 'problems' with these texts have less to do with the authenticity of the text, as it will be demonstrated that the stories told in these films are reflective of the stories of *some* young Arab Australians (both Muslim and otherwise). The 'problem' is that the only stories that seem to generate interest are stories where young men enact a deviant masculinity or national identity (or both) and confirm existing stereotypes. This thesis therefore acknowledges the problematic nature of these representations but stresses their importance, based on the fact that these voices are almost always silenced in discussions about expressions of masculinity and national identity.

One of the clearest limitations of this project is the genre in which the texts are situated. The crime genre's obvious need for 'good versus bad' characters and storylines automatically creates a binary. While it was the initial intention of this

project to undertake a comparison of crime texts with comedic ones, it became apparent early on that there was not (and arguably there still is not) enough material to make such a comparison. This is in itself revealing, as it may indicate that the Australian screen industry is unwilling to support Arab/Muslim cultural identities being portrayed in a lighter, potentially more humanising, genre. While it may have been that comedic texts could allow for a less 'binary' approach to characterisation, it was decided that an in-depth analysis of crime texts could offer a sound basis to which future research might add.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One begins by situating the research in existing literature, beginning with Said's esteemed work *Orientalism* and recognising the influence of scholars like Franz Fanon. The second chapter then provides an Australian context by offering an account of important recent events that have further been used to demonise Australia's Arab and Muslim community.

Chapter Three will explain how *EW101* offers realistic depictions of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Wise 2009) through the normalisation of cultural difference in the workplace. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate how Malik's life is presented as a hybrid mix of Arab, Australian and Muslim practices in a way that promotes hybridity as an asset. Chapter Four then explores how the characters in *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* demonstrate a form of protest masculinity, which seeks to challenge the rigid definition of masculinity characterised by the iconic white lifesaver. Telling the story of Other masculinities validates their experience and recognises their existence as a legitimate expression within the Australian context.

Chapter Five introduces a more critical analysis of the productions, outlining how *EW101* maintains the ideal of whiteness in order to promote a 'White Nation Fantasy' (Hage 1998). Through an analysis of Malik and a second Arab-Muslim character, it will demonstrate that accumulating markers of whiteness makes one a more acceptable citizen of the multicultural nation. Chapter Six will then argue that, while *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* attempt to tell the story of disenfranchised youth, they reinforce caricatured portraits of white Australia and Australian Arabs. It will further argue that this binary is reflected in the experiences of the producers and writers themselves, who then bring their polarised understanding to the screen.

Chapter Seven, through an analysis of five online discussion forums, will consider the disjuncture that sometimes occurs between what producers intended when they created the text and how audiences read the text in light of the social, political and historical climates in which they have been produced.

The conclusion summarises the main findings and discusses the implications of the research for both scholarly and practitioner communities engaged with the representation of cultural minorities in popular culture. It suggests that there are a number of external factors, which are named throughout the research, that influence the portrayal of Arab and Muslim communities in televisual fiction, such as limited funding budgets allocated for 'multicultural' programming.

The following chapter will now situate the research within a postcolonial framework and explain the methodology of this research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PLACE OF THEORY

#### **Situating the Research**

*Intentionally or unintentionally, images teach people whom to fear, whom to hate, and whom to love. (Shaheen 1997, p. 11)*

*The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and realistic.*

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

This chapter will bring together the important concepts utilised throughout this dissertation. It will begin by situating the concepts of 'Orientalism' as examined by Edward Said, and 'whiteness' as explored by Ghassan Hage and Aileen Moreton-Robinson within the broader field of postcolonial theory. Both terms have proven useful in understanding the positioning of Arab and Muslim Australians on the periphery of Australian culture. Through an understanding of research around identity, it will then explain how these concepts manifest themselves in modern representation of Arab and Muslim Australians and importantly how these representations impact on people's understanding of their own identity. It will further explore the effect such discourses have on conceptions of masculinity and belonging within the Australian national context.

#### ***Postcolonial Theory***

Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, and his subsequent writing on representing and understanding the Orient, as well as the work of intellectual heavyweights such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty, gave rise to the body of knowledge now often referred to as 'postcolonial theory'. The differences between the hyphenated form 'post-colonialism' and 'postcolonialism'

have been debated in academic literature (McLeod 2010, p. 6; Shohat 1992; Childs & Williams 1996). The former is said to refer to a period of time, namely that after colonialism. The non-hyphenated form of the word refers to the 'disparate forms of *representation, reading practices, attitudes and values*' (McLeod 2010, p. 6) shared and enacted by colonised people. Postcolonialism is used to frame a distinct approach to political and cultural theory, one that resists Eurocentrism and the assumptions that underlie much of Western theory on identity and culture – for example, an eternal opposition between the West and the East (Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1988; Young 2001; McLennan 2003). In particular, postcolonial theory accounts for 'hybridity' (Bhabha 1996), multiple variations in identity and goes beyond looking for a single shared heritage (Shohat 1992, p. 108). This is important for this research as the representation of hybrid or multiple identities is repeatedly explored through these case studies.

Postcolonial theory aims to destabilise any universal understanding of history or historical texts, be they academic or other sources (Moore-Gilbert 1997, p. 7). It is used as a means of resistance to colonial narratives that have typically ignored the traumatic experiences of colonised subjects. Like feminism, it is able to foreground subjectivity and personal experience and does not require that a single methodology be followed, giving weight to a range of objectives and priorities (Young 2001, p. 64), thus making it beneficial in the discussion of race, ethnicity and, in this case, religion.

The discussion of the postcolonial attempts to move away from a discussion of the colonial subject or Orient as deficient or problematic. Rather, it affords agency to Oriental peoples and allows them to take control of how their stories are told. For centuries the Orient has been viewed as a problem in need of a Western solution. 'Oriental' societies were viewed as primitive and barbaric, as evidenced in all aspects of social life from their 'backward' forms of government to their 'oppressive' treatment of women. Du Bois (1989, p. 1) poignantly asked: 'How does it feel to be a problem?' It is this very problematising and devaluing of cultures and

people through an embedded language of inferiority that postcolonial theory aims to explore (Young 2001, p. 274).

In order to better understand the discursive positioning of the Arab over time we turn to the concept of Orientalism, based on the work of literary theorist, Edward Said, with particular focus on the body of work of the same name (1978).

### ***Colonising the Other***

This section will explain the historical roots of Orientalism and demonstrate *how* Arabs and Muslims came to be widely accepted as a universal Other. This section will then contrast Said's explanation of the effect of colonisation with Bhabha's less constrictive understanding of the ambivalent experience of the colonial subject. It will further demonstrate how both explanations are useful in the undertaking of this research and contribute to the growing field of literature in critical race theory, specifically work related to understanding whiteness.

### *Orientalism*

For Said the colonisation of the Middle East continued to have grave consequences that are deeply embedded in the language used to discuss the region and the people who inhabit it. Ultimately, his understanding of the way this colonisation continues to permeate the region is rooted in the polarising of the world into East and West, or Orient and Occident as he opts for, where West or Occident is always considered superior.

Orientalism is a complex term. Firstly, Said describes it as a divisive way of thinking based on 'ontological and epistemological distinctions between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"' (Said 1978, p. 2). The Orient refers to 'the collective noun, which has been used to homogenise and refer to' people from North African and Middle Eastern lands (McLeod 2010, p. 47). The primary function of Orientalism is determining the role of institutions in relating to, and dealing with, the Orient (Said 1978, p. 3). In this instance colonisation could be

justified because of the knowledge produced about the Orient, relating to their inferior positioning, through the various modes of representation discussed below.

Orientalism in the form we understand it today is a result of secularisation that resulted in a move away from viewing the world simply in terms of Christianity and Islam (Said 1978, p. 120) and instead understanding it as Europe and the Arab world. The spread of Orientalism is indebted to four processes: expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy and classification.

As European exploration extended beyond Islamic lands, the presence of other Orientals, savages, and monsters was continuously reported on. Thus, the idea of expansion relates to the age of exploration and colonisation, which fostered an understanding that the Orient could be seen all around Europe in various forms. Such imagery assisted in keeping Europe at the centre of the world and maintained ethnocentric racial hierarchies (Said 1978, p. 117).

This expansion led to an ongoing historical confrontation between Europe and the Arab world inevitably resulting in the demonisation of the Arab. However, rather than take the Orient as a fixed enemy created by the European, this process involved allowing 'Arab' or 'Islamic' texts to speak for themselves. By offering excerpts and interpretations or translations from Oriental texts, eighteenth-century Europeans could easily reinforce their moral superiority. Such an example includes the translation of the *Quran* by George Sale (Said 1978, p. 117). This reinforced European superiority by demonstrating the alien 'Otherness' of the Arab through their own words.

Such comparisons often led to a historical sympathy. More positive understandings of the Orient began to arise, for example in the works of Mozart or the selective dealings of Napoleon, who saw beyond the 'doctrinal walls' and 'identified hidden elements of kinship' between him and the Orient (Said 1978, p. 118). Said posits that in both *The Magic Flute* and *The Abduction from Seraglio* Mozart locates 'a particularly magnanimous form of humanity in the Orient'.

However, Said (1978, p. 119) acknowledges that these depictions of the Orient were overshadowed by more sinister or 'exotic' representations that existed within academic works. The process of classification therefore arose from this academic form of Orientalism. Said (1978, p. 119) describes this as the 'dramatizing [of] general features' and 'reducing vast numbers of objects to a smaller number of orderable and describable *types*'. Types, according to Said, have 'particular character', which allow one to take physical characteristics and make moral generalisations, for example the classification of the 'African' as 'black, phlegmatic, lax' (Said 1978, p. 119), making the academic Orientalist more of a scientist than a cultural critic.

These factors combined to allow for greater understanding and increased control of the Orient on the terms of the Occident. Through an expansion of empire and greater exposure to original texts produced by the Orient, such as translations of the *Quran* (Said 1978, p. 117), the Orientalist (one who explored the Orient) was able to create spaces of understanding whereby the similarities between Orient and Occident were explored and sympathy was invoked (Said 1978, p. 118). This was deemed important because it was believed that cultures were 'bound together by a ... national idea which an outsider could penetrate only by an act of historical sympathy' (Said 1978, p. 118).

Such detailed insight into the ways of the Orient led to the inevitable need to classify their physical and moral behaviours/characteristics, generally associating them with primal or primitive labels (Said 1978, p. 120). This further allowed colonisers to hierarchically order certain characteristics that were not possessed by the colonised as being more highly revered, a mindset often internalised by the Orient in a process referred to by Fanon (1986) as 'colonising the mind'. This occurs when the colonising powers encourage the colonised to internalise colonialist language and logic, a point that will be further explored below.

There was great importance placed on turning to the original sources in order to



understand the Orient. Some scholars dedicated their work and their life to understanding original texts of the Orient. This, they assured their populations, was necessary as the work of the Orient was so obscure that it could not be understood by the lay European. It instead required the knowledge of an expert. This legitimised the purpose of the professional Orientalist, demonstrating how their work was a meticulous art that required dedication. To study the Orient was to engage in a difficult field of inquiry, to decipher their ways proved strenuous as it was revealed that they had neither the 'taste' nor the 'critical spirit' of the European (Said 1978, p. 128). Their simplicity was a science unto itself. In light of this, it also legitimised the partial translation and publication of short excerpts from the original texts, rather than whole works. It meant that the job of the Orientalist was to 'present the Orient by a series of representative fragments' (Said 1978, p. 128).

In addition to interpreting the texts of the Orient, the Orientalists also constructed their own in many genres (Said 1978, p. 4). Orientalist texts include travel memoirs or travelogues such as the works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, history books, academic writings, poetry and stories of imaginative fiction that preceded even the works of Austen and Dickens. The inferences in such works rarely varied and Europe came to *know* the Orient well.

It is through the struggle and study of the Orientalist that we understand the Orient. It is the Orientalist that brings the Orient into being through a discursive construction, uncovering what has been lost or hidden and making it familiar. Importantly this process highlights that the *reality* of the Orient is interchangeable with the *representations* of the Orient created by the Orientalist (Said 1978, p. 129).

Similar understandings of Arab and Muslim cultures are experienced today. With a lack of engagement by the mainstream communities with the Arab and Muslim communities in Australia, many Australians rely on representations of these communities in place of any real interaction or experience. It is this reality that makes the research undertaken in this thesis of great importance. When nations

rely heavily on representations and loaded language as a replacement to reality persistent negative representation can have grave consequences for the community group in question.

In the third section of *Orientalism* entitled 'Orientalism Now', Said divided Orientalism into two components, namely latent and manifest (Said 1978, p. 206). Latent Orientalism can be described as the static ideas underpinning various literary works over time. Manifest Orientalism is the various forms these ideas take and through which they are perpetuated. As McLeod (2010, p. 52) succinctly outlined the former is like a 'blueprint', while the latter is the various ways in which these are expressed, for example in the form of travelogues, books, films and comics. While inevitably the Manifest forms will vary over time and be influenced by culture and context, the Latent understanding will always remain, meaning that the Orient will always be considered inferior, delinquent, and deviant, no matter where and how it appears. The Orient is 'irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; in contrast, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal"' (Said 1978, p. 40). These classifications legitimised the ruling status of colonial powers, making them seem natural.

Said describes Manifest Orientalism as a type of 'convergence' (Said 1978, p. 222). By this he means that the job of the Orientalist for years had been to decipher the Orient on behalf of the East and portray the Orient in a way that could be understood by the Occident. In doing so, however, the Occident was always looking from a distance, indicating that there was always a limit to how well the Occident could understand the Orient because it was always at least slightly beyond it.

Once determined, Orientalist understandings of the Orient were considered 'knowledge' and disseminated through records kept and stories told by various travellers, scholars and literary authors. When the information of all influential writers was banded together it created a consistently 'quintessential Orient'. Through repetition without variation, the Orient took on a generally understood meaning (Said 1978, p. 222). The authority of the author and the repetition of his

claims by other authors, sufficed as replacement for any lived experience.

Said, extending on the work of philosopher Michel Foucault, discusses the knowledge/power nexus. He explains that the 'knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control' (Said 1978, p. 36). Colonial powers were able to control the Orient because they had knowledge of *what* they were. Orientals were always the same, there was little variation within and among them and governing them required only slight variation (Said 1978, p. 38). The reproduction of such a discourse occurred through the constant representation of the Arab Other through art, literature, poetry and fable.

At the crux of Said's explanation of Orientalism was the pivotal point that East and West, Occident and Orient depended upon one another for their own understanding of themselves. One could not exist without the other by which to compare it. When Said speaks of the Orient having 'helped to define Europe' (Said 1978, p. 1), he recognises this interdependence. At the very centre of all binary classifications is the notion that one part of the binary must be somehow superior to the other. In the case of Orientalism, the Western 'us' is superior to the Oriental 'them' (Said 1978, p. 46). Part of this superiority is reinforced through the classification of moral behavior described above. This, as Fanon (1986) discusses, leads to the colonised people accepting their position of inferiority through a colonisation of the mind. He explains that once a person's identity is defined for them in negative terms as in the example below, they cannot but see themselves as an Other. This Other like Said's Other is inferior and lacking, a feeling that is continuously reinforced through language.

Fanon explains the story of the young child who points at him and exclaims numerous times, 'Look, a Negro!' Fanon described his reaction thus: 'I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object ... All I wanted was to be a man amongst other men' (Fanon 1986, pp. 112-113). This

excerpt underscores the power of language to reinvent Fanon as 'the Negro', as the other, and as the child continues, 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' we realise that the depth of the history of otherness is woven into the word 'negro' and carried through every use of the phrase.

*Ambivalence and Mimicry – Limiting Colonial Discourse*

Bhabha suggests a different reading of minority acceptance of dominance by ruling forces in terms of the concept of national identity. While Said argues that the discourses are constructed, reproduced and, therefore, acted upon as if they were inherently true, Bhabha in his famous essay 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation' (1994, pp. 199-244) argues that colonial discourse is in fact ineffective given its 'ambivalence'. Bhabha, like Said, argues that colonial discourse (he does not use the plural) works to construct the Orient in a way that legitimises the colonising of land and people. He, however, believes that it is not always successful because discourses between coloniser and colonised are often in conflict (McLeod 2010, p. 63).

Bhabha, like Said, identifies the polarising use of language to bring into being the colonised. He speaks of a dichotomy between the 'colonial subject' and the 'colonising subject' (1994, p. 107), the equivalent of Said's Orient and Occident respectively. Bhabha's concepts of 'ambivalence', 'mimicry' (1994, p. 121) and his identification of what he terms a 'third-space' are of particular significance to this research and will briefly be explored below.

Unlike Said, whose work is influenced by Michel Foucault, Bhabha's work draws heavily on the work of psychoanalyst, Frantz Fanon, and poststructuralist Jacques Lacan through his discussion of colonial discourse as 'ambivalent' and eternally fractured. Like Said, however, Bhabha too considers the purpose of colonial discourse as one which constructs the colonial subject as degenerate and less than its colonising counterpart (1994, p. 70). However, a great criticism of Said is that he treats colonial discourses as static and unchallenged, suggesting that texts are consistent in the discourse they purport, never challenging them (Gandhi, 1998).

While Bhabha acknowledges the function of colonial discourse as a way to create an understanding of *what* the other is, he believes that colonial discourse was more volatile than suggested by Said.

Bhabha agrees with Said that it is the stereotype, created through language (written or imaged), that functions to both bring the colonised into the realm of understanding of the coloniser and maintain a distance between themselves and the colonial subject (Bhabha 1994, p. 107). Unlike Said, he deems this the reason for its limited success. He argues that to at once claim that something is entirely foreign, strange and mysterious beyond comprehension, yet perfectly knowable, as degenerate and problematic, is to create a jarring inconsistency that undermines the very discourse used to bring the colonial subject into existence. Bhabha terms this disjuncture 'ambivalence', as Western understanding is always ruptured between their discursive construction of the other and their inability to be understood (Bhabha 1994, pp. 121-131). 'Colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible' (Bhabha 1994, pp. 104-105). It is due to this ambivalence that the stereotype struggles to wield power.

The purpose of the stereotype then is to freeze or fix the contradictory positions of the colonial subject so that it may finally be understood. It is in this fixing that the distance from which the coloniser is looking is lessened and, through employing the language of the coloniser, the colonised is finally brought into being on the terms of understanding of the former. However, it cannot simply be that the coloniser accepts any similarity between themselves and the colonised; therefore, the stereotype must contain a level of Otherness. Hence the stereotype operates as an expression of colonial discourse, again installing and disavowing difference (McLeod 2010, p. 64). This ambivalence in representation makes the colonial subject capable of 'domestication' but also 'wild' (McLeod 2010, p. 64). The colonial subject is always moving between these two positions: on the one hand it appears capable of becoming like 'us', on the other hand it is apparent that he or she is much too different to ever be like 'us'.

This movement and the inability to fix the Other, even through stereotyping, is what make the repetition of stereotypes important. But this very repetition demonstrates the coloniser's inability to 'fix' the colonised. '[T]he *same old* stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 111). Thus, colonial discourse repeatedly fails because it can neither make the colonised entirely the same as, or completely different to, the coloniser.

As Fanon (1986) explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*, colonisation often led to colonial subjects voluntarily becoming more like their colonisers. This process of becoming more like the one who oppresses is what Bhabha (1994, p. 121) refers to as 'mimicry'. However, since the colonised can never be entirely like the coloniser they can simply attain certain features and signs that make them more like their oppressors. Bhabha says of the colonised who attempts to behave like an Englishman but is never accepted as one, 'to be anglicised is emphatically *not* to be English' (1994, p. 125). Just as the representation of the Other lingers somewhere between the same as and entirely different to the coloniser, so too do 'mimic men'. Their presence, however, is unsettling as it always makes evident the ambivalence of colonial discourse. It further questions how 'exclusive' the traits of the coloniser are if they can easily be adopted and learned by the colonised. This continues to serve as a reminder that colonial discourse is fractured and inconsistent, always presenting the possibility that it might cave in on itself.

Similar to mimicry explained by Bhabha, whiteness, as described below, can also be acquired by dominated groups to make them 'almost the same, but not quite' (1994, p. 86). Unlike Bhabha's understanding of mimicry, the acquisition of whiteness is considered a means of creating social harmony on terms of the white majority.

### *Whiteness*

Undeniably the work of Said, Bhabha and Fanon has helped to explain the inferior position of the colonised. However, in a 'multicultural' context like Australia it is important to garner an understanding of how nations who purport to value difference nevertheless maintain a hierarchy where the coloniser is still on top. Though Said and Bhabha wrote more generally, their ideas have great relevance within the Australian context.

Like much of the Arab world, Australia has also displayed obvious markers of a colonial history. Though the original inhabitants of the land, Aboriginal Australians have continuously been represented as objects about which we know, rarely in the position of the knower (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 75). In the same way that the Occident understands the Arab, the white majority understands non-white minorities, a binary that is as old as colonialism itself (Hage 1998, p. 58). Studies of 'race' in Australia and across much of the Western world have not, until recently, looked at the privileged subject position, structural location or cultural practices of whiteness. As a result 'the normative and dominant nature of whiteness remained invisible' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. vii) in discussions about race. The naming of whiteness is thus paramount in a postcolonial approach.

Whiteness 'is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 75). Whiteness has continued to function effectively due to its invisibility. The association of studies on race with cultures that are *other than* white seeks to normalise the existence of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1) and relegate *other* cultures to the position of the Orient, where they must be studied, by the coloniser. And being white is not about having white skin; rather, skin colour functions as a marker of whiteness and a reminder that whiteness is not fixed (Hage 1998, p. 58).

In order to understand how communicative strategies relate to cultural dominance we must understand how the existence of cultural hegemony, as discussed by

Gramsci, allows 'the laws, constitutions, theories, ideologies, and social institutions [to] express and ratify the domination of a particular class' (Hirst and Harrison, 2007:49). Gramsci himself did not offer a precise definition of cultural hegemony. As noted by Lears (1985, p568) however, scholars often quote his characterisation of hegemony, which allows for an understanding of the complexity of the process he discusses. Here Gramsci notes that hegemony is "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Lears 1985, p568). Simply expressed, hegemony is the acceptance of domination by subordinate classes, as the dominant class normalises their interests through a disguise of social and class inequality and, a mental acceptance of the customs of the dominant class (Hirst and Harrison 2007, p50). The normalisation of these practices is essential in contributing to the acceptance of domination of the ruling class by subordinate classes. In this way cultural hegemony is not about manipulation and deceit but instead, about consensual participation in a system that is disadvantageous to the masses.

In the Australian context this has occurred to the point where all issues relating to migration have been structured around the desires, needs and aspirations of white Australians (Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004, p. 208). Such an understanding relates to what Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage (1998) has termed the 'White nation fantasy'. 'It is a fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy' (Hage 1998, p. 18). This fantasy is not simply a desire expressed or imagined by a small group of neo-Nazis. Instead, the white nation fantasy applies to both white-racists and white-multiculturalists alike (Hage 1998, p. 18). Both groups share this fantasy insofar as they deem themselves nationalists and see themselves as authorities on who may and may not enter the national space (Hage 1998, pp. 17-18). In so doing they view non-whites, be they Aboriginal or otherwise, as 'national objects to be moved or removed according to White



national will' (Hage 1998, p. 18). The non-static nature of whiteness makes the concept of being completely white as fantastical as the white nation. What is significant is the perception individuals have about themselves, that they are white enough to 'yearn' for such a label. This yearning is what allows one to be thought of as white (Hage 1998, p. 58).

Hage (1998) and Elder, Ellis and Pratt (2004, p. 209) posit that white people of this persuasion 'assume that their place is at the centre or core of the nation', with non-whites positioned on the outside. This thesis discusses the effects of this marginalisation through film and television and explores the significance of placing the non-white subject at the centre of the plot.

Fanon (1986) speaks of this as a delay experienced by minorities, also known as a 'time lag' (Bhabha 1996, p. 56) where although minorities exist as hybrids in a globalised world they will forever exist on the opposing side of a white world. The time lag refers to the time it takes to see the discursive construction of the Other to form a part of post-colonial agency. While liberalism will attempt to create a world where all cultures are valued and appreciated equally, it ignores the history of the present. It ignores the feelings of disjuncture, both temporal and historical, and always places the minority outside of this, treating it as something that needs to be accommodated but not at the expense of 'compromising our basic political principles' (Taylor 1993, p. 63). In this thesis it is recognised that, while there is acknowledgement of the importance of cultural diversity, it can only be accommodated when it maintains the status quo, leaving the white centre intact – a notion that has not changed over time.

In order to maintain the hierarchy and continue to posit the supremacy of 'white' Australians as 'superior' the position of supremacy must go unchallenged. In order to do this it must appear invisible. The white mainstream therefore is not posited as a group who wish to maintain superiority but rather a group who are 'benign' and neutral. The 'benign mainstream' (Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004, p. 210) behaves as the metaphoric Switzerland of the Australian nation, working as if they have no

concern other than the protection of the 'national interest' and nothing to gain by ordering the nation in a particular way through deciding who enters and who belongs (Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004, p. 210). By both positioning the non-white Other outside the nation and keeping the protective invisibility of whiteness out of their reach, white Australia is able to include on its terms, in a way that never compromises its privilege.

The belief that one has a *right* to order the nation is referred to as 'governmental belonging' (Hage 1998, p. 46). This is not the same as the right to 'govern' in a formal state sense; it simply refers to the 'feeling that one is legitimately entitled in the course of everyday life to make a governmental/managerial statement about the nation ... or to have a governmental/managerial attitude towards others' (Hage 1998, p. 46). This feeling of legitimacy is what is important. It makes the person with a sense of governmental belonging feel that their opinions about the ordering of the state or an element of that ordering, such as foreign policy or border control, hold more weight than those of others, who are not considered to be in possession of governmental belonging.

Hage (1998) therefore argues that Others are able to find a greater sense of belonging in the white nation if they are able to accumulate whiteness. This accumulation is similar to the idea of mimicry as explored by Bhabha and carries with it some of the attributes of the Negro of Antilles as discussed by Fanon (1986) in his chapter on 'The Negro and Language'. Fanon explains 'The Negro of Antilles will be proportionately whiter; that is, he will come closer to being a real human being' (Fanon 1986, p. 18). He continues: 'The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle' (Fanon 1986, p. 18). Similarly non-white Australians can also adopt the habits and standards of white Australia and as a result increase their level of governmental belonging. However, the governmental belonging of the non-white can never be as secure or widely recognised as that of whites.

Nevertheless, what is important in Hage's consideration of whiteness is that individuals are given a level of agency. This is particularly important throughout this research as we consider the conscious decisions and subsequent outcomes of each of the central characters in these case studies. To deny them agency is to suggest that they are simply victims of their circumstances.

### ***Bourdieu and the Types of Capital***

Using Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' Hage (1998) unravels the intricate relationship between the migrant and the multicultural state. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, through a thorough exploration of French society, unpacks the concept of capital as something beyond a simple economic acquisition. Bourdieu sees capital as 'accumulated labor ... which when appropriated on a private (i.e., exclusive) basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor' (Bourdieu 1986, p. 241). The accumulation of capital in any of its forms allows one to move through the social world with various levels of ease. The more capital one attains in a particular field the more dominance one has in that field. This dominance is of course translated into power (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243).

Bourdieu explores four types of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243). Economic capital is that with immediate monetary value, while social capital refers to networks and connections with the various groups to which one belongs (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243). These networks are perceived as being of more significance if they can be converted into economic capital. Cultural capital, on the other hand, exists in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243). Embodied cultural capital is expressed through our disposition, tastes and accents (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244). Objectified cultural capital refers to objects one owns that possess cultural value, for example, books, art, music and the like (Bourdieu 1986, p. 246). Finally, institutionalised cultural capital refers to such things as educational qualifications recognised by institutions (Bourdieu 1986, p. 247). Generally, when these forms of cultural capital are converted into economic capital they are then viewed as being of greater importance. However, in

this instance, cultural capital is of benefit when it is converted into symbolic capital. That is, cultural capital is converted into recognition through an acknowledgment of national belonging, as will be discussed below.

That which is worthy of acquisition depends on what is valued within the field in which the actor is operating. Hage (1998, p. 58) defines a field as 'a market like structure in which individual and collective subjects are involved in various competitive and conflictual struggles over the accumulation and deployment of modalities of "capital"'. It is through acquiring specific and valuable modes of capital that one begins to dominate any given field. It is this 'acquisition' that will be explored throughout this thesis, especially in relation to Malik and his ability to dominate the field and move through it with greater ease and more success than other characters with whom he shares a cultural and/or religious affiliation.

#### *Accumulating Whiteness*

Hage focuses specifically on the accumulation of cultural capital in the field of 'national power', which he terms 'the field of whiteness' (Hage 1998, p. 57). He argues that acquiring whiteness is directly related to the accumulation of national capital. In accumulating national capital ordinary citizens are competing with one another for dominance in the field of whiteness. For Bourdieu our interactions in any field are much like an ongoing game, where reward is only given to players who adhere to the rules, though simply adhering to the rules is no guarantee of reward. The rules in this instance are defined by whiteness.

White cultural capital in all forms (embodied, objectified and institutionalised) is accumulated, so that over time citizens are viewed as more or less Australian. Possessing Australian citizenship, a form of institutionalised cultural capital, does not legitimate one's presence in the field of national power. Rather, it is attaining whiteness, in particular embodying whiteness, which allows one to claim a dominant status in the field. As whiteness has traditionally been linked to European colonialism, there is an element of natural possession in those Australians with a northern European heritage that makes it difficult for *Others* to

reach a similar state of acceptance. As Hage (1998, p. 56) indicates, however, being in possession of certain capital such as white skin, blonde hair and an Australian accent can increase one's level of whiteness. The value of each capital, however, varies according to history and context. For instance, having white skin, blonde hair and a European accent grants one a lesser level of whiteness than someone who has white skin, brown hair and an Australian accent, although 'blonde hair' is seen as a marker of whiteness. Whiteness is therefore prescribed by others but significantly shapes the experiences and understanding of one's own identity.

### ***Recognition and Identity***

Although commonly discussed and widely used, a precise meaning of identity is difficult to come by. However, many scholars agree that identity comprises both a personal and a social dimension. Fearon (1999, p. 2) argues that identity is used to consider both 'social categories and ... sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity'. Bottomley (1991) put forth two similar dimensions of identity based on the concept of recognition: the first, as with Fearon (1992), is a social category and the second a personal category. Trivedi (1993, p. 15) speaks of the processes of colonialism and postcolonialism as being two way processes of identification and self-identification. The process of being identified by others has been theorised in terms of recognition (Noble 2009c).

Keith and Pile (1993) explain that studies concerning identity have relied on either a freezing of identity in place and time, or focusing on categorical aspects of identity such as age, sex, race or religion. While both reduce identity to a manageable concept for study, neither captures the complexity nor the fluidity of such a concept (Noble 2009c, p. 876; Tabar, Noble & Poynting 2010, p. 11). To freeze identities can suggest that they are simple truths waiting to be discovered; instead they are created through a process of self-identification and recognition by others (Noble 2009c, p. 877).

This recognition, however, is not necessarily afforded on the terms of the person wishing to be recognised. Indeed colonial discourses create an understanding of

the Other on the Other's behalf. They create images and meaning about the Other for the Other. Taylor (1994) argues that there is a 'politics of recognition', whereby people from minority groups living in democratic, multicultural societies demand recognition before the law through legislative changes that benefit them and protect their rights, their way of being and living. This approach *recognises* them as equals before the law and endorses their way of life. The argument is of course that recognition is an essential component of identity. Misrecognition or non-recognition often results in feelings of negativity or low self-esteem amongst members of the minority community being misrecognised (Taylor 1994, pp. 25-26) as becomes evident throughout this research.

Acknowledging that identity formation is a dialogical process that never occurs in isolation but always in conversation with others (Hall 1994; Bhabha 1996; Noble 2009c) is important for understanding the fluidity of identity. At times we confirm ways in which people see us, while at other times we define ourselves in opposition. This desire to either confirm or resist perceptions is a recurring element throughout this thesis. Regardless, people outside of us are a vital component of identity formulation (Taylor 1994, p. 33). It is for this reason that representation in popular culture is an essential component of national identity. To exclude certain communities from the mainstream cultural realm is a form of non-recognition. To limit the roles in which they appear is to misrecognise. Both lead to feelings of inferiority of the excluded community group and a general sense of non-existence or dismissal by the majority culture.

This recognition, however, need not be based on highlighting 'differences'. Multiculturalism, as McAuliffe (2007) outlines, makes the assumption that people wish to have their differences recognised and subsequently valued through this recognition. Oftentimes *Others* wish to have their difference downplayed. Bhabha (1996, p. 56) discusses the fine line walked by minority groups of any denomination. This is the line between being deemed visible but remaining invisible enough that they are not defined by their Otherness through a process of over-racialisation (Nayak 2003, p. 139). The over-racialisation of minorities is a

process that simultaneously leads to a normalising and thus 'de-racialisation' of the majority (Nayak 2003, p. 139).

Noble (2009) discusses this through the experiences of his research participant Kefah, a 28-year-old man whose father is of Palestinian descent, for whom recognition is not always preferable. Kefah mentions that in his workplace he is known as being Palestinian. As a result people always come to him when conflict occurs in the Middle East and ask him to explain the situation, which Kefah feels uncomfortable about. In these situations a single person comes to represent an entire culture. While Hall (1997) speaks of this mainly in consideration of the realm of cultural production, Noble (2009) adapts this concept to encompass the burden on people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds to explain or justify the social and political actions or tendencies of Others, particularly in a post-September 11 climate. This burden of representation will be considered in more detail below.

### ***Intersectionality***

In discussions of race, it can be tempting to reduce identities to a single facet to gain a deeper understanding of how this element affects the lives of the individuals under discussion. That is, it can be tempting to focus on one element of identity without acknowledging how other aspects of one's self may influence the expression of that particular trait; a temptation that extends to the work of artists and cultural producers in varying pursuits and can be seen in the case studies in this research. It is, however, important to understand how elements of identity are illuminated in various circumstances and why this occurs.

Freeze-framing identity or looking at one element of identity in isolation ignores how different facets of our identity inform one another. An intersectional approach to research therefore reinforces the idea that 'different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands' (Brah & Phoenix 2004, p. 76). Intersectionality is a term commonly used in feminist and diaspora studies as

it recognises how other elements of identity affect gender and sexuality and race and culture.

An intersectional approach to analysis involves the 'concurrent analyses of multiple, intersecting sources of subordination/oppression, and is based on the premise that the impact of a particular source of subordination may vary, depending on its combination with other potential sources of subordination (or of relative privilege)' (Denis 2008, p. 677). In my research the sources of subordination are race, class and gender. By understanding how the three of them intersect (in Chapters Four and Six) we are able to understand how young Arab and Muslim men negotiate and resist marginalisation based on all three characteristics of their identity.

The concept of intersectionality has roots in the anti-slavery movement as early as 1832, when Maria Stewart noticed that women were subjugated by both gender and colour (Bilge & Denis, 2010, p. 3). The term first coined in Black feminist legal scholarship by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989 (Nash 2008). Since then, the Black feminist movement in the United States has played a key role in the progress of intersectionality in modern day research (Bilge & Denis 2010, p. 3; see Hooks 1981 and 1984).

Many postcolonial approaches to scholarship use intersectionality to better understand the sources of oppression faced by colonised peoples, in particular, women (Mohanty, 1988). McClintock (1995) uses the intersection of race, class and gender to explain how imperialism was able to flourish. She explains that her endeavour to explore the realm of intersection demonstrates that race, class and gender 'come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways' (italics original, McClintock 1995, p. 5).

Often intersectional studies take place in a non-explicit fashion. That is, scholars do not necessarily declare that their work is intersectional but they do tap into various facets of identity to better understand another. The edited collection by



Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan (2007) is an example of how Islam is viewed as only a small part of the lives of young Muslim men. Similarly, Noble (2009c), using the example of a focus group conducted by the National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA) with young Arabic-speakers, recognises that being Lebanese is an element of their identity that young men do not directly link to the make of car they drive, despite, interviewers repeatedly asking whether 'particular types of people are associated with particular types of cars' (Noble 2009c, p. 880). In this instance these young men do not prioritise their Lebaneseness; rather, they are simply interested in cars for their power, speed and street credibility (Noble 2009c, p. 881).

Noble's adoption of intersectionality pre-dates the study noted above. In 2007 he recognised the significance of both gender and ethnicity in the construction of respect and respectability among young Arabic-speaking males in Western Sydney. He found that that ideas about acceptable forms of respectability were dictated by cultural expectations of these young men from within their own cultures. This involved a move away from a desire to be feared in order to gain respect (Noble 2007, p. 338), to one where they enacted an 'ethic of care' toward their families and friends (Noble 2007, p. 337). These expectations are not simply cultural, they are also gendered. Thus an intersectional approach is essential to understanding the politics involved in Arab-Australian performances of masculinity.

### ***Negotiating Complex Identities***

Debates have arisen as to whether Muslims can be Australian and Muslim simultaneously (Hage 2003, p. 73). It has been argued by politicians and social commentators alike, that to be Australian means encompassing the Judeo-Christian values on which the nation was built. This approach, as Hage addresses in his explanation of the 'cosmo-multiculturalism', ignores the multicultural values Australia prides herself on (Sunderland 2007), insisting instead that the white majority reign supreme. However, 'hybridity' (Noble, Poynting & Tabar 1999, p. 31) encompasses the 'hyphenated identity', thereby enabling someone from a migrant

background to embody not only their Australian identity but also their cultural, ethnic or religious identity. This is in contrast to the idea that people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds are lost between two cultures. Instead, the children of migrants consciously adopt and move between these various facets of their identity without great difficulty.

Studies in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia reveal that the religious element of amalgamated identities is a conscious one. As Duderija (2007) tells us, for the children of Muslim migrants in particular it is a reevaluation of their parents' ethnic and religious values appropriated with the values of the sociocultural context of the West. It is not a pure adoption of their parents' values, culture or religious identity but rather a negotiated conscious choice that assigns new meaning to Islamic practices and assists in 'mediat[ing] the dissonance and [the] challenge of living in environments that are laced with conflicting cultural values and practices' (Duderija 2007, p. 146). The salience of a religious identity acts as an anchor allowing them to make sense of a world filled with conflicting values, in which they are a marginalised minority group.

McMichael (2002) discusses the importance of a religious identity for Somali women refugees recently resettled in Melbourne, Australia. She discusses the importance of religion in ordering and structuring the lives of these women and providing them with stability in times of great adversity. These women find their religious identities to be a 'sustaining thread' that assists with the 'discontinuity that comes with displacement' (McMichael 2002, p. 172). This highlights the significance of religion in the lives of migrant religious minorities, not simply as an added point of difference but as one that assists in grounding them when they feel a sense of 'unbelonging'. These ideas are echoed in Hage's (2011) analysis of Muslim men who experience a sense of misinterpellation.

Hage (2011) describes misinterpellation as the experience by which people who feel entitled to belong via a form of assimilation are shunned by the state. This is a process that commonly occurs in the children of migrants, by virtue of having been

born in a country they feel authorised to be considered a part of it. When, in the instance of young Muslim men for example, this does not happen, some seek to find belonging on the margins and others turn to religion to fill the gap left by the multicultural state (Hage 2011, p. 172). The idea of (mis)interpellation will be dealt with more deeply in Chapter Six of this thesis. For now, however, it is important to recognise the part that religion has played in compensating for the failure of the multicultural state, that was never set up to deal with misinterpellation, only interpellation and negative interpellation (again dealt with in Chapter Six).

Post September 11 the struggle for Muslims to acquire the necessary cultural capital to assimilate has been made even more difficult. Indeed, September 11 and subsequent terrorist attacks performed in the name of Islam – especially those thought to be the work of ‘home grown’ terrorists – have been displayed as examples of the failure of multiculturalism (Gaita 2011, p. 190). It is here that the idea of the moderate versus extremist/fundamentalist/fanatical Muslim and the political distinction between them becomes essential for understanding the implications this has for belonging in the mainstream.

While it is important to acknowledge that religion does play an important anchoring role for some minorities, it is not the only significant facet. Sen (2006) explains that we can simultaneously have more than one identity and that they needn't necessarily conflict. For example, one could be a woman, a Buddhist, an academic, a mother, a swimming instructor and so on, and while they may occasionally compete for priority over one another, this competition will only prove important in certain circumstances (Sen 2006, p. 19). When this occurs we then make a decision as to how much importance we place on each aspect of our identity (Sen, 2006 p. 19). As we see in this research, young men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds often attach greater importance to their culture when they feel it is under threat or deemed inferior by a more dominant social group.

Sen (2006) asks why it is that we premise a division of the world based on notions of culture and/or religion. Why, he asks, do we not consider other social markers such as class or gender by which to divide the world we inhabit? (Sen 2006, p. xvi) If the classifications and identity labels are expanded then one's ability to relate to an 'opponent' may very well be increased. However, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on a shared history and in the affiliation with that shared history in political discourse that our identities appear reduced (Sen 2006, p. 19).

As Sen (2006, p. xv) argues:

The art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations, and in a conveniently bellicose form can also overpower any human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have.

Thus, that common humanity we often refer to is diluted by the need for opposition. You are either with us or against us. Binary representations such as these have been mobilised in nationalist rhetoric since the creation of the nation state.

### ***Identity and Representation – Bringing These Concepts Together***

The questions of identity, national identity included, and representation are both complex and interwoven. To Hall (1994, p. 222) they are not two separate entities; rather, they exist within the realm of one another. That is to say that one cannot, and indeed does not, exist without the other. 'Identity construction is to be found only in representations, in narratives: "Identities therefore are situated within, not outside representation"' (Hall 1996, p. 4, as cited in Leeuw & Rydin 2007, p. 448). When Keith and Pile (1993, p. 23) describe the linkage between the metaphoric and the real they too imply a similar position. It is never clear where symbols, metaphors and representations end, and realities begin. For these reasons representations are not merely fabrications – they are continuations of many existent realities. Representations are not creations existing beyond the politics of the social, cultural and political; rather, they embody prevailing social tensions and

are capable of reproducing dynamics already in existence (Haldrup, Koefoed & Simonsen 2008, p. 118). It is through representation that we can learn about others and ourselves.

Hall (1994; 1996) writes extensively about the politics involved in cultural representation. He argues (1994, p. 393) that one way of looking at and exploring cultural identity is to look for the shared sense of history referred to above, a commonality that unites based on a shared culture. One must then approach cinematic representations with this notion in mind. Hall speaks extensively of the 'Black' or 'Afro-Caribbean' experience but similar perspectives can be applied to the Arab community. He (1993, p. 224) explains to us that these identities, once reduced by the process of colonisation, are being produced through retelling post-colonial histories. This in the past has been a vital step in reclaiming a history and beginning vital movements such as anti-colonialism. However, Hall (1993, p. 225) recognises this as limited. To imply that there is one history and that all people who share a common heritage share this same history is limiting and reductive. One does not realise a history and therefore discover an identity. Identities vary depending on time and place and positioning. To speak of one history or one identity does not allow us to acknowledge the various narratives at play. As has already been established, minority peoples experiences of themselves, particularly since the period of colonisation, have been influenced by a cultural power that, through binary representations, normalised Western cultures and required the colonised to identify themselves as Other (Hall 1994, p. 394). Hall reminds us that '[e]very regime of representation is a regime of power formed ... by the fatal couplet "power/knowledge"' (Hall 1994, pp. 394-395).

### *The Politics of Representation*

Hall (1996, p. 443) defines the concept 'politics of representation' by separating it into its various components. 'Representation', he notes, can be used to imply a number of different things. In some instances it is 'another way of talking about how one images a reality that exists "outside" the means by which things are represented'. At other times it is a 'very radical displacement of the unproblematic

notion of the concept of representation' (Hall 1996, p. 443). Hall comes to settle on the notion that 'events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning'. It is the effect of this understanding within the discursive that this thesis aims to explore.

Hall continues, 'how things are represented and the "machineries" and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive* (italics original), and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios or representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – a formative, not merely expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life' (Hall 1996, p. 443). Such a realisation only cements the importance of representation in understanding who we are and who others are in relation to us.

By recognising the significance of shared stories and memories in generating a shared national history, one understands the impact of national identity on experiences of belonging. Fear of the alien Other has always been an important part of regulating behaviour of populations within the nation state (Haldrup, Koefoed & Simonsen 2008, p. 117). Outside the realm of 'official' national history, as Barker (1999) emphasises, popular culture is a medium through which identities, national identities included, are expressed. It is through popular culture that people see their national landscape, both physical and social, reflected back to them. Thus, it is through representation that one learns what does and does not belong.

### *Burden of Representation*

In his article, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', Mercer (1990) outlines that the works of black artists are often experienced in isolation to one another. The overwhelming under-representation leads to sporadic experiences of black art that contributes to a disjointed reading of texts by black artists. Thus, for example, when an exhibition is held displaying the work of black artists, audiences expect

that the work will say all there is to say about black communities. This expectation stems from recognition of the rarity of such an opportunity. However, in treating each text as if it were the beginning and end of black art, we never allow for a continuation of the conversation that relates to previous works and leaves room for future productions. This phenomenon is known as the burden of representation.

'[T]he 'burden of representation' is constructed as an effect of the hierarchy of access to the institutional spaces of cultural production in visual arts' (Mercer 1990, p. 65). As a result of this we see the work of artists from minority groups as speaking for their respective communities. As Shohat and Stam (1994, p. 183) determine, representation occurs when 'something is standing for something else'. This notion applies when one considers political and social representation as well as artistic representation.

Thus, depictions of Arab and Muslim Australians through popular culture come to be viewed as standing for Arab and Muslim communities more generally, and often each representation is viewed as the beginning and end of Arab/Muslim representation. For an uninformed audience these depictions are new and limited; for those interested in artistic self-expression by Arab and Muslim Australians these representations are in fact part of a broader conversation. The production of this art is, in part, conceived as an act of 'social self understanding', a means by which viewers from the same cultural background can explore the expanse of their own potential (Mepham 1990, p. 60). This does not necessarily suggest that people outside a specific culture cannot relate to the text being created, but for those who rarely see themselves reflected in popular culture this experience is a necessary part of exploring the breadth of possibility available to them. Artists from this area recognise, however, that because their work is not made for a 'mainstream' audience, it is relegated to the margins.

This, as Mercer argues, is a systemic problem not an individual one. It is this systemic issue itself, where access to the means of cultural production is limited,

that creates the burden of representation (Mercer 1990, p. 65). As a result of this limited access, the roles that people from 'diverse' backgrounds play in the filmmaking or screen writing process is often very junior, meaning that they may not be able to exercise high levels of creative control on a project, or that their productions are not made available to mainstream audiences.

While these debates are ongoing in the field of cultural studies, an important aspect of popular culture is that through such productions we are able to deduce particular things about the nation. Popular culture, as nicely explained by Lause (1992, p. 40), 'is what we're saying at any given moment in time'. It is through an analysis of these artifacts that we discover the 'signs embedded deeply in the mindset of the times'. Ideas of national identity are often promoted by and through popular culture, including those elements that are fictional (Zannettino 2007, p. 97). Popular culture is a space for the production of identities; in particular it is about identities relating to citizenship. Through popular culture we learn who belongs and who does not (Street 1997, p. 12). Television and cinema have both been instrumental in a transformation of the political into 'everyday experience and feeling' (Barker 1999, p. 66). Through the visual representation of the landscape and history we recognise a nation. Through the representation of its people and their characterisations we recognise what these people typically look like, how they behave and what they do. We learn who is of us and who is not (Barker 1999, p. 66).

### ***Cultural Diversity on Australian Screens***

In the 1970s the Australian Government, under William McMahon and later Gough Whitlam, saw cinema as a medium by which the nation could portray images of itself to the rest of the world (Elder 2007, p. 195). This desire to market Australia overseas led to the birth of the Australian Film Commission (AFC).

The 2007 the AFC report defined its role as:



[E]nrich[ing] Australia's national identity by supporting the development of film, television and interactive media projects and their creators, promoting the availability of Australian content to Australian audiences and cultivating and assisting the development and appreciation of Australian screen culture locally and internationally. (AFC 2007, p. 1)

In the initial stages of its inception it funded the likes of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) and *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975). Both films focused on building the national cinema landscape on national myths of the bush and traditional mateship (Elder 2007, p. 195). As Bertrand (1984) discusses, representations of Australian identity in both film and history led to the notion of 'Australianness' as a 'way of life', rather than a 'series of intrinsic qualities' that all Australian people possessed (Bertrand 1984, p. 180). She further reinforces that the production of film is not about depicting the historical accuracy or truth of a being Australian but rather it is about producing an identity of Australianness, without which we as a nation cannot continue to survive (Bertrand 1984, p. 1818). These ideas of Australianness may theoretically incorporate the notion of multiculturalism during the post-war migrant boom and apparently a growing acceptance of Aboriginal culture. Certainly the growth of Italo-Australian cinema can vouch for this, at least in part, but it was primarily a means of securing a white national identity with an overwhelmingly clear absence of women, Indigenous peoples and migrants from non-Anglo backgrounds (Elder 2007, p. 197). It was a time when the production of the Australian story was one we could be proud of as a nation, that could be commodified and sold overseas. As Elder (2007, p. 199) rightly points out, it did not include the story of our Colonial past. Rather, Australian film was characterised by landscape, primarily that of the bush.

### *Deviant Arabs*

Past studies (May, 2003) have indicated that characters from culturally diverse backgrounds are often portrayed as either 'problematic' or 'exotic'. This is partly due to the fact that, in order to engage an audience, fictional plots usually include some kind of dilemma or problem. In this way people from culturally diverse

backgrounds, who tend to more frequently play guest roles, are included as a problem to be solved or an individual to be assisted (May 2002, p. 14). This gives the impression that they lack autonomy and independence and are powerless, further reinforcing the dominance of the coloniser.

The Orientalist portrayal in Australia is strongly influenced by cultural productions from both the United Kingdom and the United States. Aside from the representations discussed in these three case studies, the inclusion of fictional Arab and Muslim characters in Australia has been limited. Most fictional images therefore come to us via North American cinema and television, in particular Hollywood productions. The following section therefore will detail the common portrayals of Arabs in cinema and television and, briefly, also in literature.

In the same way that theatre brought forth the Orient to the masses in the 1800s the advent of film did the same for modern audiences. Since 1896, with the establishment of American cinema, the Arab (overwhelmingly Muslim) has been portrayed as the cultural Other, playing on stereotypes deeply rooted in Orientalism (Ramji 2005, p. 2). Shaheen's classic compilation *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001) outlines the portrayal of over 900 Hollywood feature films with Arab/Muslim characters. Of these, only 50, or roughly five percent, show positive portrayals of Arabs and Muslims (Shaheen 2001). Examples include Aladdin, Sinbad, Ali Baba, Azeem in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, and Frank Haddad in *The Siege*, who plays a similar role to that of Zane Malik in *East West 101*. These characters, however, are almost always portrayed as exceptional and unlike other Arabs or Muslims. The example of Frank Haddad is one that highlights this in depth. Frank, although having to deal with the fact that his son has been imprisoned because they are Iranian Shi'ites and a potential threat to the United States, eventually comes back to the FBI to assist them in fighting the 'bad' Arabs.

The film *Aladdin* adopts much of the gendered stereotypes present in Orientalist approaches to Islam and Arab cultures. The destructively patriarchal portrait of the Muslim and Arab world is held firmly intact by the male characters in the film,

particularly the Sultan, Jafaar and Aladdin himself. The only female character presented in any depth is the Princess Jasmine. Addison (1993) estimates that there is only 12 seconds worth of footage that include other female characters. Jasmine consistently complains of the oppressive and secluded life she leads and describes the palace as an almost prison where 'people tell you what to think and what to wear', playing strategically on the stereotype of female isolation in Eastern cultures. The film furthermore is centred on the arranged marriage of Jasmine and how she shall free herself by marrying (eventually Aladdin) for love.

Jasmine, as is typical of Orientalist fantasies is always wearing a blue belly dancing outfit exposing her tanned figure and, although intended to be innocent, she is generally presented as seductive and unintentionally attractive. The male characters in the film represent the perceived tension and the general tendency to believe that 'Brown women' require 'saving' from 'Brown men', usually by 'White' men (Spivak, 1988). While in this case Aladdin is not white, his superiority is indicated by his lighter complexion (while Jafaar's is dark) and his American accent. Jasmine too has an American accent and together they represent freedom and a better life, a non-Eastern life. Jafaar on the other hand is a dark man with a beard and what one presumes is a kind of Arab accented English. The film embodies all that the West assumes women in the East desire.

Films such as *The Sheik* (1921), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) propelled Orientalist fashion, art and architecture into the modern world, framing it as worthy of consumption and appropriation (Rosenblatt 2009, p. 61). In typical Orientalist fashion, the Middle East was 'depicted as beautiful, mysterious, and sexually alluring, while the inhabitants were barbaric, savage and tyrannical' (Rosenblatt 2009, p. 61).

As Ramji (2005) clearly demonstrates in her recount of Muslim portrayals in film, the Muslim is always a barbaric threat. Importantly, however, she summarises the power of film as being a force for reiterating social norms and accepted worldviews (Ramji 2005, p. 1). She then draws the distinction between movies

pre-1990 and those produced post-1990. This distinction is important because, she argues, prior to the early 1990s films pertaining to the Arab/Muslim way of life always focused more prominently, almost universally, on the Arab world. The threat was distant and could only be encountered if one travelled abroad. After this period, however, and with the onset of the Gulf War 'terrorists' from the Arab world were suddenly a threat to Western civilisation and fear of the migrant Arab was perpetuated. The film *Navy Seals* was one of the first of such films that presented the Arab world as a threat to the US through its allies, in this case Spain. The story takes us through the city of Beirut in Lebanon, the base from which the terrorists are planning to attack 'civilian aircraft in Spain' (Ramji 2005, p. 4).

Spain becomes the metaphor for Western civilization and by implication means that the terrorists are threatening the United States. In the film, however, we see the terrorists as showing no mercy to their own city, Beirut, and thus as an audience we are left believing they would show even less mercy on a city that is not their own.

### ***Arab-Australian Masculinity***

The news media in Australia have played a prominent role in painting an almost static picture of the Middle Eastern male, reflective of the images outlined above. The growing body of research on this topic has drawn extensively on the work of Said in order to understand the constructed deviance of this particular group (Noble 2005; Poynting & Noble 2004; Poynting & Mason 2006; Poynting & Mason 2007; Collins et al. 2000; Poynting et al. 2004; Abood 2008). Previous literature on representation in Australia has discussed the implications of news media on the identities of Arab and Muslims, focusing heavily on the male population. The cited research discusses in some detail the frustrations of Muslim youth, in particular young working class and unemployed males from the South Western Sydney region (Collins et al. 2000; Poynting et al. 2004) in having derogatory labels thrust upon them. It is these young men who appear to be most affected by the pigeonholing.

As Collins et al. (2000) discuss, there exists a media frenzied moral panic relating to ethnic gangs in Australia and in particular in Sydney's southwest. This has led to stereotyping in popular political and media discourse (Grewal 2007), including in the fictional portrayals of Muslim characters on Australian television. Furthermore, as Poynting et al. (2004) have observed, this has led to the formation of an 'us' verses 'them' dichotomy, which sees a minority community labelled as social deviants and deemed responsible for various heinous crimes. In this instance not only are the perpetrators expected to take responsibility for their actions, but the entire community that shares their ethnicity must also take responsibility for the actions of 'their' youth (Poynting et al. 2004, pp. 179-201; Grewal 2007, p. 119). In Chapter One of *Bin Laden In the Suburbs* Poynting et al. (2004) discuss the characterisation of the 'Arab Other', including the racialisation of crime and violence that has been discursively constructed as being a 'pathological' characteristic in all 'Arabs' (Poynting et al. 2004, pp. 11-51).

In line with Orientalist understanding of the primitive Arab, a moral panic surrounded the crimes committed by young Arab men. What is significant about this moral panic is the framing of young Arab men as homogenously dangerous. While this rhetoric will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, it is important to understand how the Arab male has been positioned in light of Orientalist discourse. Labels such as 'rapist' and 'terrorist', often applied to the 'Middle Eastern' male, place them outside of the realm of acceptable Australianness and, in some cases, outside the realm of basic human decency. Through the process of misinterpellation, the Arab male is positioned as the ungovernable citizen (Hage 2011). When someone is positioned outside of the realm of national belonging they also fall beyond the realm of control.

Consequently, young men in this position often construct an identity in opposition to quintessential Australianness. Poynting, Noble and Tabar (2003) advocate for the broadening of perceptions of Australian masculinity. This is outlined in their analysis of the Cronulla Riots, discussed in the following chapter and again in Chapter Four. These broader definitions are essential in order to recognise the

existence and complexity of non-white Australian masculinities. However, any attempt to broaden the definition of Australian masculinity beyond the realm of whiteness is generally viewed as an assault on the status quo and met with resistance. Examples of such will be discussed in Chapter Four where young Arab men can be seen to frequent Cronulla Beach dressing and behaving in ways that challenge Australian masculinity. For this reason, the case studies in this research are a valuable point of inquiry. Through them we are able to understand the tension between competing forms of masculinity experienced within the national context in a battle for belonging.

The above discussion has demonstrated the ways in which young men of 'Middle Eastern appearance' have occupied a more visible space in Australian media and thus within the Australian psyche. While they can no longer be deemed an invisible minority, their increased representation, even in works of popular culture, are limited to themes revolving around crime. Although the productions under discussion in this study are important for altering our understanding of Australia's identity as a nation and for recognising coexisting Australian narratives, as this chapter has established, for a long time Arab and Muslim communities have been associated with ideas of deviance. Thus, questions arise as to whether linking the Arab-Australian narrative so closely to crime is a 'progressive' way of shedding light on their story or whether it reinforces Orientalist understandings of the Arab Other. The significance of this research therefore sits in the messy space between recognition of difference and reinforcement of stereotypes. This thesis will build on existing articles relating to the case studies discussed. Below is a brief discussion of the arguments presented in each article and how this research will elaborate on these findings.

Nicholls's article, '*East West 101* as Edgy text: Television Police Drama and Australian Multiculturalism' (2011), offers a strong analysis of *East West 101* as a pseudo-multicultural text that reinforces elements of the 'white nation fantasy'. It argues (as I will too in Chapter Five) that, despite its multicultural cast, *EW101* only promotes limited cultural difference and leaves the status quo undisrupted.

Further, McLean's (2011) article, 'Cultural threats, cop drama, and "community PR": Diversity and security cultures in *EastWest101*', offers insight into the reactions of Arab and non-Arab Australian viewers of the first season of *EW101*. The findings reveal the significance of the Arab characters for members of the Arabic-speaking communities. These results seem to suggest that audiences read these characters intertextually and against a backdrop of social and political information. Audiences attach meaning to these characters beyond simply their fictional storylines. These findings will be used to interpret the reactions of online audiences as discussed in this research.

Lagerberg and McGregor (2012) offer the first critical evaluation of Caradee's *Cedar Boys*, suggesting that the film does not challenge but rather reaffirms cultural stereotypes of Arab, specifically Lebanese, youth. Through an exploration of Tarek's pursuit of the Anglo woman, Amie, who resides in the Eastern suburbs, the authors explore how Tarek accepts his subordination. The relationship between the two young lovers reinforces Orientalist understandings of the Other as striving for whiteness, an idea reinforced in the findings of this thesis.

The following section will outline the specific methodological approach of this thesis.

### **Methodology**

This thesis uses a mixed methods approach, combining two qualitative methods to explore the representation of Muslim/Arab men on Australian screens. These qualitative methods, namely in-depth interviews and critical discourse analysis, were chosen because of their unique ability to examine meaning.

Qualitative research has been adopted in this study in order to draw an in-depth picture of the reasons behind existing portrayals of Muslims and Arabs on Australian film and television. The aim of qualitative study, as outlined in Ambert, Adler and Detzner (1995, p. 880), 'is to learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do'. It allows us to discover new information, shedding light on existing or emerging practices, ways of thinking or behaving, as an alternative to the practice of verifying information (Ambert et al. 1995, p. 880). This is effective in analysing the texts themselves as well as the interviews and audience responses. Together they will give us a greater understanding of why Muslim and Arab characters conform to particular stereotypes, how these stereotypes are resisted and the power struggles depicted within these film and television productions.

### ***Data Sources***

This research collected data from a number of independent sources. It firstly relied on a critical discourse analysis of three separate cultural productions to inform the key themes in this research. It was then able to triangulate its findings by consulting a number of key industry personnel through a series of interviews. Finally it considers the response of audiences to these texts by coding the comments found in numerous online fora.

### ***Cultural Productions***

Through the application of critical discourse analysis this thesis considers three audio-visual texts: a television series, *East West 101 (EW101)* (2007-2011), produced by Steve Knapman and Kris Wyld and directed by Peter Andrikidis for Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS); *The Combination* (2009), a film written by George Basha and directed by David Field; and a second film, *Cedar Boys* (2009), written and directed by Serhat Caradee.

*EW101* consists of three seasons, comprising six, seven and seven episodes respectively, with each episode running for under 60 minutes. *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* are feature films that run for 96 and 100 minutes respectively.



Each of these texts was screened between 2007 and 2011. All were made in a post-September 11 climate, where the demonisation and vilification of Arab- and Muslim-Australian men was commonplace.

These texts received a modest, if sometimes niche, following, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven. These three case studies are of particular interest, as they are the only texts to feature Arab and/or Muslim male protagonists that have entered the mainstream in Australia. They are therefore considered for study as they convey a lot about the struggles of young men of this demographic and offer commentary on their challenges in belonging.

While the majority of these episodes and films were viewed as they first aired, either on television or in the cinema, DVD copies of the texts have formed the basis of this analysis. As there was no difference in the content that aired and the content on the DVD, this seemed most appropriate to allow multiple viewing of the texts. Though the DVDs sometimes contained additional features, such as bonus or deleted scenes on a separate DVD, these were excluded from the analysis as a way to simulate the viewing experience of 'real time' audiences.

### *Interviews*

Additionally, this thesis uses the information collected in 11 interviews with key industry personnel involved in the works under analysis, including writers, researchers, producers, directors and actors. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the motivations and goals of the cultural producers, as well as to gauge each individual's perspective on the effectiveness of their productions in achieving their original goals and where they fit within the broader Australian film and television industry. Each interviewee had played a significant role in the production of one of the three works under analysis and was therefore in a unique position to provide this valuable information.

Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 ½ hours and covered general questions on the topic of cultural production and the inclusion of ethnic minorities,

and the basis of stereotypes as well as the reproduction of them. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing particular points of interest to be followed up in much greater detail, while less relevant parts could be skimmed over (Travers 2006, p. 105; Bryman 2004, p. 320). This allowed for a clear understanding of participants' experiences and views on the topics discussed.

The questions asked of each participant were directly related to the production that they had worked on. For example, why they had chosen to frame a particular character in one way or take particular stances on issues of identity. The questions allowed a comparison between interviews but also allowed for an exploration of areas of interest based on each participant's role in the production process. As these were all issues of which the participants had direct knowledge, they did not face any difficulty in answering these questions (Flick 2002, p. 81; Rosenblum 1987, p. 389).

As these interviewees were public figures, interviewed in their professional capacity, their real names and other markers of their identities have been used throughout this research. Their professional profiles meant that no anonymity was provided; it is recognised that this may have affected the results, as interviewees may have felt restricted in what they could or could not say publicly.

#### *Online Comments*

To complete the analysis, over 1,000 online comments relating to the three productions were coded thematically. These comments appeared in online threads of YouTube, and the websites of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and SBS. None of these threads were instigated for the purpose of this research; rather, all of them were already active beneath:

Reviews on the ABC website.

1. <http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2625717.htm>
2. <http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2492722.htm>

Short trailers on the YouTube website.

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nu36UVVAVQ>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YchHsvmdmuc&nofeather=True>

Or on the SBS website.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/eastwest101/episodes/page/season/1>

This means that the data collected was not influenced by the expectations of a researcher and was instead organically created and formulated. These comments are not intended to act as an insight into what audiences 'think' but rather, it helps to explain how these texts have been received by the people for whom they were made.

### ***Critical Discourse Analysis***

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach was utilised because of its effectiveness in examining issues of inequality and social exclusion. As a methodological approach, CDA is concerned with taking the 'side' of the powerless and the oppressed in a way that does not compromise the objectivity of the researcher. It considers language to be 'an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life' (Fairclough 2003, p. 2). This means that, although language is a specific part of interaction, it cannot be separated from other aspects of discourse (Fairclough 2003, pp. 28-29). Discourse both influences and is influenced by social structures including power relations between people and groups of people (Fairclough, Mulderring & Wodak 2011, p. 358).

Often, however, the connection between language and power is not immediately apparent and requires further investigation in order to demonstrate how relations of power are maintained (Fairclough 1995, p. 54). Thus the term 'critical' in 'critical discourse analysis' is used to both explain and change social phenomena (Fairclough, Mulderring & Wodak 2011, p. 358). CDA therefore is about unpacking the ways in which language has been used to reinforce and reproduce power

structures. It is thought that, by explicitly uncovering this process, critical discourse analysts can instigate a process of change. In this way, it is the hope of this project that, by explicitly discussing the underlying discourses within these texts, we might better be able to understand, and thus resist, the ongoing marginalisation of Arab and Muslim Australians.

Fairclough (1995, p. 54) and Wodak (2001, p. 122) use 'discourse' to not only refer to spoken and written words but any other practice by which we generate meaning, including visual images and modes of non-verbal communication. This definition works well when undertaking a critical analysis of media texts, as has been done in this study. It allows for an analysis both of the characterisation of personalities within the texts through speech, but also dress and appearance, plots, music and soundtracks, program titles and other discursive components of the productions.

It is significant that language be treated as a social practice because it 'implies that language is a socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social' (Fairclough 1995, p. 54). CDA sheds light on how texts, and the language used to construct or produce them, might be read in specific social contexts. It gives prominence to the concepts of power, history and ideology (Wodak 2001, p. 2), recognising that no text is free of the social and historical period in which it has been produced. Therefore CDA takes into careful consideration structures of power, recognising that not all interactions take place on equal terms and thus acknowledging that, sometimes, subordinate groups exercise power through resistance (Wodak 2001, p. 2). This is significant because it does not assume a top down approach to power. Instead, it affords agency to subordinate groups and recognises that through language they too can reclaim or redefine power. It is also significant in this research because it allows for the recognition that these texts were intended to be read intertextually against a backdrop of the social and political climate of the Global War on Terror and association of young Arab men as folk devils (Noble 2009c, p. 880).

Intertextuality can refer to texts or a body of work outside the text being created, either directly by quoting or indirectly by referring to the context, without directly making mention of the text itself (Fairclough 2003, p. 47). Either approach assumes that the audience is familiar with the background information assumed or implied in the unsaid (Fairclough 2003, p. 40). This is important because it influences how an audience will read a text. They will bring with them ideas that have been developed and talked about elsewhere when they read the texts. In this instance, audiences will be familiar with the 'deviant' behavior of young Arab men as constructed in the news media. They will also be familiar with the depiction of Muslim men as actual or potential terrorists. As they view these texts about such topics, they already bring with them assumptions that affect how they respond to the texts.

These texts have been considered holistically within the context that they were produced and in light of the theoretical perspectives outlined above. Fairclough (2001, p125), drawing on the work of Bhaskar (1986) provides a scaffold for how to undertake a CDA. He notes that since CDA is a critical approach to analysis it is ultimately problem based. The first step therefore, is to identify a 'social problem which has a semiotic aspect' (Fairclough 2001, p125). When considering whether something is a 'problem' it is often considered from the perspective of the socially disadvantaged, for example, the poor, or those who are often marginalized (Fairclough 2001, p125). In this case the social problem relates to the deviance, or the perceived deviance of young Arab men that can be identified in the three case studies outlined below. Fairclough (2001, p125) then continues to unpack the various levels at which a discourse analysis can take place. This thesis concerns itself with linguistic and semiotic analysis. This stage of analysis is concerned with ideology and understanding how the dominant ideology (or discourse) 'contributes to sustaining particular relations of power and domination' (Fairclough 2001, p126). In this way it was important to understand how particular themes reinforced or challenged the existing power structure. The first task therefore, was to code the texts according to significant recurring themes. Examples include:

1. National identity
2. Masculinity
3. Whiteness
4. Everyday multiculturalism
5. Hybridity

Specific storylines and subplots were coded under these themes and considered more closely. Key scenes were marked in relation to these broader themes and coded in greater detail in an Excel spreadsheet, where pieces of dialogue and exchanges between characters could be noted for further exploration. Additionally, other markers that related to the theme under consideration were also noted.

For example, scenes concerning discussions of identity were not only coded for mentions of cultural affiliation and acceptance but physical characteristics of the characters were studied as signifiers and markers of identity. For instance, in the scene in *The Combination* where Charlie and his friends discuss the importance of 'earning respect', the body language, dress, hair cuts and eventual actions (a physical altercation) of the boys are deemed as important in the construction of discourse as the words spoken by them. Their haircuts, which appeared to be non-conformist, and the brands of shoes and backpack that they sported were deemed significant in understanding this scene as an expression of masculinity that falls outside the realm of national belonging. This scene therefore was coded for both gender identity and national identity.

In other instances the music or the setting of the scene were important for analysis. For instance, in the opening scene of *EW101* we see Malik seated behind the counter of his parents' grocery store, which sells Middle Eastern groceries, while a fusion Middle Eastern/Western track plays and Malik sits wearing a green and gold sports jacket. The colours of his sports jacket are indicative of Australian sports colours. This amalgamation of cultures proved significant in understanding Malik's positioning within the nation. Thus, in these instances, the scenes and

intrinsic dialogue were analysed with consideration of how they fit into the themes of the show, but also in light of the post-September 11 environment of hypersensitivity and alarm.

The recording of a critical analysis took place in a separate Word document, where key scenes were described in great detail, including a focus on characterisation, dress, colour, background, music, lighting, dialogue, shot sizes and cuts used throughout the scene. This allowed for the formulation of the main argument of the thesis. That is, it became clear through this analysis that, while multiculturalism was being promoted, characters were also limited in how they might be encouraged to express it.

The interviews with key industry personnel were also carefully coded, although they served a more informative than analytical purpose. They were able to help fill in the gaps and answer questions that arose from the initial analysis of these texts, ones that were difficult to speculate about.

After transcribing each interview verbatim in order to ensure the full context of the interview was maintained, the interviews were coded for broad themes such as:

1. Intention
2. Outcome
3. Previous industry experience
4. Research process and community consultation
5. Production process
6. Audience Response
7. Backlash
8. Text themes

Identity markers of the producers were also flagged throughout the interviews. Particular attention was given to educational background, class and feelings of social exclusion, cultural background and gender. These were flagged as being

especially significant, as it will later be argued (in Chapter Six), that class, gender and feelings of social exclusion (in particular) contribute to the production of texts, which reinforce problematic binaries to their audience, despite the intention to do the opposite.

Finally, the analysis of the online comments demonstrated that the texts had indeed been read intertextually and were thus coded similarly to the texts themselves. The most prominent codes, and thus the ones discussed in this research, were:

1. Support for the text
2. General dislike for the text
3. Support for the intention behind the text, but criticism of the visual elements (e.g. it was poorly shot or poorly acted)
4. Used the text to reinforce their dislike of a particular cultural group

The above codes were used to organise audience responses and determine whether there was a gap between what producers had intended and how audiences had read the texts, to an extent determining how much influence the social and historical period has on audiences when they interpret a text. This helps to argue that, while these texts are deemed Orientalist, audience responses should prove a necessary encouragement for the continued production of these texts, as they highlight an ability to stimulate discussion (although at times limited). This will be further expanded upon in Chapter Seven.

The following chapter will outline the historical and social period in which these texts have been written, in order to allow for a better understanding of how intertextuality might operate in this instance. It will also situate this research in the context of Australia and its positioning of Arab and Muslim Australians.



## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTEXTUALISING THE ARAB AND MUSLIM AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

#### **Introduction**

Muslims have a long history in Australia, dating back to 1600s when the Macassans<sup>8</sup> of Indonesia traded with the Indigenous population of Australia in what has been described by Patrick Dodson as ‘arguably ... the most successful encounter ever between two cultures on this continent’ (Dodson 2013). These business transactions were built on respect and acceptance of the other culture without the need to override or diminish the customs and practices of the other. This continued until trade between Indigenous Australians and the Indonesian Macassans was deemed illegal by colonial authorities that were threatened by its flourishing success (Dodson 2013).

By the mid-1800s Afghan cameleers were beginning to trade and settle in, among other places, northwestern Australia (Kabir 2005). This history, however, tends to be absent from public discussion; instead, the arrival of Muslims in Australia is framed as a recent and problematic phenomenon. While the relationship between the Indonesians, Afghans, Malays, and the Indigenous populations across northern Australia had generally been peaceful and fruitful for all communities, in recent times the relationship between Anglo Australians (otherwise described as ‘mainstream’ Australia) and the Muslim population has been tense. Recent studies,

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<sup>8</sup> The term Macassan was used by the Yolgnu people to describe Indonesian traders coming to Northern Australia from the Indonesian city of Makassar, located on the Island of Sulawesi. The Macassans would make their way to the Northern Australian coastline in search of sea cucumber, otherwise known as trepang, which they would then trade with the Chinese. Indigenous Australians would assist the Macassans in locating the trepang for trade. To this day the relationship between the Macassans and the Indigenous population of Northern Australia is celebrated by Indigenous populations. (Bilous 2011, p. 372).

as mentioned in Chapter One, have indicated a traditionally Orientalist approach to understanding the more recently arrived migrants of Islamic faith.

Prior to the mid-1900s Australia's history of Arab migration was overwhelmingly limited to that of Lebanese migrants (Hage 2002, p. 38). Over the years, however, this has changed to include migration from the full spectrum of Arabic-speaking countries (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] 2004). Unfortunately this distinction is again missing from public discourse, with the media in particular blurring the lines between terms such as 'Arab', 'Lebanese', 'Middle Eastern', and 'Muslim' (Grewal 2007, p. 117; Evers 2009, p. 187; Lattas 2007, p. 301). Conflating such terms means that it is often difficult for those unfamiliar with these communities to understand their diversity, a trend particularly identified since the early 1990s (HREOC 1991, p. 364). Moreover, these descriptors are typically associated with negative behaviour such as crime and terrorism (Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales 2003, p. 40).

In news reports and police descriptions, in New South Wales at least, the phrase 'of Middle Eastern appearance' is used to refer to people from over '20 different countries' (Warner 2006, p. 352). This descriptor was deemed by the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau as being ineffective after extensive lobbying from the Australian Arabic Council (Jabbour 2001, p. 2). As Jabbour argues: 'The description is fundamentally racist. The image of a "Middle Eastern" person doesn't exist in reality, but rather comes from Hollywood stereotypes of the "enemy" the "Arab" villain' (2001, p. 2).

The conflation of the terms 'Arab' and 'Muslim' means the global issues that affect one group often affect the other. The Gulf War in the early 1990s saw increasing overt hostility toward Arab and Muslim Australians (Hage 2002, p. 9), felt most intensely by Muslim women who wore *hijab* (the Muslim head covering) as they were most visibly noticeable (Kabir 2005, p. 207). A similar response was pre-empted when Australia declared its allegiance to the United States and sent troops to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq by then Prime Minister, John Howard,

who asked Australians to refrain from targeting Arab-Australians in the aftermath of the hostile invasion (Hage 2002, p. 9).

It has not only been Australia's participation in wars in the Middle East that has fueled the demonisation of Australia's Arabic-speaking or Muslim population. The effects of numerous events both at home and internationally have placed all Arab and Muslim Australians under intense scrutiny.

This chapter will briefly outline these landmark events and their subsequent effect on the media depiction of Arabic-speaking and Muslim Australians, beginning with the infamous Edward Lee murder in 1998 and concluding with the Cronulla riots in 2005. But first, we will start with a demographic profile of Arab and Muslim Australians.

### **Demographic Profile of Arab and Muslim Australians**

The 2011 Australian census revealed that Australia's reputation for cultural diversity is well and truly warranted, with 26% of its population born overseas, in addition to 20% having one or both parents born overseas. Among Australia's migrant population, 305,871 were born in North Africa or the Middle East (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2011b).

Looking at religious affiliation, 61% of Australians identify as Christian, while 22.3% identified as having 'no religion'. 2.2% of the population, or 476,000 individuals, indicated identification with Islam, with 61.5% of them born overseas, including in the Middle East, Africa and Asia; although the most common birthplace of Australian Muslims was Australia (38%) (Peucker, Roose & Akbarzadeh 2014, p. 6). The diversity of Australian Muslims can be seen in their most common birthplaces, namely (Peucker, Roose & Akbarzadeh 2014, p. 6):

1. Australia 37.6%
2. Lebanon 7.1%

3. Pakistan 5.6%
4. Afghanistan 5.5%
5. Turkey 5.3%
6. Bangladesh 5.0%
7. Iraq 3.3%
8. Iran 2.7%
9. Indonesia 2.6%
10. India 2.1%
11. Other 23.2%

The most common ancestry of Australian Muslims was Lebanese (42%), followed by Turkish (28%) (Krayem 2014, p. 58). Nearly half (219,380) of all Australian Muslims resided in New South Wales, followed by Victoria and Western Australia (ABS 2011a). Australia's Muslim population is comparatively young, with the majority (81%) being under 44 years of age, compared to the national average of 60% in this age range (Peucker, Roose & Akbarzadeh 2014, p. 28).

The census data also show that Australian Muslims on the whole are slightly more likely than other Australians to attain a tertiary qualification, with a higher proportion having attained a bachelor, graduate or postgraduate degree (Peucker, Roose & Akbarzadeh 2014, p. 8). However, the education profile of Australian Muslims is polarised, as they also more likely than average not to have a higher qualification, with 52.9% not having gained an education beyond high school. Australian Muslims had almost twice the unemployment rate of the national average, at 12.6%, compared to the national average of 5.6% (Peucker, Roose & Akbarzadeh 2014, p. 9).

Turning to linguistic diversity: overall 81% of Australians spoke only English at home, while Arabic was one of the most common languages other than English, spoken at home by 1.4% of the population (ABS 2011a).

Of Arabic speakers 41% were born in Australia with the next largest group having been born in Lebanon (23.7%), followed by Iraq (8.8%) and Egypt (7.1%) (Special Broadcasting Service [SBS] 2012). Like the Muslim population, the Arabic-speaking population is quite young, with 35% being between 20 and 39 years of age (ABS 2011). In the period between 1895 and the present the greatest number of migrants from Arabic-speaking backgrounds arrived from 1971 onwards (ABS 2011).

Just over half (51.9%) of Arabic speakers are from a Muslim background, while 42.4% are Christian (SBS 2012). Of Arabic-speaking Australians 42.8% completed a year 12 or equivalent qualification, with 10.7% holding a bachelor degree and 2.3% holding a degree at a postgraduate level (ABS 2011). This is compared to the general population, of which 52% of Australians completed a Year 12 equivalent (ABS 2011).

Despite the diversity of the Australian Arab and Muslim populations, as seen in the census data, these communities have been tarred with the same brush, with significant events in the last two decades in particular earning them the reputation as Australia's most unwelcome migrant groups.

### **Muslim Men Attack 'Our' Women**

As the nation was preparing to host the Olympics in 2000 a series of gang rapes took place in Sydney's Western suburbs, contributing to an ongoing media furore about the rise of 'ethnic gangs' in southwest Sydney. The greater Western Sydney region is home to over 1.6 million Australians, roughly one-third of Sydneysiders, and is one of the most multicultural regions in the country. While it is rich in ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, it has been deemed to be 'significantly poorer, less healthy, and less well-resourced' (Burchell 2003, p. 31) than other parts of the city. This is not evenly distributed across the region. Areas such as Blacktown have a 15% higher mortality rate than the state average for lifestyle-related diseases (e.g. lung cancer), while places such as Baulkham Hills are 20% lower than the state

average (Burchell 2003, p. 31). These distinctions, much like those regarding the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities in Australia more generally, are rarely explored and media portrayals of Western Sydney have often painted it as 'underprivileged' (Burchell 2003, p. 88) with a crime problem. This issue has been tied to the presence of large numbers of immigrants and refugees in the area.

In 2001 concern about 'Middle Eastern' gangs operating in Sydney's western suburbs escalated when a young man of Lebanese descent was sentenced for stabbing schoolboy, Edward Lee, in Punchbowl, a suburb in Sydney's southwest. Roughly two months later the police station in Lakemba, a neighbouring suburb, fell victim to a drive by shooting. The assailants were again identified as 'Lebanese' (Collins et al. 2000, p. 1). This marked the beginning of a media and political frenzy detailing the dangers of 'ethnic gangs' in Sydney's Western suburbs (Manning 2004, p. 27). The community was further tarnished, when it was repeatedly reported that 'leaders' of the diverse Lebanese Muslim community were failing to co-operate with police and that the community at large was maintaining a 'wall of silence' (Collins et al. 2000, p. 3), hindering police investigations.

The stabbing of Edward Lee in particular was linked to a 'turf war' over drugs (Collins et al. 2000, p. 39) and greater police presence in the area was called for. As a result 130 police officers descended on suburbs in the Canterbury-Bankstown area, arresting 24 people and charging 70 others. The young people of the area, men in particular, felt unfairly targeted and harassed and some viewed the ensuing police station shooting as retaliation for the crackdown (Collins et al. 2000, p. 41).

The media was already reporting a threat of ethnic gang violence but it was a series of gang rapes between 2000 and 2002 (two prominent cases in particular) that gave the violence a 'sexualised aspect' (Grewal 2007, p. 118). The discussion was no longer simply about ethnics (mostly 'Lebs' and Asians) violating each other but now about 'Middle Eastern' men out to rape 'our' (Caucasian) women (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 117). While media coverage at the actual time of the rapes was overshadowed by the hype of the Olympics, coverage during the time of the

trial of Bilal Skaf (2001-2002) was extensive (Manning 2004, p. 27; Warner 2006, p. 345).

The *Sun-Herald* published articles with inflammatory headlines such as '70 Girls Attacked by Rape Gangs', 'Police warning on new race crime', 'Caucasian women the targets' (Grewal 2007, p. 118) and '70 women lured and pack-raped' (Manning 2004, p. 28). Poynting et al. (2004, p. 116) claim the number was significantly lower than the 70 claimed by the *Sun-Herald*. Both the Premier of New South Wales at the time, Bob Carr, and Police Commissioner, Peter Ryan, agreed that racially and religiously identifying the perpetrators as 'Middle Eastern' and 'Muslim' was legitimate both for 'operational reasons' and so the 'community could take control of their youth and the people of Sydney become aware of the problem' (Manning 2004, p. 27). In another instance Carr justified the labelling by race, claiming that the perpetrators had brought race into the argument when they targeted and raped their victims (Grewal 2007, p. 120). When Carr 'called for a tightening of immigration policies to reduce ethnic crime' (Warner 2004, p. 346) the hype increased dramatically, despite research from the Bureau of Crime Statistics that indicated that sexual crime in the area (Bankstown) had been steady since 1995. While there had been one spike in 1999 when 70 incidents had been reported in one month, these were all attributed to a single individual, Lesley Ketteringham, who had since been imprisoned. The report further disclosed a higher rate of sexual assault in northwestern Sydney, an area not typically inhabited by Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities (Warner 2004, p. 346). The link between immigration and crime echoed repeatedly (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 59) following the murder of Edward Lee.

While the media was committed to labelling the victims of the rapes 'white', the report released by the Anti-discrimination Board (2003) indicated that the victims were Italian, Greek, Aboriginal and Anglo. However, the media was maintaining a clash of cultures rhetoric, with shock jock Alan Jones claiming that the rapes were a '[sign] of Islamic hate against a community which has welcomed them' (Grewal 2007, p. 119).

The first case to gain a national profile was that of 'AEM and Others'. It was alleged and later proven that the victims, two 16-year-old girls had been offered a ride home from Beverly Hills station late on the night of 5 September 2000. The girls had initially refused the lift but later agreed and were taken to a house in Villawood where they were raped for four hours by four different men. The case was heard in the District Court and the four men were meted out sentences of between 18 months and six years, depending on the extent of their involvement in the crime (Warner 2006, pp. 346-347).<sup>9</sup>

Politicians, the media and, according to opinion polls that week, the public were of the belief that 'the victims had been let down by the judicial system' and further insisted that race and religion were motivating factors in the assault, although the judge had argued that she had no reason to believe such was the case (Warner 2006, p. 347). An appeal was granted and heard in the Court of Criminal Appeal in 2002 where the sentences were increased. Of particular note was the lengthy sentence handed down to Bilal Skaf, the young man considered to be the ringleader. Skaf received 55 years in jail with a minimum 40-year sentence; the longest ever delivered for such a crime. The media and politicians praised the sentence as being just and condemned the violent actions yet again.

The second infamous case of 'Muslim' men violating 'Anglo' women was that of the 'K brothers'<sup>10</sup>. This time four Pakistani siblings living in Australia raped four women in three separate instances in 2002 (Grewal 2012, p. 510). It is alleged by their

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<sup>9</sup> Between April and October 2000, 12 attacks were carried out on women in western and southwestern Sydney. Though this case was not the first, it attracted the most media attention because of the perception that the sentences meted out were too lenient (Warner 2006, p. 346). The names of the perpetrators were not released, as two of them were under 16 years of age at the time the crime was committed (LIAC Crime Library 2014). AEM was the eldest at 19, while his brother KEM was 16. Both men are related to the 'gang leader' by marriage, although they were not present at all the instances when rapes occurred (Warner 2006, p. 346). MM, the third young man was the cousin of AEM and KEM and was under the age of 16 at the time of the incident.

<sup>10</sup> These four brothers are known as the 'K brothers' as two of the perpetrators were juveniles at the time of the offence. They are known as MSK, MAK, MMK and MRK. Each of their first names is Mohammed (a common practice in Pakistan) and their last initial is correct though their middle initials have been kept off the public record for the reasons mentioned above (Sheehan 2006).



victims that throughout the ordeal they identified themselves as 'Lebs'. A cultural defence was used on behalf of the K brothers in the third trial, claiming that they were unaware that in this country being alone with a woman did not mean that they could not have sex with her (Grewal 2012, p. 521). The trial took place in 2003 continuing the now entrenched association in the media between 'Muslim' men and rape.

Conservative columnist and commentator Paul Sheehan explains the details of the incident and court case that followed, in his popular book *Girls Like You* (2006, p. 294), where he uses a phrase first quoted by K's defence lawyer, Stephen Odgers, to describe one of the perpetrators, Sami K, as a 'cultural time bomb', by which he means that the cause of the rapes was the culture (and religion) of the young man. Such rhetoric continues to raise issues about the effectiveness of multiculturalism.

The multiculturalism debate soon became as much about limiting the bounds of national identity as a debate on the protection of the rights of women in Australia, labelling misogyny as laying beyond those bounds (Grewal 2012; Ho 2007; Randell-Moon 2007). Suddenly even the most unlikely candidates from the conservative far right were peddling feminist rhetoric to differentiate 'Australian' from 'other' cultures, giving the former a sense of moral superiority (Ho 2007, p. 290). As Grewal (2012, p. 510) argues:

Not only did this leave little room for any type of anti-racist feminist response, it allowed for the emergent dominant political discourse of a need to return to (white, Christian) 'Australian values' to be based not on an argument of racial superiority but rather *moral* superiority: an outcome which re-established dominant white patriarchal order.

The victims and their legal team were placed in direct opposition to the brothers, who were defined as unAustralian. In this case, to be Australian meant respecting the rights of women, speaking English (Ho 2007, p. 291) and enacting the moral superiority of Christianity, as we see outlined in a description of one of the victims,

Roxanne, whose crucifix necklace was emphasised in Sheehan's account (Grewal 2012, p. 518). The description of the brothers on the other hand was of barbaric monstrosity, and at one point uncontrolled emotion as their father detailed in the witness box his journey from Pakistan to Australia. Such claims are reflective of Said's depictions of the Oriental subject (Grewal 2012, p. 517) as unreliably emotional and predictably barbaric.

### **Asylum Seekers as Terrorists**

Muslims, in particular working-class unemployed young men, have long been seen as 'other' in the West, and more specifically Australia (Noble 2005; Poynting & Noble 2004; Poynting & Mason 2006; Poynting & Mason 2007; Collins et al. 2000; Poynting et al. 2004). This has often occurred through a racialisation of crime and violence, which has been discursively constructed as being a 'pathological' characteristic in all 'Arabs' (Poynting et al. 2004, pp. 11-51). This has constructed a deviant group who possess all the immoral and undesirable characteristics of any given society (Said 1978, p. 3). Further it does not make a distinction between different types of people within that category but instead contributes to the creation of a homogenous unit (Said 1978, p. 2). That is, this characterisation is said to be true for all people who belong to the demonised or marginalised 'other'. This perceived criminalisation led to a similar discursive construction of asylum seekers (also framed as Arab/Muslim) arriving on Australia's shores.

At around the same time as the debates about ethnic crime occurred, the *MV Tampa*, a ship now carrying rescued asylum seekers from the *Palapa*, a fishing vessel that had foundered at sea, had just been intercepted off Christmas Island (Warner 2006, p. 348). Pictures later emerged of a separate incident where a woman was photographed holding her child out over the edge of the boat. It was later reported that this woman had been attempting to throw her young child off the boat and into the sea. The story was written in a way that suggested that this was simply a bid for sympathy from the Australian government, which further

outraged the Australian public (Klocker & Dunn 2003, p. 71). Although these claims proved to be a complete fabrication, one conveniently not denied by the Howard government, it was too late to shift public opinion (Klocker 2004, p. 12). This, combined with the already troubling perception that Muslims and Arabs were a looming threat to 'our' women, made it easy to depict the asylum seekers, who were later proven to be refugees, 'as a threat to our national security' (Ho 2007, p. 290).

The situation with the *MV Tampa* played out over the course of several days beginning on 26 August 2001 (see Marr & Wilkinson 2004 for a comprehensive account). The situation began when the *Palapa*, a barely seaworthy Indonesian fishing boat carrying 438, mostly Afghan, asylum seekers fleeing the Taliban, found itself drifting out at sea with a failed engine (Marr & Wilkinson 2004, p. 4). Australian planes had circled the air above for 20 hours prior to the rescue that followed, yet had made no rescue attempt. As the passengers began to give up any hope of being saved, a Norwegian cargo ship the *MV Tampa* cruised past. Noticing that the passengers were clearly in need of help, the captain turned the ship around and his crew set about conducting a rescue mission. Given that the passengers were in Australian waters and the nearest island was the Australian territory of Christmas Island, captain of the *Tampa*, Arne Rinnen, set out to sail them there to safety (Philpott 2002, p. 63; Poynting & Mason 2007, p. 79). The Australian government was not pleased about this course of events, given that mainland detention facilities were full and Christmas Island too was crowded with newly arrived asylum seekers (Marr & Wilkinson 2004, p. 3) and Australian rescue authorities kept deferring responsibility to Indonesia by refusing to help those on board the *Palapa* and harassing Indonesian authorities to do something instead (Marr & Wilkinson 2004, p. 4).

Rinnen was ordered to turn the ship around and sail to Indonesia, with orders from Canberra insisting that the ship would be refused entry and potentially seized if they did not comply with the instructions. Rinnen attempted to do so slowly but the passengers on board caught wind of the situation and began to threaten

violence. At this point Rinnen decided it was safest to head toward Christmas Island and waited just outside Australian waters while Australia made a decision (Philpott 2002, p. 64). After a three-day stand-off, during which the government attempted to introduce a Border Protection Bill that was eventually blocked in the Senate, the Australian Navy boarded the *Tampa* and escorted the passengers to the Micronesian island of Nauru for processing (Marr & Wilkinson 2004).

During a second debacle the Howard Government fabricated stories of 'children overboard', suggesting that asylum seekers on board the vessel had thrown their children into the open ocean in order to garner sympathy from the Australian public (Poynting & Mason 2007, p. 80). Interestingly, it was Howard's pragmatic ability to capitalise on the situation, linking the War on Terror (after September 11 2001) to the idea that asylum seekers could be potential terrorists, that led him to a victory at the next election (Poynting & Mason 2007, p. 80). His continued dehumanisation of asylum seekers as an immoral 'them', who throw their children overboard, compared with a civilised 'us', who could never imagine engaging in such behaviour, was paramount to the Orientalising rhetoric (Poynting & Mason 2007, p. 80).

In the aftermath of this and the international events that followed (which will be discussed below) Howard uttered his infamous words during an election campaign speech just weeks later: '... we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' (Howard 2001). His words were met with applause at the time that they were delivered, but with skepticism from other sides of politics and critics in the aftermath. His words further fuelled the xenophobic attacks on the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities, by his implication that these asylum seekers would only contribute to the growing problems already caused by local Muslim and Arab populations.

Howard used the Tampa Crisis, as it came to be known, as a means to legitimate the tougher policies his government wished to implement in relation to asylum seekers, their detention and their processing but also to immigration policies in

general (Klocker 2004). Strict immigration policies have been used historically to manage the national space, distinguishing between 'us', as acceptable citizens of the national space, and 'them', as outsiders who are identified through exclusion (Klocker 2004, p. 3). In this instance, the Australian public tainted asylum seekers with negative associations. When a sample of 1,000 participants from the Australian town of Port Augusta in August 2002 was asked to select descriptions of asylum seekers from a list of positive and negative terms 82% of respondents chose 'illegal immigrants', while 79% described them as 'unlawful' (Klocker 2004, p. 5). Such sentiments revealed an overwhelming support in this town for Howard's border security policies was to be expected, with some respondents thinking they were not harsh enough, citing security issues as their primary concern (Klocker, 2004, pp. 7-8).

In 1991 the Keating government formalised the practice of mandatory detention, for asylum seekers. Howard continued the policy and also extended a neo-liberal approach to immigration, steering the program overwhelmingly toward skilled migrants. By 2008 skilled migrants made up 70% of the migration intake (Stratton 2009, p. 678). While Howard projected an anti-immigration and near xenophobic stance on new arrivals, his government was in fact responsible for accepting a rising number of skilled immigrants. However, by focusing on the arrival of a fairly small number of asylum seekers by boat, and deeming these people a threat – claiming that 'there was "an undeniable link" between illegal immigrants and terrorism' (Klocker & Dunn 2003, p. 71) – the government diverted attention from the huge number of legal immigrants arriving.

The Tampa Crisis in 2001 marked the beginning of an openly hostile stance on asylum seekers from Middle Eastern countries (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 23). In the wake of September 11 they were marked as a potential terrorist threat (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 27), creating an image not uncommon in Australian history that, like communists, 'they', this time terrorists, were coming to invade our shores (Poynting et al. 2004; Aly 2007).

### **September 11 2001 – The Threat of Terrorism in Australia**

The attacks of September 11 on the World Trade Centre and sections of the Pentagon conveniently assisted Howard's stance on the refusal to accept any more asylum seekers arriving by boat (Klocker 2004, p. 1). They were the solid 'proof' needed by the Howard Government to illustrate the 'otherness' of asylum seekers from the Middle East. If you were not convinced by the presence of ethnic gangs, the shooting up of police stations, or the rape of innocent women, then the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon would prove to be enough to enact stringent border security measures and justify the international War on Terror (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 53). Through the perpetuation of such divisive rhetoric and the promotion of a culture of fear around issues such as asylum seekers, the previously struggling Howard government was able to regain popularity in the polls and win the 2001 Federal election (Klocker 2004, p. 4). This rhetoric of fear wasn't limited to the major political parties. One Nation party leader, Pauline Hanson, who had in the late 1990s called for an end to Asian immigration, seemed to inspire the Xenophobic rhetoric of the Prime Minister, standing by her belief that immigrants were terrorising innocent Australians (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 60).

After the events of September 11, there were reportedly whispers of terrorist 'sleeper cells' in Australia. The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) raided the homes of Muslims of Arabic backgrounds, despite never making any arrests, further fuelling these fears. The Bali bombings in October 2002 only added to the fear that terrorism was on our doorstep (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 61). With the death of 88 Australians (Cook et al. 2006) this threat hit close to home and the idea that we should 'be alert not alarmed' (Banham & Gibbs 2002) prevailed, creating a sense of fear and suspicion (Kirchengast 2008) in the 'Australian psyche' (Hage 2003, p. 52) and further implying that 'terrorist' and 'Muslim' were virtually synonymous.

In the aftermath of these events the wider Australian community sought retribution and retaliated by attacking members of the Muslim and Arabic-

speaking communities, with women reporting more experiences of discrimination than men (HREOC 2004, p. 47). There was an increase in the number of reported rapes against Muslim girls and many were threatened with rape (Warner 2006, pp. 351-352). Community organisations were vandalised and Muslims were beaten (Warner 2006, pp. 351-352). Muslim organisations around Australia reported an increase in the number of incidents of physical and verbal abuse (HREOC 2004, p. 43). Two-thirds of participants in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, *Isma*,<sup>11</sup> reported an increase in racism against them after September 11 in the form of threats of violence, actual violence, attacks on property and name calling (HREOC 2004, pp. 46-52). These attacks were a disturbing illustration of the direct effects of racialising crime.

The most common sites of racism, abuse and violence were shown to be in the media, in the street, on public transport, while driving, and at shopping complexes, schools and colleges, work, leisure places and government offices (Poynting & Noble 2004, pp. 7-8). Anglo-Australian men were the most common perpetrators of racism, abuse and violence and victims were most likely to be alone when they experienced the abuse, racism or violence (Poynting & Noble 2004, p. 8).

The final event that was described by some (Redmond 2007, pp. 336-340) as revenge for the 'unAustralian' behaviour of Arab and Muslim Australians was the Cronulla riot (Hartley & Green 2006). It was seen as a way of putting 'Lebs' back in their rightful place (Poynting 2006, p. 85). On Saturday 4 December 2005 a group of young Lebanese-Australian men had allegedly punched two lifesavers after a verbal altercation on one of Sydney's most iconic beaches, Cronulla. In the subsequent media frenzy, stories of Arab men terrorising 'our' beaches and 'our women' were circulated (Grewal 2007, p. 121; Hartley & Green 2006, p. 355).

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<sup>11</sup> The word *Isma* means to listen in Arabic. This project was launched in 2003 to document racial vilification of people from Muslim and Arabic speaking backgrounds. 69 national consultations were conducted with 1,423 Australians across the country. A further 1,475 questionnaires were completed by Arabic speaking and Muslim Australians, recording their experiences of racism and discrimination in a post-September 11 environment (HREOC 2004).

The Australian public had supposedly had enough of being bullied by the Lebanese from Western Sydney, a tension that had been building up for some years (Evers 2009, p. 187; Poynting 2006, p. 87), and a text message was sent around to encourage all Anglo Australians to participate in 'Leb and wog bashing day'. Alan Jones read the message in its entirety out on his radio program: 'Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge. This Sunday every Aussie in the shire get down to North Cronulla to support leb and wog bashing day' (Hartley & Green 2006, p. 355). Sadly many did, and a week later on 11 December 2005 almost 5,000 people, mostly Anglo Australians, descended on Cronulla beach and nearby areas ready to attack anybody of 'Middle Eastern appearance' (Noble 2009b, p. 1) while chanting 'kill the Leb' (Evers 2009, p. 187).

A number of commentators, including an ex-Sydney police detective Tim Priest, believed the violence was justified and again cited the issue of 'Middle Eastern' men showing a lack of respect to women on Sydney's beaches (Grewal 2007, p. 123). Unfortunately the violence did not stop there. Taking matters into their own hands, young men of 'Middle Eastern appearance' made their way down to Maroubra beach to cause some damage of their own, smashing cars, shops and, in some instances, people (Noble 2009b, p. 2; Collins 2009, p. 27). Again the issue of incompatibility between the 'Australian way of life' and those from the Middle East was raised.

Alan Jones was the first to connect the incident with the lifesavers to the gang rapes five years prior but also viewed it as an attack on 'Australian masculinity' (Evers 2009, p. 188). As with the rapes that occurred earlier that decade, masculinity became an essential component of the tension to come. The attack on the lifesavers was an attempt to undermine 'Australian manhood' (Evers 2009, p. 188), which was in direct opposition to the masculinity enacted by the 'Lebs' from the western suburbs, encompassed in their choice of cars, clothing, food and sports allegiances (Evers 2009, p. 187). Poynting (2006, p. 86) describes this as 'the process of some youthful masculine contestation over space'.



### **The Rise of Islamophobia in Australia**

All of these significant events led to the labelling and demonising of Muslims as the 'other', which subsequently resulted in an increase in surveillance targeted at them, legally, politically (Kirchengast, 2008) and through the media (Osuri & Banerjee 2004).

A recent inquiry into migration and multiculturalism in Australia found that 'the highest proportion (31%) of people experiencing religious discrimination were Muslims, while migrants from Africa and the Middle East (21%) and Asia (20%) felt most discriminated against'. (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2013, p. 58). The inquiry found that 'one in four Australians were uncomfortable with Islam' (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 2013, p. 55). Dunn, Klocker and Salabay (2007, p. 571) also found within their study that 66% of participants claimed that Islam posed some threat to Australia. But only just under one-third of them could identify what that threat was, overwhelmingly citing a security threat as their greatest concern.

The findings of Dandy and Pe-Pua (2010, p. 38) were consistent with the above conclusions. In their study survey respondents were asked to rank ethnic groups in terms of most to least desirable as Australian citizens. The ethnicities that received the highest rankings were those most similar to the dominant culture. Those with the lowest ranking were 'Arabs', 'Lebanese' and 'Moslems' and the results did not differ much depending on whether the respondent was born in Australia or overseas. It was noted, however, that those who rated 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' more favourably also viewed multiculturalism, cultural diversity and immigration more favourably (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010, p. 41). Most recently in a national survey by the Scanlon Foundation Australians recorded 'relatively high levels of negative feelings' toward Muslims who had immigrated to Australia, with 12% indicating 'very negative' feelings and 15% 'somewhat negative' feelings toward immigrants from Lebanon (Markus 2013).

The joint committee inquiry also revealed widespread concern for the rights and freedom of Muslim women and girls living in Australia, with particular reference to the burqa as a symbolic threat to women's rights and freedoms (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 2013, pp. 59-60). Other participants professed that 'religious diversity weakens social cohesion' (Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 2013, p. 58), because it is assumed migrants who come with different religious beliefs have less of an attachment to their 'host country'. While this may be the case, the most common place of birth for Australian Muslims is Australia (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007, p. 565), rendering the reference to 'host country' void.

Nevertheless, these findings are not surprising given the climate of opinion encouraged by media reporting and government policy in light of the events outlined above (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007, p. 582). Both domestic and international events have been portrayed by opinion makers as incontrovertible evidence for the dangerous Otherness of Arab and Muslim Australians.

This chapter has explained the real events that have led to the ongoing negative portrayal of Arab and Muslim Australians in political and media discourse. The following chapter will elaborate on the presence of Arab and Muslim Australians in fictional television and the positive outcomes of their humanisation through the television series *East West 101* (EW101).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POLITICAL USES OF CRIME DRAMA: USING FICTIONAL DRAMA TO CHALLENGE MYTHS ABOUT THE ARAB OTHER

*... one of the interesting things was to take a traditional western hero, that is the cop, who goes out into the world and fights injustice, and make him Muslim.* Kristine Wyld

The underlying tensions between Australia's Arab and Muslim populations and the broader Australian community, as outlined in the previous chapter, are often played out in popular cultural productions. The restrictive roles within which people from these backgrounds are cast allude to a history of Orientalist discourse in Australian film and television. In addition to reinforcing age-old myths and stereotypes about certain groups, popular culture can also be used to tell stories that conflict with or challenge existing discourses. This chapter will outline the limited history of Arab and Muslim presence on Australian screens and will explore the place of *EW101* within the existing landscape. It will explain the desires and the intentions of producers and writers in challenging Orientalist discourse through screen culture.

#### **The Current Screen Landscape**

Australia has a limited history of depicting Arab and Muslim Australians in its popular culture. Nightly news bulletins are often filled with stories of crime, war, injustice and political turmoil across the Arab world, with many of these portraying Australian Arabs or Muslims in negative ways – for example, as criminals or terrorists. However, fictional portrayals of Australian Arabs and Muslims are a rarity on Australian screens. When Arab and Muslim Australians are

represented, their appearance is still 'othered', usually through the problematisation of their ethnic or religious background.

Recent depictions in Australian popular culture (excluding the following three case studies) include fleeting characters in Australian serials. Nada al Farouk (played by Nicole Nabout) was an Arab-Muslim character featured on the ABC series *The Librarians*, produced and written by Robyn Butler and Wayne Hope (2007-2010). Nabout played a sassy librarian forever at odds with her narrow-minded boss. A second ABC series, *Crownies*<sup>12</sup> (2011) was a show about a team of young Crown Prosecutors, featuring a young Australian Palestinian, secular Muslim lawyer Lina Badir (played by Andrea Demetriades). Lina is an intelligent young woman stumped more by her personal life than her professional endeavours.

As these two examples show, Arab and Muslim women have most recently been represented as intelligent and capable. However, representations of the Arab and Muslim male as 'thug' or 'terrorist' continue to prevail. These depictions appear to be influenced by the American penetration of the Australian television and film industry. While Australian productions often include an Arab criminal as part of the plot, they rarely develop these characters in any meaningful way – for example ABC's *Wildside* (1997-1999) regularly featured Arab men from Western Sydney brushing up against the law, without any deep exploration of their situation. The exception to this is the Nine Network's *Underbelly: The Golden Mile*<sup>13</sup> (2010). The series focussed on the interactions of nightclub business owner and entrepreneur John Ibrahim (played by Firass Dirani) and his longstanding feud with Kings Cross police officers between 1988 and 1999. In this instance the police are exposed for their part in accepting and demanding bribes in order to keep the drug world functioning, as well as other crimes including the rape and degradation of female

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<sup>12</sup> Written by Greg Haddrick, Jane Allen, Kylie Needham, Tamara Asmar, Blake Ayshford, Chris Hawkshaw, Justine Gilmer, Pete McTighe, Stuart Page and Sam Mickle. The show was directed by Tony Tilse, Chris Noonan, Cherie Nowlan, Grant Brown, Lynn Hegarty, Garth Maxwell and Jet Wilkinson.

<sup>13</sup> *Underbelly: The Golden Mile* was written by Greg Haddrick, Peter Gawler, Felicity Packard and Kris Mrksa. It was directed by Tony Tisle and Shawn Seet.

officers. Although the story exposes him as a key operator in the Kings Cross underworld, the exploration of Ibrahim's story depicts him as the lesser of two evils.

In addition to the depiction of terrorist, we see examples of Arab men depicted as incompetent and somewhat idiotic. Examples, such as Paul Fenech's *Pizza*, aired by SBS, which is classed as a 'dark comedy', exaggerate issues of sex, drugs and violence in order to make light of the issues within the Arabic-speaking community. The depiction of non-white men as petty or lazy, mirrors depictions of men from other minority groups in Australia, including the character of Steve, played by Nick Giannopoulos, in the Australian film *The Wog Boy*. Steve is a Greek Australian man who is mostly unemployed and attempts to make a compensation claim against the Australian government to maintain his lifestyle without having to work. While humorous, the film continues to play on the false understanding that 'wogs' are lazy 'dole bludgers' or welfare recipients, who are capable of but choose not to work.

Thus, when Kristine Wyld describes the leading protagonist of *EW101*, Zane Malik, as 'interesting', we understand this to also mean rare, since most frequently the Muslim character is a rough male inciting violence for the purpose of causing harm and destruction to Western societies, rather than protecting them. For example, in what Shaheen (2008, p. 27) describes as '[p]ost-9/11's most disturbing movie', *The Stone Merchant* (2006; directed by Renzo Martinelli), audiences are presented with multiple images of terrorist attacks. Firstly, with the shooting of innocent civilians by Arab terrorists in an airport in Rome, and secondly the detonation of a bomb filled with 'radioactive material', leading to the death of innocent people on board a ferry (Shaheen 2008, p. 27). Even the lighthearted comedy, *American Dreamz* (directed by Paul Weitz) played into the 'Arab as terrorist plot', with the young Omer being asked to blow up the US President on the set of an *American Idol* type game show where he was competing as a vocalist (Shaheen 2008, p. 28). Although lighter than *The Stone Merchant* in tone, *American Dreamz* still links the Arab to Al-Qaeda and terrorism.

Hollywood films have built much of the groundwork for the representation of Arabs (Hussain 2009, p. 134), in particular Arab men, as perverse beings perpetrating injustices against women in the name of Islam (Shaheen 1997, p. 14). Take for instance the film *Not Without my Daughter* (1991; directed by Brian Gilbert), in which an American woman marries an Iranian Muslim man and together with their young daughter they take what was intended to be a short holiday. Instead, the father decides he wants to raise their daughter in Iran. Her mother insists on fleeing Iran after encountering physical abuse at the hands of her husband, where he uses religion to justify his abusive behavior. This movie grossed over 14 million dollars at the time of its release, reaching a record rating in the week that the 1991 Gulf war began (Ramji 2005, p. 4). Record viewing of similar films was witnessed again in the months following September 11 2001, this time with the films *True Lies* (1994; directed by James Cameron), *Air Force One* (1997; directed by Wolfgang Petersen) and *The Siege* (1998; directed by Edward Zwick), all of which focused on Muslim terrorists. In the months after the terrorist attacks Canadian video stores recorded a spike in rentals of the above films of ten times higher than prior to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York (Hussain 2011, p. 3; Ramji 2005, p. 3).

Hussain (2009) outlines representations of Muslims on American television. Of particular interest is the character of Kareem Said (played by Eamonn Walker) in the prison show *Oz* (created by Tom Fontana). The show focuses on prison life and Fontana mentions that he in no way attempted to be groundbreaking when portraying the leading character. Rather, he attempted to be true to the dynamics of prisons. Hussain outlines that, while the portrayal is positive in the sense that Said is articulate, mostly non-violent and stands for 'traditional family values' (Hussain 2010, np), he is nonetheless a prisoner, one who was put there because he blew up a business owned by white people. At its core, *Oz* still plays on the traditional negative stereotypes of the Arab and Muslim male.

Hussain (2010, np) further makes the point that Muslims on North American television programs are portrayed as non-citizens rather than belonging to the

broader society, a depiction that pre-dates September 11. However, as Western governments fought Muslim countries in the War on Terror, September 11 made Muslims and Arabs seem like fair game. In Australia it gave us a reason to 'be alert not alarmed' – a government slogan put in place to generate fear by reminding us not to be afraid.

American television series *Sleeper Cell*<sup>14</sup> was produced in a post-September 11 climate when the perceived potential threat of another terrorist attack was high (Steuter & Wills 2008, p. 100). The story focuses on a 30-year-old Muslim African American ex-convict turned FBI agent Darwyn Al-Sayeed (played by Michael Ealy), whose job is to infiltrate an Islamic terrorist cell (Keane 2007, pp. 50-51). While the cast is ethnically diverse, featuring Bosnian Muslims, African American Muslims and Anglo converts to Islam (Hussain 2010, np) and the Muslim is the 'hero', one cannot escape the fact that the show is premised on ideas of Islamic extremism and, even more disturbingly, plants the idea that *any* Muslim could be a potential terrorist (Hussain 2010, np). The pressing issue with shows such as *Sleeper Cell* is that the lines between reality and fiction are immediately blurred because of the context in which they are created (Hussain 2009; Keane 2007). Although they are works of fiction, they are intended to be read intertextually and feed into prevailing anti-Muslim opinion and climates, exacerbating fear and suspicion.

As Keane (2007) highlights, American nationalism is an underlying feature of this show. As with previous examples such as *The Siege* (1998) and *Aladdin* (1992) (a Walt Disney production), the focus, even if subtle, on America as an 'exceptional' place, distinguished as superior to other places, is the underlying message. This explains the terrorists' choice for targeting America in *The Siege* (1998) (Keane 2007, p. 55). In Disney's *Aladdin*, Aladdin, Princess Jasmine and the Sultan are all anglicised. Aladdin looks distinctly unlike other Arabs in the film, who mostly have long beards and hooked noses (Shaheen 2009, p. 57). He has an American accent and asks to be

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<sup>14</sup> *Sleeper Cell* was written by Ethan Reiff, Cyrus Voris, Angel Dean Lopez, Alexander Woo, Kamran Pasha, Katherine Lingenfelter and Andrew Barrett. It aired for two seasons on network television channel, Showtime, in the US from 2005 to 2006.

called 'Al'. As noted in Shaheen's commentary on Arab representation 'what makes him [Aladdin] nice is they've given him this American character' (Salam, cited in Shaheen 2009, p. 58). The contrast between the villains wearing turbans, having hooked noses and speaking English with Arab accents and Aladdin's wholesome American boy depiction further emphasises America's exceptionalism, locating it as better and more civilised than the Arab world through a deliberate portrayal of Aladdin as the civilised hero. Such an example demonstrates the overarching need to un-ethnicise a non-Anglo hero, even in a traditionally 'Middle-Eastern' tale, in order to make it appealing for American consumption.

The representation of Arabs and Muslims as sub-human is not limited to television and film. Demeaning images of Arabs and Muslims have recently found their way into children's video games popular in the US. This includes the 2002 *Counter-Strike* (developed by Valve Corporation), a game that requires players to kill or convert non-Christians, all of whom have 'Muslim sounding names' (Streuter & Wills 2008, p. 100), and the 2006 *Left Behind: External Forces* (developed by Inspire Media Entertainment). Both are aimed at young children and encourage players to kill the Muslim/Arab villains (Streuter & Wills 2008, p. 100). The former has been used as a tool to recruit young men into the US army and has attracted over 7.5 million users (Streuter & Wills 2008, p. 100). When considering the history of these depictions, it becomes clear why an Arab or Muslim character who fights injustice, rather than causing it, is a rare depiction on screens across the Western world, not just in Australia.

With images like these peppering screens, it's not surprising that Kristine Wyld, producer of *EW101*, would find an Arab-Muslim male seeking justice to be 'interesting', a point further explored below. Before we discuss the progressive messages found in *EW101*, it is firstly important to situate the series within the service of SBS, a television station dedicated to highlighting and catering to the broadcasting needs of Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is because of the space provided by SBS that productions such as *EW101* and *Fat Pizza* mentioned above can exist and garner an audience.



## **SBS**

The expansion of culturally diverse media was instigated by the findings of the historic review into programs and services available to newly arrived migrants in 1978, commonly known as the Galbally Report, which was undertaken by Melbourne barrister Frank Galbally under the Prime Ministership of Malcolm Fraser (Galbally 1978). The report established the need to expand the scope of linguistically diverse media to meet the needs of migrant communities. The Galbally Report noted the broad range of existing foreign language newspapers and advocated their expansion to radio and television programs (Galbally 1978, p. 112). This is recognised as an important step in the 'politics of recognition' of those from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) communities in a way that recognised languages other than English and created a space in the national media landscape where people from within these communities felt they belonged (McClellan 2013, p. 48).

In 1977 'ethnic' radio was trialed on urban airwaves via radio stations 3EA and 2EA, based in Melbourne and Sydney respectively, both of which proved to be immediately successful and, as a result, the stations were placed under the authority of SBS (Galbally 1978, p. 112). SBS television was launched in 1980 (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 10) with '[t]he principal function [being] to provide multilingual and multicultural ... services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society' (SBS Charter 1991). This was made explicit in the SBS Charter (1991) and indicated the beginnings of a far more inclusive media culture with a desire to promote diversity.

It wasn't till 1991, however, that SBS became an independent corporation with its own legislation and subsequent charter, which stated that the primary role of SBS would be 'to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society' (*Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*, p. 3).

The purpose of SBS was to ‘to unite the nation through understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity’ (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 2). As a result, it has come to be seen as the ‘ethnic’ broadcaster. With such clear aims it is no wonder that SBS houses programs such as *EW101*, *Legally Brown*<sup>15</sup> and *Go Back to Where you Came From*<sup>16</sup>, which focus on telling the stories of non-white Australians. On the other hand, SBS is also aimed at an educated, highbrow, cosmopolitan audience or at least those who are intellectually engaged. As Mark Atkins, Acquisitions Consultant and Programming Preview Manager states: ‘We don’t program for couch potatoes. We want a response out of our viewers, we want to stimulate them’ (quoted in Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 214). Thus, SBS has developed a reputation for being the broadcaster that caters to ‘ethnics’ and ‘eggheads’ (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 221).

Focus groups conducted by consultant group The Leading Edge concluded that the typical audience type for SBS are those with the ‘explorer’ personality. They are independent thinkers, seeking to have their curiosity aroused, and question their environment and surroundings. They appreciate thought-provoking pieces that challenge their perspectives. They enjoy diversity and learning of difference and change (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 242). In having identified who its audience is, we then understand that if programs airing on SBS attract high ratings, it is because they receive interested viewers rather than channel surfers. As Knapman (2010) argues, the SBS audience is a ‘converted’ one, meaning that they are sympathetic to liberal ideologies relating to immigration and cultural diversity. In recent years, however, SBS have attempted to alter this perception by targeting a younger audience. With the inclusion of television programs such as *South Park*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Legally Brown* is a ten-part comedy series written by comedian Nazeem Hussain and produced by Johnny Lowry. It consists of standup sketches in front of a live studio audience, as well as prerecorded skits and social experiments.

<sup>16</sup> *Go Back to Where you Came From* produced by Cordell Jigsaw Productions, is a social experiment packaged as reality television. Each season follows six individuals with a different opinion on Australia’s asylum seeker issue. Over the course of the season they are required to follow the same route as a potential asylum seekers who arrive by boat on Australian shores. They live in refugee camps and even go back to the country of origin.

<sup>17</sup> *South Park* is an animated, satirical, adult sitcom created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.

(1997-present), *MythBusters*<sup>18</sup> (2003-present), *Pizza*<sup>19</sup> (2000-2007) and, more recently, *Legally Brown* (2013), younger audiences have switched to SBS (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 229).

It must also be noted that SBS is a public broadcaster. It has more flexibility in being able to tend to the needs of the nation without answering primarily to advertisers and stakeholders looking for ratings in order to continue funding (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 3). However SBS is a 'low budget broadcaster' (Flew 2009, np) that has found it increasingly difficult to secure funding in order to maintain its ongoing activities and to undertake new initiatives such as local productions (Flew 2009, np). This has led to SBS supplementing its funding with revenue from advertisers, leading to further criticism that it is straying from its intended focus (Flew 2009, np).

When it comes to ratings, SBS has always aimed for 'reach over share', meaning that, while it only receives 3 to 4% of the share of viewers, it reaches over 45.8% of homes each week (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 227). SBS tends to attract a certain number of viewers to specific shows, but these viewers are not the type to cross over and try other programs. They seek programs specifically catered to their interests and are regular and dedicated viewers of them (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 238). SBS television therefore is home to programs that cater to minorities across cultural, class and religious divides. In understanding this, it becomes apparent why a series like *EW101* can thrive on a station like SBS.

### **The White Mainstream in Australian Television**

SBS was a product of Australia's multicultural policies in the 1970s. Thus its programming choices often reflect and promote multicultural Australia (McClellan

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<sup>18</sup> *MythBusters* is produced by Beyond Television Productions. It is a science entertainment program featuring scientific 'myths' that the cast attempts to 'bust' i.e. prove true or false.

<sup>19</sup> *Pizza* is a comedy program produced and created by Paul Fenech. Fenech himself plays the part of the protagonist, a pizza deliveryman. *Pizza* deals with explicit issues like sex and drugs as well as ethnicity and marginalisation.

2013, p. 47), whereas free to air channels tend to be less inclusive. On commercial free to air channels (Seven Network, Nine Network and Network Ten) much of the programming in primetime program slots (6pm-9pm, when the largest audience share is available) is dominated by programs that reinforce Eurocentric norms, including the long-running, award-winning series *Home and Away* (1988-present; Seven Network) and *Neighbours* (1985-present; Network Ten). Newer programs such as *Packed to the Rafters* (2008-2013; Seven Network) also draw in a large share of the audience. This refers of course only to locally produced content. These shows are often lighthearted and relatively innocuous, feel-good programs that are considered appropriate family entertainment. While they reflect social attitudes, they tend not to delve into the realm of the overtly political, leaving the status quo undisrupted. Ward, O'Regan and Goldsmith (2010, p. 170) report that a *Packed to the Rafters* writer stated 'domestic audiences prefer drama to be comfortable, cozy, fairly realistic, and not challenging'.

Overwhelmingly, the characters on each of these programs are Anglo-Australian and the plot lines reinforce middle-class pursuits of romance and family, money and conformity (Ward, O'Regan & Goldsmith 2010, p. 171). May (2001) performed a two-week content analysis on seven Australian-produced television dramas, of which both *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* were included (May 2001, p. 162). The study found that there was not a single 'sustaining cast member [from a non-English speaking background who] was involved in a role which referred to their ethnicity' across the seven programs. However there did appear four guest actors whose roles were 'ethnically based' (May 2001, p. 168). The actors surveyed in this interview stated that, as second-generation migrants, they preferred not to have their ethnicity foregrounded; thus, the role of regular cast members was in line with the wishes of actors from non-English speaking backgrounds. However, it was also noted that 'guest roles are much more likely to utilise such cultural elements as accent, attitude and appearance, in order to engage with a multicultural story' (May 2001, p. 168). While more recent analyses of these programs are not available, commentary by actors within the industry seems to suggest that Australian television is not becoming any more diverse.

The limited casting opportunities experienced in the early 2000s are still evident today. As recently as 2012 Australian actor Firass Dirani and Auckland-born Jay Laga'aia (former *Playschool* host and former *Home and Away* star), who is of Samoan descent, publicly made statements attesting to the 'racism' of the Australian television industry. Dirani commented on the progressive nature of other countries:

American TV, British TV, have shows with different nationalities — and they're not just putting different nationalities up for a point of difference, they're creating work that caters for actors of different backgrounds.' (Wilkins 2012)

When taking a holistic view of Australian television it must be noted that programs imported from overseas, in particular from the United States of America, dominate much of Australia's television landscape. After the implementation of the Australia United States Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA) in early 2005 it became far cheaper to purchase content from the United States, pushing aside locally produced content (Given 2004).

In 2009 Screen Australia for the last time published the top rating TV dramas of the year, after which they began measuring top rating episodes. The list was topped by *Packed to the Rafters* (Seven Network), *All Saints* (Seven Network), *NCIS* (Network Ten), *Midsomer Murders* (ABC1) and *Merlin* (Network Ten). The first two of these are locally produced programs, bringing in 1.9 million and 1.5 million viewers respectively, which indicates a support base for locally produced content in Australia.

By 2012, however, the American-produced drama series *Revenge* took out seven of the top ten places, with Australian-produced *Howzat! Kerry Packer's War Part 1* and *Howzat! Kerry Packers War Part 2* taking positions two and three respectively. Australian produced *Underbelly: Badness* filled tenth place, followed by *Packed to*

*the Rafters* (Screen Australia 2012). The results still indicate strong support for locally produced content but programs such as US produced series *Revenge* and *The Big Bang Theory* have evidently gained a loyal following from Australian audiences. While *The Big Bang Theory* offers limited depictions of cultural diversity, with regular representation of Indian professionals through the characters of Raj and his sister, Priya, *Revenge* is predominantly Anglo-centric, rarely boasting any obvious cultural diversity.

The general clause in the AUSFTA states that 55% of programs on Australian television are required to be Australian content (Given 2004, p. 11). Australian networks, however, are reluctant to purchase Australian content when they have met their 55% quota (Lawrence 2008, p. 122). This is in part because Australian television does not have the same budgeting freedoms as many productions coming out of the United States. (Lawrence 2008, p. 124). A bigger budget means more special effects and the ability to attract big name actors, which usually leads to higher audience ratings. Furthermore, the Australian television industry, as of 2008, possessed a \$164 million trade deficit, indicating that, unfortunately, Australian content does not sell overseas (Lawrence 2008, p. 125).

This is not to say, however, that it necessarily does much better in Australia. Australian television programs set in a hospital (*All Saints* and more recently *Offspring*) or a small community (*Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *A Country Practice*, *Packed to the Rafters* etc), as well as cop shows (*Blue Heelers*, *White Collar Blue*, *Wildside*, *Water Rats*, *Stingers* to name a few) are the formats that seem to reassure networks and retain the greatest audience share and popularity. Anything else makes networks nervous and, often, new programs in Australia are not given the time they need (usually more than one season) to establish their fan base (Lawrence 2008, p. 125), resulting in an overall belief that certain formats simply do not have any demand.

The issue therefore, one that is unable to be fully discussed here, is not simply that Australian television is not representative of anything beyond young (if you are

female) white, middle-class experiences, but that the tensions created by a disparity in financial investment between imported cultural products and locally produced ones are great. Even the ABC and SBS, which are expected to address not only the gap in content, but also to provide more diverse representation, are unable to do so without the necessary funding from government bodies, since few independent investors are willing to invest in shows that do not typically attract large mainstream audiences. This concern is echoed by many of the participants in this research, including commissioning directors and local content producers. *EW101*, however, is a rare example of where such an investment has been made.

### **East West 101**

*EW101* is a crime drama series produced for SBS by Kristine Wyld and Steve Knapman (also producers of *Wild Side*<sup>20</sup> and *White Collar Blue*<sup>21</sup>), starring Don Hany as Zane Malik. Michelle Offen, a researcher and writer on *EW101*, explained that the idea for the series came from former SBS Commissioning Editor, Glenys Rowe, who had indicated that she was ‘interested in a crime series about a Muslim detective’ (Offen 2012).

The show screened on SBS for three seasons between 2007 and 2011. *EW101* centres on the life of male protagonist Zane Malik, a Muslim detective in the Major Crime Squad (MCS), located in Sydney’s western suburbs. Through the series we are exposed to the intricacies of a Muslim detective juggling faith, family and the demands of his profession. The themes explored in *EW101* are made explicit from

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<sup>20</sup> *Wildside* was a crime drama series screening on the ABC from 1997 to 1999. In 1998 it received two TV Week Logie Awards, one for Most Outstanding Actor, awarded to Tony Martin, and the other for Most Outstanding Miniseries. Later that same year it also won 5 Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards for Best Miniseries, Best Episode in a Series (Episode 17), Best Writer (Tom Pye), Best Direction in a Television Drama (Peter Andrikidis) and Best Actress (Rachel Blake). In 1999 it won two more Logies for Most Outstanding Actor (Tony Martin) and Most Outstanding Actress (Rachel Blake). It was again nominated for five AFI’s (Australian Film Institute Awards) and won Best Episode (Episode 59) and the Holding Redlich Young Actors Award Best New Talent (Abbie Cornish).

<sup>21</sup> *White Collar Blue* was also a crime drama series that ran on Network Ten from 2001 to 2003. Lead actor on the series, Peter O’Brien, received a TV Week Logie Award in 2003 for Most Outstanding Actor (Knapman & Wyld 2010).

the outset and the intentions of the production team are hardly discreet. Throughout the series the perceived conflict between being a Muslim and a police officer, fighting for 'Western' ideals of justice, are brought into question. While Malik rarely seems to find his Muslim and police officer identities in conflict, this is not the case with some of his colleagues. As will be explored in the following chapter, the police force as an institution is symbolic of the white nation. This means that the perception of conflict between Malik's identities as an Arab, as a Muslim and as a police officer starts to raise questions about his apparent loyalty to the nation.

*EW101* comments on the social tensions in Australian societies, in particular those in Sydney and, even more specifically, in Sydney's western suburbs, a region of Sydney rarely explored in Australian popular culture. The desire of Knapman and Wyld to create something groundbreaking has resulted in noteworthy praise within the Australian television industry. Since Season One of *EW101*, they and their team have received much recognition both in Australia and overseas, with Season Three actor Matt Nable (who plays Neil Travis) claiming, '[e]very actor in Australia ... would love to be on *East West 101*. It's sort of the benchmark of Australian drama' (Catanzariti 2011).

In 2008 *EW101* was awarded an AFI (Australian Film Institute) Award for Best Miniseries. This was followed in 2009 by three AFI's for Best TV Drama Series, Best Lead Actress (Susie Porter as Patricia Wright) and Best Director (Peter Andrikidis). In 2010 it was awarded two TV Week Logie Awards for Most Outstanding Actor (Don Hany) and Most Outstanding Miniseries, as well as multiple international awards. These included a gold medal at the New York Film and Television Festival Awards and three awards at the Los Angeles Awards of Excellence, including the awards for Best Miniseries, Best Leading Actor (Don Hany) and Best Supporting Actor (Gerry Lepkowski as Skerrit) (Australian Associated Press [AAP] 2011; Knapman & Wyld 2010). In 2011 it won three Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA, previously AFI) Awards including Best Television Drama Series (Season Three - 'A Hero's Journey') and was nominated for Most



Outstanding Lead Actor (Don Hany), Best Supporting Actor (Aaron Fa'aoso) and Best Supporting Actress (Rena Owen).

As discussed above, SBS must deal with culturally diverse content. Thus, the fact that *EW101* features on SBS is not surprising. 'We're making a genre show but we're also meeting all their multicultural charter requirements,' says Knapman (cited in Hassall 2007). Knapman alludes to the idea that multicultural television need not be an independent genre. It can easily be incorporated into existing genres through deliberate casting of people from diverse backgrounds. Don Hany himself recognises that often the television made in Australia does not reflect the diversity of the Australian population. This, he admits, can make it very hard when you're wanting to 'cast ethnic roles' as 'you're dealing with a very small pool of actors. You end up finding people who can do it, but they might not have done it before' (Hassall 2007). While people like director, Peter Andrikidis, welcome the diversity of experience actors bring to the screen (Hassall 2007), he and others recognise that a show like *EW101* might not have been as successful on other channels. As Steve Knapman (2010) aptly summarised:

I think if it were on a commercial network it would rate through the roof. But I think if we'd developed it with a commercial network ... They couldn't have done it ... Because they don't know how to operate at the level we operate. They just don't get it ... So if it was on Seven, Nine or Ten, the show would rate but Seven, Nine or Ten could never have developed this show.

The comment above, relating to the networks being unable to 'operate at the level' of people like Wyld and Knapman, can be interpreted in a way that implies networks need to understand a certain 'layering' or a depth that exists in the work of experienced producers and writers. Those who work on the show attribute its success to the extensive research conducted by the writers and producers. Michelle Offen (2012) offered that the research involved both reading extensively about the Arab and Muslim communities in Australia and beyond, and speaking to people in ethnic communities and from within the police force, including several

detectives. Primarily, they consulted a young Muslim detective who, Offen (2012) claimed, for privacy reasons could not be named but operated under the alias 'Ali Rafik'. 'Ali' whose real name is Hany Elbatoory (as reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Hassall 2007) introduced them to a number of other Arab detectives, both Christian and Muslim, allowing for the exposure to a diversity of Arab experiences. 'Ali' also happened to be friends with a young Samoan Christian detective and after months of liaising with the young men they became the inspiration for the characters of Zane Malik and Sonny Koa (Offen 2012). However, as Offen explained, 'the police department were a bit particular about who they allow to speak to us', the entire MCS was based on individuals with whom they had liaised in the Police Force. Although SBS had asked Offen and colleagues 'to try and find Middle Eastern writers', SBS did not have any contact with Middle Eastern writers themselves. Offen (2012) claimed that she,

did look quite hard ... I just trawled the internet and I ended up with Shereene Salama. I was very upfront about it. I said, 'look this is my first credit, I want the opportunity to write but SBS won't take me on, on my own, and rightly so' ... I don't think she realised how much work it was.

Eventually Shereene found herself time poor and unable to contribute in the same way that Offen could and her overall contribution was quite minor (Offen, 2012).

Despite none of the writers sharing the specific cultural backgrounds of the characters they were writing, all those interviewed agreed that it was this research that gave their characters the required three dimensionality and depth that they believed was otherwise lacking when characters from 'culturally diverse', meaning those from non-English speaking, non-Christian backgrounds, are created for other Australian television programs.

Despite the lengthy consultation and research process, the team made it clear that they were not interested in

mak[ing] a politically correct show. I'm as little interested in pandering to that as I am playing a commercial game because what we look for is in all things in the process, we look for the balance and the contradiction. (Knapman 2010)

Knapman and Wyld were not interested in creating two-dimensional characters that reiterated basic stereotypes and reinforced national narratives familiar to most Australians. Instead, as Caterina De Nave, Commissioning Editor of Drama and Comedy at SBS, stated: 'We mentioned to Knapman and Wyld that ... we wanted to do something around a Middle Eastern character, and they of course are experts in cop shows, so it became a cop show' (De Nave 2011). As this research will explain, it is not simply a 'cop show' but one that attempts to challenge the common narrative of the white Australian hero. The 'balance and the contradiction' alluded to above will be further explored in the following chapters.

#### The inspiration for the show

came out of 9/11, the desire to do something that explored the tension between I guess the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world ... because up until 9/11 people were only dimly aware of the Muslims in our world, in the Western world and they didn't really know anything very much about Mohammed. They might have had a vague idea about the crusades; they probably hadn't done much thinking. They probably knew about Ramadan but beyond that it wouldn't have been a great knowledge base. (Wyld 2010)

The show was clearly intended to be read against a backdrop of current global affairs and it was with the intention of exploring the 'tension' not just between the Islamic and non-Islamic 'world' but also between Muslims and non-Muslims who happen to coexist, that the series was produced. Within *EW101*, Knapman and Wyld's desire to enlighten and educate audiences is evident. However, as they mention above, they were not interested in producing a 'politically correct' show, meaning they were not interested in presenting Muslims as flawless heroes. They

attempted to explore the full complexity of the issues that some Muslims experience around marginalisation and alienation. The series is loosely based on the real experiences of detectives in Sydney; in particular the character of Zane Malik is based on Egyptian Muslim detective, Hany Elbatoory, while the remainder of the MCS are loosely based on Elbatoory's colleagues, a multicultural team of officers and detectives, affectionately dubbed the 'Wog Squad' (Hassall 2007).

It is the context of the television program that is vital to understand what generates acclaim by critics and mild skepticism from the academy. As mentioned in the previous chapter the Howard era, the Cronulla Riots and of course a post-September 11 world and the subsequent War on Terror, including the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, have much to do with a reemergence of fear toward the Muslim/Arab Other (Poynting et al. 2004).

*EW101* deals with current issues facing Australia's Arab and Muslim communities. While the storylines tend to focus around the experiences of Arab and Muslim Australians, they are also widely relevant to Australians from other ethnic and religious communities. One of the most progressive elements of the show is its culturally diverse cast and its representation of Muslims as an ethnically diverse group of people (further explored below). The story centres on the lives, careers and day-to-day struggles of the MCS, a team of innovative, and competent young individuals whose job it is to deal with the horrendous crimes in Sydney's West. Led by Inspector Patricia Wright (played by Susie Porter), the team is made up of detectives Zane Malik (played by Don Hany), Sonny Koa (played by Aaron Fa'aoso), Helen Callas (played by Daniela Farinacci) and Jung Lim (played by Renee Lim). There are also seasonal appearances by Detective Sergeant Ray Crowley (played by William McInnes), Agent Richard Skerritt (played by Gerald Lepowski) and Detective Neil Travis (played by Matt Nable). The team is highly diverse in terms of age, culture, religion and sexuality, encompassing the basic elements of everyday multiculturalism (Wise 2009).

### ***Everyday Multiculturalism in East West 101***

Everyday Multiculturalism is defined by Velayutham and Wise (2009, p. 3) as

a grounded approach to looking at the *everyday practice* and lived experience of diversity in specific situations and spaces of encounter. It explores how social actors experience and negotiate cultural difference on the ground and how their social relations and identities are shaped and re-shaped in the process.

Earlier discussed by Stratton (1998), the emphasis is on the mundane happenings and encounters of everyday life rather than the top down policy-related approach that traditional multiculturalism literature has sought to deal with. This, however, does not mean that the broader social and political issues are neglected; rather, the basis of everyday multiculturalism is that these broader issues find their way into the day-to-day social interactions between individuals, whether they choose or are forced to encounter difference. Workplaces are important sites of everyday multiculturalism as they involve daily and intensive encounters between people of different cultural backgrounds.

In making cultural diversity the norm, Knapman and Wyld have reflected the lived reality of most Australian workplaces. A nationwide study undertaken by Ang et al. (2002, p. 29) found that 56% of the Australians surveyed had contact with people from different cultural backgrounds through their workplaces. This proved to be an important entry point into regular interactions with others from different cultural backgrounds, as work relationships often allowed people to continue to build bonds and with those outside their own cultures.

The workplace thus becomes a 'contact zone' (Wise 2004), a place where people from different cultures encounter one another. The term has its roots in a more complex definition as a

space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. (Pratt 1992, p. 6)

As Watson (2006, p. 2) discusses of public spaces in general: 'Moments of tranquility or harmony can easily erupt into moments of antagonism and violence' in situations where people are required to experience unfamiliar difference. Ang (2003, p. 147) draws our attention to examples of colonisation for a complete illustration of how violent these encounters can become, but reminds us that 'different "peoples" who are thrown into intercultural confrontation with each other, whether by force or by will, have to negotiate their differences if they are to avoid war'.

While a full-blown war is hardly likely in the case of a workplace, it is this negotiation of difference, complete with power hierarchies and occasional conflict, that *EW101* aims to explore in an attempt to demonstrate that relative harmony can exist in a culturally diverse space. For the most part we see the MCS as a place of positive and normalised experiences with difference evident, for example, in the relationship between Malik and Sonny Koa. Koa is a young Pacific Islander who in many ways shares Malik's childhood experiences of alienation and isolation. Koa is Malik's best friend, loyal ally and closest confidant. The relationship between Malik and Koa demonstrates the potential for coexistence despite difference. It illustrates to audiences that shared values and interests can bridge gaps across cultures. So much so that people from different cultural backgrounds can be as close to you as family.

While Wise's (2004) initial research on contact zones in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield showed that many elderly, Anglo-Celtic, long-term members of the community were struggling to embrace the rapidly changing culture of their suburb with the recent influx of Indian and Chinese migrants; she also acknowledges the emergence of what she terms 'hopeful intercultural encounters' (2006, p. 172). The individuals involved in these encounters, she believes, are

'beginning to explore and discover ways of connecting across difference' (Wise 2006, p. 177). In many ways, this is an appropriate description of how members of the culturally diverse MCS operate. Although they come from Greek, Iraqi, Chinese, Pacific Islander and Anglo-Australian backgrounds, they are able to work together, collectively united by their pursuit of justice.

At the end of Season One, we see a very tumultuous relationship between Detective Sergeant, Ray Crowley, and Detective Malik come to a peaceful resolution based solely on the need to put aside their differences and clear their names. Both men are implicated in a series of interconnected criminal activity. Crowley is the prime suspect for the murder of a drug dealer, Jamal Basha, who was responsible for selling the drugs that killed Crowley's young son, while Malik is suspected of dabbling in terrorist activity. Although, as we discover, Crowley is in fact guilty, both men must work together to prevent their reputations from being tarnished. Despite Malik's knowledge of Crowley's guilt, he understands Crowley's desire to avenge the death of his son and seeks to conceal evidence that might convict him; the reasons for this are discussed below. This mutual need creates a sense of trust and security between the two men, not previously experienced in their professional relationship. These characteristics of a relationship, as Wise (2006, p. 178) explores, give rise to a sense of community, which allow for the fruition of hopeful and prosperous encounters across, and in spite of, difference.

For Koa and Malik, however, the basis of their friendship emerges from a shared bond through past experiences of alienation and social isolation. Both have struggled to be accepted based on their cultural background and both are familiar with the hyper-masculine displays required to survive teenage life as a young male from a minority group. Their sense of security and trust therefore does not flourish from a temporarily shared goal but from shared experiences, which they hope to convert into a shared vision for the future. Both Koa and Malik are instrumental in mentoring young men from their respective cultural communities and encouraging them to stay away from violent and illegal activity in order to make their way up

the social ladder. Thus Koa and Malik's sense of 'community' extends beyond the workplace and into hope for the broader Australian community. It is through the relationship between Koa and Malik that we truly see that the 'conditions of possibility are a sense of belonging, trust and security of the outward looking kind, the kind that gives us a sense of belonging and safety from which we can embrace the world' (Wise 2006, p. 178). This is solidified in Koa's asking Malik to be his son's godfather.

Koa: My son's getting christened next Saturday week; I wanted to know whether you'd go godparent?

Malik: What are you asking me for? Won't your rels mind?

Koa: Who cares? I just want a positive role model for my son, someone who'll teach him right from wrong.

Malik: I'll start by making sure he plays soccer.

This gesture solidifies their friendship and brings Malik into the fold of family. Malik, although obviously flattered, clarifies with Koa that his family would not be offended by such a gesture, recognising the importance of the extended family unit in Pacific Island culture. This also allows for Koa and Malik to bond across religious differences – Koa as a devout Christian and Malik as a devout Muslim.

The series is not simply about demonstrating that people from various cultural backgrounds can forge close bonds with one another. It is also about recognising that in certain contexts, people from 'diverse' cultural backgrounds are more equipped than their colleagues to deal with particular situations. Over the course of the three seasons we see various detectives assigned to lead cases that directly involve their ethnic community groups. In Season One we see Wright prioritise the most junior detective, Jung Lim, over her more senior counterparts when a case arises involving the local Chinese community. Wright recognises the importance of building rapport with local communities and utilises the 'diasporic' affiliations (Ang 2003, p. 141) and language skills of her team in order to ensure that the best results are achieved in the shortest period of time with minimal disruption to the



communities involved. Wright adopts a similar approach with Malik when looking into cases that involve the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities. In this way, we can view Malik, and at times his colleagues, as what Wise (2009, p. 24) terms 'transversal enablers'.

As Wise explains: 'Transversal enablers are personalities in towns and neighbourhoods who produce ... knowledge and inter-ethnic information networks' (Wise 2009, p. 24). They are responsible for creating 'threads of connection across cultural difference – for themselves and their local communities' (Wise 2009, p. 24), a point that will be further discussed in the following chapter. Malik is familiar with the cultural practices of the Anglo-Australian mainstream and the Arabic and Muslim communities. His understanding of both cultures allows him to pass on information about appropriate cultural and social conduct from one group to the next. He has what Noble, following Putnam terms 'bridging capital' – 'knowledge of the host society and local structures and connections to those with influence' (Noble 2009a, p. 55). Malik's job is not necessarily to function as a beacon of cultural harmony but rather to negotiate between cultures in the face of 'local forms of racism and marginalization' (Noble 2009a, p. 54). For Malik this is sometimes what helps him solve the case and prove the guilt or innocence of a suspect.

In a social context, where the disproportionate targeting of young men of 'Middle Eastern appearance' has been well documented, Malik's role is to use his cultural knowledge to build a rapport with 'Middle Eastern' communities and ensure that justice prevails. While he does not seek to protect perpetrators from the full force of the law, he does play a role in ensuring that young men in particular are not wrongly charged with crimes they did not commit. Part of his role as a negotiator is readily relating to young men who share his cultural background and demonstrating that he understands them and wishes to help them. He of course can only do this if they trust him enough to tell him the truth. An example of Malik's role as a negotiator occurs at the end of the very first episode. A young boy by the name of Talal Laban (played by Firass Dirani) is on the run after having

been wrongly accused of shooting and killing a police officer. In the last minutes of the episode the police have Talal cornered in an old train yard. Talal feels as if he has nothing lose, believing he'll end up in jail for a crime he did not commit and thus will not go down without a fight. Malik heroically rushes in to talk to Talal unarmed, although he knows Talal is armed with a rifle. The conversation unfolds between Talal and Malik and we realise the importance of the social context within which Talal's arrest is taking place. Malik is pleading with Talal to 'put the gun down' so they can talk about this 'back at the station' because Malik knows he 'didn't do it'. Talal responds:

Talal: I didn't fly a plane into the World Trade Tower either but I may as well have, because I'm an Arab and Arabs are terrorists. They're not with us, then they'll never accept us, no matter what we do mate.

Malik: Listen to me, alright. I respect you Talal. I respect ya.

Talal: But they, they don't.

Malik: Then fight off it Talal. You gotta earn their respect. Prove to them that you deserve it. You don't get respect by waving a gun around. You're out there helping the refugees. Sheikh Elalwany told me you got a high distinction at uni. So what are you doing here? You're not a criminal. Ali's not a criminal.

Talal: So, so why were they pointing guns at us then?

Malik: They got you mixed up with someone else, alright. Now tell me what happened. Talk to me.

This instance isn't simply about translating the cultural norms of the mainstream to a member of a different cultural group, it is also about understanding and relating to the experiences of young disenfranchised men caught up in a system that does little to rectify the institutional disadvantages they experience.

In addition to the diversity and skilled cultural negotiation of the detectives on the show, *EW101* also displays the full range of ethnic diversity across the Muslim community. Although most of the stories feature Arab-Muslim characters, *EW101*

goes some way to dispelling the misconception that all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arab. The first season in particular introduces a number of storylines demonstrating this diversity. Episode Three centres on an Arab-Christian family whose two sons have been killed in a drug related murder. This clearly illustrates that there are Christian Arabs and also that the social issues relating to drugs spread across these communities and are not confined to the Arab-Muslim community specifically. Episode Five deals with a Serbian-Muslim mother and daughter who are suspects in a murder case. It unclear who the killer is as they both try to cover for the other. The victim was a soldier in the former Yugoslavia who is thought to have raped the mother. Upon arriving in Australia they run into the ex-soldier while attempting to purchase a used car and they recognise him as being the man who committed the rape. This allows audiences to recognise the cultural reach of Islam and the different issues that community groups face as a result of their experiences of war.

The MCS is not simply a microcosm of a well-oiled multicultural machine, it is also the site of much turmoil and exclusion, as will be discussed in the following chapters. The analysis that follows, however, will explore the ways in which the character of Malik is involved in connecting people and bridging cultural divides.

### ***Zane Malik, Muslim Detective.***

Zane Malik is a Muslim man whose family migrated from Iraq during his childhood. Malik's family, once in Australia, attempt to make a living through running a small mixed business located in the Western Sydney suburb of Lidcombe. We learn this in the opening scene where, within moments, the themes of East and West are brought to the fore, constantly flickering between images that illustrate an obvious juxtaposition between the two cultures to ones that seem to be speaking of an innocuous in-betweenness where, for the next three seasons, Malik's ambivalence is to be played out.



**Figure 1: Malik and his young family: Yasmeen (played by Lucy Abroon), Amir (played by George Fayed) and his wife, Amina (played by Tasneem Roc).**

In the opening scene Malik brings us into the conflicting space that he occupies. The *Athaan* or the Muslim call to prayer is the first sound we hear as the opening credits begin to roll over a black screen, followed by the piercing sound of police sirens. The *Athaan* has obvious symbolic meaning for Muslims, being a repetitive reminder of their connection to God. The siren symbolises the authority of the Western institution of the police service. These are two forces, which in current debate are depicted as continually conflicting.

Malik's presence in the police force serves a dual and contradictory purpose. Firstly, it demonstrates how those on the margins are required to prove first their loyalty to the nation state, in this case through pledging loyalty to their team, as Malik is required to do. Secondly, it challenges the idea that only the Anglo

majority can legitimately occupy this governing space. Here we recognise the continual conflict that Malik encounters by virtue of being a Muslim police officer in an Australian context. What makes for interesting television is how Malik is able to negotiate the perceived conflict between his identity as a police officer and a practising Muslim. It is this negotiation that makes *EW101* edgy and sometimes confronting drama.

In contrast to the images of conflict offered by the juxtaposition of Islamic motifs and the police force, there are instances in *EW101* where the difference between East and West is not emphasised. Rather, there are subtle suggestions that cultures have influenced one another and that Malik's world is a meshing together of East and West. The remainder of the opening scene reinforces this focus on the third, hybrid space as we are shown a close up of a young Zane Malik writing and rewriting his spelling words – 'identity', 'separate' and 'ambition' – as he sits in his parents' mixed business, surrounded by Oriental foodstuffs and wearing a green and gold jacket that possibly represents Australia's sporting colours, firmly situating the narrative in the between space of these two cultures. The culture of Malik's parents is symbolised by food and produce unfamiliar to the Australian landscape. While the background seems to indicate that the two cultures sit together, albeit clunkily, Malik's homework task reminds us that the experience can still be isolating and alienating.

The music playing as we watch Malik complete his homework has been described as 'the fusion of Middle-Eastern and contemporary western music' (CDBaby 2011), ensuring that the aesthetics of the opening scene locate us in the murky territory somewhere between *us* and *them*. A man in a black balaclava, wearing a black jacket and blue jeans walks into the store. We notice Malik's face is fearful and panic-stricken. The man comes face to face with the young Malik and draws his gun, firmly demanding that he give him 'the money'. Malik hesitates in what could be interpreted as a response of defiance, emphasised by his clear articulation of the word 'no'. Malik's father comes to the front of the store pleading with Malik to give the money to the armed robber, while the man continues to scream at Malik

'give us the money, or I'll blow your brains out'. At this point we are presented with the ocean blue of eyes of the man behind the balaclava as he draws his gun and shoots Malik's father in the shoulder, leaving a horrified Malik to deal with the blood pouring from his father's wound. We later learn that this wound has left Malik's father in an almost childlike condition, unable to complete basic tasks such as eating and showering without assistance. We also learn that the assailant has not been caught and the case remains unsolved. Malik feels it is his responsibility to apprehend the assailant and ensure that justice under the law is served.

This instance introduces us to Malik's family, locating them as a vital element within this story. It is the intersection between Malik's private life at home with his family and his professional life at the office or in the field that come together as sites of negotiation. It is between these two worlds of East and West that Malik must translate and teach one to understand the other. We learn that Malik is the only child of Rahman (played by Taffy Hany, Don Hany's real life father) and Mariam Malik (played by Irimi Pappas), who live with him and his young family. Malik is in his mid 30s and married to an intelligent and rational woman, Amina (played by Tasneem Roc). Together they have two young children, Amir (played by George Fayad) and Yasmin (played by Lucy Abroon). The family dynamic offers us insight to Malik as a person rather than a professional. Through the depiction of Malik as a family man the audience can relate to a Muslim as an ordinary man. It also allows for an exploration into the ordinary life of Malik, highlighting the similarities Muslims share with non-Muslim families.

Knapman (2010) explained:

We made a decision early on to go home with Malik ... so we could see a Muslim family, but we also wanted to just show that it's nothing special. They're not always on the prayer mat, all those clichés that people might have.

Entering the realm of the private assists in demystifying some of the common misconceptions associated with Islam and Muslims. As we witness Malik and his wife going about day-to-day chores of washing or preparing dinner, the audience is able to see how a Muslim family might operate. But most importantly that it doesn't operate so differently from a non-Muslim family. The addition of the family dynamic also allows the breakdown of misconceptions concerning Arab and Muslim men as dictatorial and aggressive in the home with their families. Knapman and Wyld (2010) discussed their intentions in relation to gender roles and wanting to show that 'she's [Amina] not kowtowing, she's not under the thumb' (Knapman, 2010). Amina is a woman brought to life on terms 'we' as Australians can understand. While being a dedicated mother and wife, she also juggles this responsibility with her own job (though we are never told what it is she does) and the extracurricular activities of her children. The fact that Malik and Amina are depicted as an ordinary couple, arguing over family responsibilities and prolonged absences as a result of work commitments, make them, and by extension Muslims, less foreign to the mainstream audience.

It is this element of *sameness* that is vital in *EW101* and allows Malik to appear as a 'reasonable' and non-extremist voice from within the Muslim community. It is this very characteristic that makes Malik an 'entry' point for a mainstream audience (Nicholls 2011, p. 576).

Malik is like *us* in that he fights for justice, wants to see those who transgress be reprimanded and is generally a good person, but he is unlike *us* in that his commitment to justice and indeed the basis for his very morality stems from a belief in a God that requires him to pray five times a day, fast the month of Ramadan and refrain from the consumption of alcohol. Malik is depicted as a religiously observant Muslim, so his reasons are not secular ideals of 'goodness' but rather, deeply rooted in religious obligations to humanity. Malik's character is not just interesting for his similarities but also for his differences.

The character of Malik is previously uncharted territory on Australian television; in fact there are very few Malik prototypes throughout the Western world. He is perceived as sensitive and ethical, not without flaws, but mostly justified in his actions. Malik is also an optimist, believing wholeheartedly that different groups in society can cohabit in peace and understanding can be reached. Malik is a likeable character, making it easier for audiences to relate to his world. This was an intentional move on part of the writers and those in charge of casting.

The thing about Don is he's pretty appealing and we wanted the audience to like him and we wanted both Muslim and non-Muslim or non-Arabic people to like him as well. We didn't want to alienate him with a strong look (Knapman 2010).

As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, Malik strikes a chord with audiences who welcome the character as a demonstration of what Australian television can create when it embraces diversity. Casting the attractive Don Hany as Malik means that there is also an aesthetic appeal to his character. Audiences can silently (or vocally) swoon over his masculine charm and physical prowess making him relatable by ensuring he was desirable. His good looks are complemented by his sensitive character and good nature, making his heroic status more pronounced. Additionally, Malik's character is not 'alienating'. The lack of a 'strong look' that Knapman mentions indicates that Hany is not identifiably 'Middle Eastern'. Indeed he often plays white characters in other Australian dramas such as *Offspring*<sup>22</sup> and *Lucky Miles*<sup>23</sup>. This 'neutral' or 'white' look demonstrates a desire to emphasise the

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<sup>22</sup> *Offspring* is produced by John Edwards, and airs on Network Ten. It centres on the life of obstetrician, Nina Proudman (played by Asher Keddie). *Offspring* first aired in 2010 and just went to air with its fifth season. Over the five-season duration, the show has won a number of AFI awards as well as numerous Logies. In season one, Don Hany played the role of Chris Havel, Nina's love interest, another doctor at the hospital at which she works. He was assumed to be of an Anglo-Australian background during the series.

<sup>23</sup> *Lucky Miles* was a feature film directed by Michael James Rowland. It premiered at the Adelaide Film Festival in 2007 and won a number of awards that year, at various international film festivals. The film tells the story of a small group of Iraqi and Cambodian refugees who arrive in Australia by boat. Don Hany plays the role of a young army reservist in charge of finding the boat full of men who have wandered through the scorching Australian desert. As with *Offspring*, Hany's cultural background is never discussed, leading the audience to assume that he is an Anglo Australian.



'sameness' of Malik, not just through his actions but also through his physical appearance. In showcasing Malik's sameness, the audience is able to be welcomed into a world of difference that is relatable and not overly uncomfortable.

The scene with a young Malik situating himself in the betweenness of 'us' and 'them' then cuts back to him as an adult praying in congregation while the *Imam* recites out loud verses from the *Quran*. We are shown shots of Persian rugs and Islamic architecture in various shades of red, cream and brown interspersed with Quranic verses written in Arabic calligraphy found on the walls of the mosque. As we follow the movements of Malik in prayer, a mystic, almost meditative feel washes over the audience, but the whooshing of a train and the broad Australian accents that we hear over the police radio quickly interrupt the meditation. The fast cuts and loud noises bring us back to the urban present. We quickly cut to an outside shot of the mosque, locating the series in an urban setting. The police speak over the radio announcing 'an armed hold up in process, in Mason Street, Lakemba', describing the offenders as 'male, Middle Eastern, about 160 centimeters tall'. At this point a chase begins, resulting in a physical altercation between the two young boys and the police officers and the eventual death of one officer. The details of how this happened are initially unclear.

Within the first two minutes and thirty seconds of the first episode we have already been introduced to the underlying tensions of the series. These tensions create possibilities within the third space but also, as Ang (1996a, p. 46) rightly outlines, limit the subject in their means of expression. In this instance as *EW101* continues we see Malik constructed as the ideal Australian Muslim, one who is employed, hard working, fluent in English and obviously working for *us*. This is explored in detail in Chapter Five.

The opening sequence is vital in setting the tone for the rest of the season, as it indicates to us Malik's motivation behind joining the police force, underscoring the fact that his work is indeed personal and his commitment to justice, not just concerning his father but in all matters where people have been wronged. It

further cements in the minds of viewers, by visual representation more than any verbal articulation, the jarring conflict between East and West. At the same time it seeks to situate Malik between two cultures. The show also demonstrates Malik's greater purpose in becoming a police officer. When Malik is questioned by his wife, Amina, about the long hours he is putting in at work after a bomb has gone off in a nearby suburb and points out how little time he devotes to his family as a result of this, he turns to her and says, 'isn't that the point of all this? To prove that Muslims aren't behind it.' Thus, the character of Malik very explicitly exists to exhibit to audiences the positive virtues that some Muslims can bring to our society.

Like the other case studies to be considered in this research, one of the aims of *EW101* was to 'bridge the gap of understanding'. Writers on all three productions have echoed that allowing a glimpse into the world of these men has been the primary purpose of creating these products, as we shall see below.

Knapman (2010) stated:

[D]oing it for SBS we knew we had a converted audience, so it's how to bridge the gap and it's where the title came from, where we realised finally it was pretty obviously that [*East West 101*].

Whilst the title pits East and West against one another and stirs up traditional Orientalist imagery, it further illustrates an interesting space between East and West that is neither completely Eastern nor entirely Western. It is a space where East can meet West and the tensions between the two apparently 'opposite' modes of existence can be played out, reinterpreted and challenged. The '101' refers to an entry-level course into the everyday realities and tensions where East is forced to meet West. As discussed above, all elements of the series come together in the hope of bridging the East/West divide. The music incorporates both a mystic Eastern feel with the frequent use of the *oud*, a guitar-like instrument popular in the Middle East, with contemporary western beats, bringing us aesthetically into a space of betweenness. Malik's public and private lives are also embodied in the

title of East West. The title helps us to situate Malik at the center of this narrative. During the first episode we have been introduced to the hybrid Malik and within an hour he has attempted to challenge common discursive constructions of the Arab male.

The remaining case studies attempt to give voice to the young Arab male through an exploration of the struggles and disadvantages of growing up working class and Arab in Western Sydney. Understanding how a racialised element to their class status complicates their experience of masculinity is imperative to understanding the experiences of these young men. George Basha, writer of *The Combination*, and Serhat Caradee, writer and director of *Cedar Boys*, explore the lives of disenfranchised young men in an Australian landscape. In so doing, they fracture the perception of Australian masculinity disseminated to both a domestic and international audience and present an image of the Muslim/Arab male that is almost entirely unlike Malik. In so doing, they force others to recognise their right to belong.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **SPEAKING FOR THE MARGINALISED: ARAB-AUSTRALIAN MEN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STORYTELLING**

#### **Introduction**

*EW101* contributes to the overall representation of Arabs and Muslims by normalising their existence through positive portrayals of multicultural communities. In offering a depiction of a workplace where competent and skilled men and women from a variety of cultural backgrounds work towards achieving a common goal, the writers elucidate the idea that cultural background does not affect one's ability to work professionally, diligently and honorably. Indeed, in the case of Malik it demonstrates how ties to one's cultural and religious communities can allow for a more sensitive and thorough approach to professional engagement. For a community consistently represented in a negative light, the depiction of a normalised existence in a (fictional) personal and professional capacity is important for promoting understanding between Arab and Muslim communities and the mainstream audience. Identifying Arabs and Muslims who are like 'us' assists in making them less foreign. I will argue on the other hand that films such as *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* offer voice to a disenfranchised group of young Arab (and occasionally Muslim) males, allowing audiences to engage with the story of youths who are generally silenced or demonised. The presence of these stories is, I posit, are vital to an understanding of the feelings of isolation experienced by those who exist on the margins, struggling to be accepted. It is through films like these that such young men feel validated, acknowledged and heard.

This chapter will explore the inspiration for both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, offering insight into the demographics of George Basha, writer and actor in *The Combination*, and Serhat Caradee, writer/director of and actor in *Cedar Boys*. It will

acknowledge the gap that these films have filled in relation to missing voices in Australian cinema.

### **National Identity: Cronulla and the Experience of Australian Masculinity**

Of the incidents discussed in Chapter Two, the gang rapes and the Cronulla Riots were most influential in labelling young Arab and Muslim masculinity as deviant. In this section of the chapter I will use a brief analysis of the language employed in the lead up to and the aftermath of the Cronulla Riots to explain the national context within which *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* operate. Indeed, *The Combination* makes direct reference to the riots as the plot unfolds. The voices of the young men depicted in these films were overlooked in most accounts of the riots, underscoring why these films are necessary in the telling of Australian stories.

As Chapter Two explained, the Cronulla Riots took place after a 'gang' of 'Lebs' attacked two off-duty lifesavers (not in uniform) on Cronulla beach on December 4, 2005. The intense media coverage of the incident generated a hysteria that resulted in mass public assembly at Cronulla beach on December 11, 2005. The attacks on the lifesavers were depicted as a regular, unprovoked occurrence by 'Lebs', on Sydney beaches. The incident, however, was a response to aggravating comments made by the off-duty lifesavers, who taunted them with: 'Lebs can't swim'. Notwithstanding the initial mocking, an attack on the iconic lifesaver (discussed below), regardless of circumstance, is an attack on Australianness and, specifically, white masculinity (Evers 2008, p. 419); an attack on the beach is an attack on a quintessential Australian space (Barclay & West 2006, p. 76). Such an incident was only made more difficult by the suicide bombings in Bali, three years earlier (as discussed in Chapter Two). Bali was perceived as another location of beachly leisure that had been targeted, resulting in the death of Australian tourists (Redmond 2007, p. 339). An act of retaliation, therefore, seemed imperative for the preservation of white masculinity and to serve as a reminder of white superiority.

As Evers (2008, p. 419) summarises: 'When the local surfers joined other Anglo-Australian local men in the riots, they were effectively letting everyone know that they were still "real" men like the Diggers at the top of the pecking order, and proud of the "Australian way of life".' The standoff was therefore framed as being between surfers in the Sutherland Shire and boys from the west (Lattas, 2007, p. 300) or, as Redmond (2007) terms them, 'Surfies versus Westies'.

After the initial confrontation between the off-duty lifesavers and the young Lebanese boys a notice was put up in the Sutherland Shire that read as follows (NSW Police 2006, p. 35):

#### **'Clean up Australia Day'**

'As a patriotic Australian, nationalism runs deep within my blood which is currently at boiling point after the recent spate of cowardly attacks at North Cronulla Beach. Our Australian culture is epitomized by our beaches, which have become cesspools of antisocial behavior after the recent and unwelcome influx of young men, of 'middle eastern' appearance from the inner suburbs of Sydney.

These young men who sport the inappropriate 'beach' attire of Addidas [sic] trackpants, Nike sneakers and utterly unforgivable haircuts upon their heads, migrate south every Saturday and Sunday to our Shire, and to our beaches. Perhaps they are here to swim, and to enjoy the warmth of not only the beach but the people of Cronulla. It is apparent that this is not the case: the filth that crawls off the trains and pollutes our beaches has decided to attack an Australian icon. I am of course referring to the spineless attack on our volunteer lifeguards at North Cronulla Beach. This particular incident has enraged not only myself; but every single Australian with an ounce of nationalism within their bodies.

I therefore call on all Australians to unite and strike down upon these invaders with an almighty vengeance that will echo throughout the ages and

will forever be imprinted on Shire folklore. It is time to 'take out the trash' and clean up our beaches to restore them to their once peaceful state.

North Cronulla Beach on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of December at midday is the time of reckoning where our turf will be reclaimed from the clutches of our common enemy AUSSIES UNITE.'

The reference to those of 'Middle Eastern appearance' as 'filth' and 'trash' who form a 'common enemy' very obviously intends to exert the superiority of every 'Aussie' 'with an ounce of nationalism within them'. Exclusive language was again used by media commentators to sideline Arab masculinity as 'unAustralian' (Evers 2008, p. 419) and normalise the superiority of Australian or white masculinity through the image of the surfer. The language of migration and invasion only seeks to highlight the perceived right of belonging exerted by young men from Cronulla beach. It is their territory that requires defending from those who 'migrate' each weekend. The direct reference to the different clothing they 'sport' only reinforces their difference: rather than swimming attire they wear 'Adidas trackpants' and 'Nike sneakers', brands associated with sport not surf culture. The notice as a whole details the sentiments of the people who turned up to Cronulla beach on that fateful day and their supposed right to decide who belongs and who does not.

In the leadup to the riots, a number of mobilising text messages were also sent to young men and women, encouraging them to take part in the violence against people of Middle Eastern appearance. It is estimated that these text messages were transmitted at least 27,000 times (Dunn 2009, p. 79). One text message used divisive language to encourage 'Aussies' to 'claim back our shire' (Dunn 2009, p. 79).

Aussies: this Sunday every Fucking Aussie in the shire [the Sutherland area] get down to North Cronulla To help support ... Leb and wog bashing day ... Forward this to all you know and help us protect our brothers and sisters ...

lets claim back our shire.

Thus, on December 11 2005 five thousand 'white' Australians descended on non-white (not always Middle Eastern) beachgoers at Cronulla, chanting things like 'Kill the Leb', 'We grew here, you flew here', 'Lebs go home', 'Osama don't surf' and 'love Nulla, fuck Allah'. They were tattooed or draped themselves with the Southern Cross and/or Australian flag and occasionally, where the crowd had zeroed in on a target, loudly sang 'Waltzing Matilda', Australia's unofficial anthem (Evers 2008; Evers 2009; Barclay & West 2006; Poynting 2006; Dunn 2009, pp. 79-80). This was not just as a clash of cultures but a struggle to make clear which embodiments of 'masculinity' could find belonging on Sydney's beaches.

The riots themselves involved men conveying messages to the assembled crowd via a megaphone pertaining to the unAustralian behavior of the groups of Lebanese males who frequented Cronulla beach. The complaints spoke of beating up or intimidating other beach goers and the sexual harassment of women (Barclay & West 2006, p. 80). Ultimately the dissatisfaction with the behaviour of these young men had everything to do with their alleged inability to abide by the 'rules' already etched out by the locals of Cronulla, through an invasion of space that did not belong to them, and a false claim to Anglo women.

Many media and political accounts quoting locals implied that the young men of Lebanese descent had brought the violence upon themselves through a complete disregard for the ways of the locals and, by extension, white Australia. Even their body language was seen to wield an arrogant demeanor that did not indicate respect for the superiority of the local culture (Evers 2008, p. 420). The way they dressed, the food they ate, the sports they played on the beach (Rugby League), and where on the beach they played these sports indicated that they needed to be taught a lesson as a reminder of which expressions of masculinity were appropriate in this space (Evers 2008, p. 420). Their acts of 'masculine bravado' in the form of taunts at locals in the car park seemed to indicate that they had ignored



local customs and, in doing so, asserted their position as 'dangerous other' (Evers 2008, p. 420).

Evers (2008; 2004, p. 33) notes that violence is a tool used by male surfers 'to teach safety and deal with perceived danger' (2008, p. 419), as a way of protecting their territory, their masculinity and their women from an external threat. These acts of violence are not limited to non-white locals, but extend to surfers from other suburbs, less experienced surfers and people who do not take surfing seriously (Evers 2006; Evers 2008, p. 420; Evers 2010). The 'dangers' punishable by violence are not limited to physical threats but can take the form of simply 'chatting up' local girls that local, experienced surfers believe they have more right to, or stealing somebody else's wave out in the surf. The violence serves as a reminder of the inferiority of the masculinity of the non-local, non-experienced non-surfer.

The Cronulla Riots were not simply about asserting the right to determine who is a legitimate Australian and who is excluded by Australianness. It was also a means of declaring the superiority of a particular branch of Australian masculinity and discounting the credibility or indeed the possibility of multiple Australian masculinities. This is evidenced particularly through the violence that occurred on the day and in the aftermath, and also in the justification for the violence, especially the desire to protect 'our' women from men who dressed, walked and talked inappropriately.

As Lattas (2009) points out, the labeling of women in bikinis as 'sluts' and 'whores' was at the heart of the reasoning of the Cronulla Riots. The bikini itself became a symbol of Australianness that excluded, not men this time but women and Muslim women specifically, who in contrast wore a burka and covered themselves completely. The presence of women like this on Cronulla Beach contributed to the belief that 'they' did not belong on our beaches, nor could their presence be constituted as a growing part of beach culture. Additionally, it seemed that young Lebanese-Australian men were making sexually explicit and highly flirtatious

comments to young Anglo girls on Cronulla Beach because such 'sexualised ambience' was not available to them in their local suburbs (Redmond 2007, p. 241). This, read against the intertextual backdrop of the gang rapes just years prior, made the women and the men feel uneasy about these interactions (Ho 2007, p. 293). Thus, the desire to protect Anglo women from Lebanese men recreates the Orientalist understanding of oriental masculinity. That is, a masculinity that is dangerous and threatening as it comes from men who are simply too different (and inferior) to 'get' the rules of appropriate gender interaction (Redmond 2007, p. 341).

Evers (2009) concurs that the conflict over 'turf' was not limited to physical space but also the kind of women with whom one was allowed to interact. Young men from outside the Shire did not understand that the 'rules' of the beach dictated that they could not interact with girls who were not also 'wogs' or 'Lebs' and that Anglo girls were for Anglo boys (Redmond 2007, p. 341). These ideals limited the kind of masculine prowess that was considered acceptable.

### **Men on Screen: Changing the face of Australian Masculinities**

In the introduction to a compilation of work on Australian masculinities, Australian sociologist, R.W. Connell (2003, p. 14) wrote:

It is now abundantly clear that the Australian identity was not just constructed around the image of a man, but around the image of a white man, and that race relations and racialised identities are of great importance in the enactment of masculinities. We can never again speak of 'Australian masculinity'; there are multiple masculinities on this continent.

*The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* go to great lengths to communicate the multiplicity of masculinity being enacted in Australia. Through film people are able to express, and indeed preserve, stories of national identity (Elder 2007, p. 193).

Renowned Australian feature films have often focused on telling stories of national identity through exploration of the white male subject. Throughout Australian film history, white masculinity has been the centrepiece of key cinematic genres, including war movies. For example, films such as *Gallipoli* (1981), directed by Peter Weir and starring Mel Gibson, *Breaker Morant* and *The Lighthorsemen* typify what it is to be an Australian. Through their commitment to one another abroad, the young men in these films demonstrate Australian myths relating to mateship and masculine camaraderie (Elder 2007, p. 197). The rugged white-Australian male has also been the central feature of classic adventure films, from *The Man from Snowy River* to *Crocodile Dundee*.

Even in the 1990s, when cultural diversity on Australian shores was undeniably visible, the inclusion of heterogeneous cultural stories in Australian cinema and other media did little but reinforce ideals of white hegemonic masculinity (Rayner 2000, pp. 121-124). Examples like *The Wog Boy* play on the caricatures of Greek Australians as unintelligent and sly migrants who wish to take advantage of the welfare system. The entire comedy routine is based on the inability of Greek Australians to mimic 'Australianness' as defined on white-Australian terms.

Overall though, Australian cinema has remained stubbornly Anglo-centric. Depictions of Australian masculinity have diversified beyond the digger or outback hero to feature, for example, men as fathers (e.g. *The Castle*) or quirky urbanites (e.g. *Proof*, *Malcolm and Kenny*) or homosexuals (e.g. *The Sum of Us* and *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*). Australian Aboriginal masculinity has also featured in some iconic Australian films (e.g. *The Tracker*, *Ten Canoes* and *Samson and Delilah*). However, depictions of men from migrant backgrounds have remained rare.

The growth of 'diasporic cinema' (Simpson, Murawska & Lambert 2009) – that is, cinema produced by and about Australians who identify with cultures outside of Australia's borders – should change ideas of what it means to be Australian and how we project these ideas to Australians and the rest of the world, for example

*Lucky Miles*.<sup>24</sup> However, these films tend to only be screened in fringe film festivals or specialised screenings in independent cinemas. It is for this reason that films like *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* are important. They offer a depiction of a wounded masculinity that is continuously being reminded of its subservient position.

Essential to both Basha and Caradee's stories are the acceptance of multiple types of Australian masculinity as legitimate forms. The analysis of the Cronulla Riots assists in providing an explanation for the importance of the conflicting masculinities depicted in the two films. After being told for years that their form of masculinity was subservient, their desire to prove otherwise became paramount. Thus *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* not only contribute to the redefinition of Australianness but, more specifically, they recognise an existing Australian masculinity that is mostly invisible in Australian cinema and other media. The intersections between experiences of racism and expressions of masculinity are demonstrated in both films with little apology. What is important in them, as Caradee summarised, is that we are presented with an answer to the question of 'why' Arab and Muslim men who engage in this form of protest masculinity act as they do. Audiences are asked to consider the pressures of working-class Lebanese men through the stories of Charlie and Tarek and understand their behaviour as an outlet for the frustration of wounded men.

Protest masculinity is often seen as a resistance to hegemonic masculinity (Walker 2006, p5). This type of masculinity is often considered to be 'destructive, chaotic and alienating' (Walker 2006, p5). Protest masculinity often includes high levels of violence and physical aggression, an example of which is juvenile delinquency (Broude 1990, p103). Connell (1995, p16), pointing to Adler, discusses the root causes of this resistance. As a result of being dominated in early

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<sup>24</sup> *Lucky Miles* is an Australian feature film directed by Michael James Rowland. It tells the true story of three Indonesian and Cambodian refugees who enter Australia illegally, only to be left for dead on the Western Australian coast by an Indonesian fishing boat. The men are quickly disoriented as they enter the Australian desert after having been told there is a bus stop on the other side of a large sand dune. The men are left disappointed and confused when no such bus stop exists, leaving them to wonder the desert aimlessly.

childhood by the authority of parents, children are often required to play a 'feminine', more passive, role. Thus during adulthood when their authority or position of power is compromised or threatened, men might view this as a weakness, reminding them of their childhood, where they were expected to take on a more submissive role. In this instance men become anxious 'which motivates an exaggerated emphasis on the masculine side of things' (Connell 1995, p16). Adler does not discount similar behaviour in women, but posits that due to their social inferiority, women's protests do not become a 'public menace' (Connell 1995, p16).

Connell (1995, p111) acknowledges that this behaviour is common in working class men from ethnic minorities who have somehow been 'injured'. In light of this discussion the injury suffered by these young men are the injuries of racism (Poynting, Noble, Tabar 1999, p60). Poynting et al., (1999) discuss the resistant masculinity that has surfaced in young men in Western Sydney. They detail the experiences of seven Arabic speaking youth, all male, who live in Western Sydney in suburbs with a heavy Lebanese population (Poynting, Noble, Tabar 1999, p63). In this article they discuss the intersection between gender and class and how this influences the rebellion of young Lebanese men in these institutions. The racist injuries experienced by these young men are nestled in the assumptions of their peers and the broader community, where it was 'assumed' for example, that Lebanese men, both Christian and Muslim 'were intrinsically more sexist than White males' (Poynting, Noble, Tabar 1999, p62). The similarities between experiences of protest masculinity as evidenced in Poynting et al's (1999) research and those young men depicted in the films, is outlined later in this chapter.

### **Writing Yourself Into Existence: Storytelling Through Feature Films**

The journeys of both George Basha and Serhat Caradee into the film industry are loaded with personal inspirations, challenges and noble intentions. What follows is a brief look into their reasons for creating both the screenplays of *The Combination*

and *Cedar Boys* and the content covered by each. The following section identifies personal elements in the stories, as well as the desire to create a change within the industry and give voice to young men who have been mostly silenced in the media frenzy that led to their alienation and demonisation. It is this point, alongside the desire to create work for young men of 'ethnic' backgrounds, that inspires these men to continue in their pursuit of diverse representation in a mostly Anglo-dominated industry.

Producer of *EW101*, Knapman (2010) suggests that the industry is heading in a new direction and beginning to account for new stories. He explains:

The reality is that most people in the film industry have come up through a very safe, generally middle-class, upbringing. Until you get, and this is where I think the new filmmakers that are coming up ... like Serhat Caradee, who did *Cedar Boys*, suddenly you're getting the input of people whose upbringing is different because they were outsiders on the general status quo of the society.

Knapman sees, as I do, the work of Caradee as fresh and necessary in order to introduce new stories to the film industry. These stories, as I will argue, expand the currently narrow film landscape populated by middle-class white Australians to a space of acknowledgment of non-white, in this case Arabic-speaking, minorities.

When a text is made by producers who share communal links with their audience – such as Basha declaring that as an Arab man he made this film for 'our people', meaning people of his cultural background – the text often contains greater nuance and a more detailed understanding of the specifics of cultural practices and traditions. This deeper knowledge is not often available to those who do not belong to those groups. We see this most readily in the vernacular adopted by John and Charlie in *The Combination* and Tarek, Sam and Nabil in *Cedar Boys*. The fluid mix of Arabic and English phrases is reflective of the language adopted by young

second generation Arab Australians. In particular the phrases ‘shoo’ (meaning ‘what?’) and ‘yallah’ (meaning ‘let’s go’) are mixed into conversation without a second thought. The ease with which these words are slipped into dialogue mostly dominated by the English language illustrates an understanding of Arab -Australian youth culture that can only be grasped through lengthy exposure to it.

### ***The Making of The Combination (2009)***

*The Combination* is a drama film released in Australian cinemas in 2009. It tells the story of a young boy, Charlie Morkos, who seems destined to repeat the mistakes of his older brother, John. It was the debut feature film for young writer George Basha and directed by veteran Australian actor David Field. Basha grew up in Sydney’s western suburbs and his upbringing exposed him to the troubled life of a young Arab man. Having been repeatedly bullied by young Anglo-Celtic men for being of Arab descent, Basha found himself on the margins. In his teens he dabbled in drugs and petty crime but turned his life around on the day that a friend of his was doused in petrol by a drug dealer and set on fire, a scene Basha replicates in his film. He explains:

I think when I seen [sic] him in hospital, you know, I came home and I just had to evaluate my life where I was going with it ... because I knew if I kept doing what I was doing I was either gonna [sic] be in jail or dead. (Basha 2013)

The stories he tells in *The Combination* are based in part on his experiences and the experiences of close friends. Basha admits that these stories aren’t just matters of fiction – he has seen and occasionally experienced them first hand. ‘I’ve seen a lot of things. I’ve seen people get stabbed, I’ve seen people get shot, I’ve seen heaps but when I seen [sic] my mate it was kind of a complete wake-up call,’ he says. Recognising that he was not invincible and with the newfound realisation that his life needed to change, Basha began to consider a career in acting. While he aspired to be an actor, Basha also recognised that in order to distance himself from his pre-

existing friendship groups he had to do so slowly and gradually. He used his acting as a way to busy himself and keep away from his old troubled life.

I knew that to get away from the boys, hanging out and all that ... and get away from all that trouble; you can't just stop seeing them, you gotta [sic] say I'm going there, I'm doing this. So I started doing that, I started doing acting classes and you know within the first three or four months I landed my first film and it was actually with Heath Ledger my first gig; a film called *Blackrock*. (Basha 2013)

Basha's first role in a feature film was as Kemel in *Blackrock* (1997).<sup>25</sup> Basha appeared in a number of minor roles after *Blackrock* but eventually realised he was only being offered opportunities to play gang members and drug dealers. After an insightful interaction with his manager who explained, 'you're ethnic – there's no roles out there for ya [sic]. People don't write for you. You know and if they do you're doing little you know re-enactments and criminal stuff' (Basha, 2013), Basha began to write his own films, realising that he wanted to 'represent [his] own people'. It was after this incident that Basha wrote the first draft of *The Combination*.

In total, it took Basha eight years to write and make *The Combination* and he recalls it being difficult to secure funding for the film.

I had it written, I had a script. I thought it was fantastic at the time, but every time I went in ... people didn't understand it. They said 'we don't get this film.' Or people would say to me why don't you put, you know, some rape scenes in it. Yeah. Yeah. I remember one guy actually said that to me. And he was a white dude. And he said to me 'if you put, you know, where you guys rape a white girl' and he was sitting at the end of the table, and I

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<sup>25</sup> The story is set in a fictional Australian surfing town and centers on the demise of a young surfer, Jared Kirby (played by Laurence Breuls), who witnesses the gang rape and has information about the murder of an innocent young woman, Tracy Warner (played by Bojana Novakovich). Slowly the secrets he hides to protect his friends see his life spiral out of control.



said 'mate', I said 'have you effen' read the script?' He goes 'Aw yeah.' I said 'so why the hell would I wanna put that in there for?' He goes 'oh you know ... it'll spice up the film.' (Basha 2013)

The film received no government funding; all of the money eventually came from the friend of a producer, who invested over a million dollars in the film. Basha believes that this was extremely liberating for him as a writer and David Field as a director, as it meant they were able to maintain full control over the script and the way it was shot.

The marketing of the film proved to be another obstacle in how audiences and critics would respond to it. Basha (2013) describes it as being 'tainted as a gang film' when in fact it was 'a love story ... about family love and love of the girl I play with in the scene, the blonde girl. And showing that no matter how our cultures clash we can always still make it work if we want to.' Matters were made worse when controversy surrounded the violent eruptions at multiple screenings of *The Combination* in various cinemas across Sydney.

Just three days into its release screenings were suspended in cinemas in both Liverpool and Parramatta after a number of violent incidents took place during screenings (Mayoh 2009), the first of which was an attack on a security guard who asked 'a youth to stop smoking in the cinema'. The final incident, which resulted in the suspension of the film, occurred during a sold-out screening in Parramatta, where a woman was punched in the face for asking a group of young men to stop talking. As a result the film was banned for three days before it was returned to screen in select cinemas. Basha believes the banning led to the demise of the film: 'We opened up the first two days at number one film in Australia before it got pulled. But then they pulled it and the movie died after that ... We got compared to *Batman Begins* in the opening weekend ... And mind you, we were only on about 20 screens' (Basha 2013). Once the film returned to screens Basha 'had to go in one week and actually talk to the audience every session' to explain that the film itself was anti-violence.

Basha, along with others involved in the production could not see why the film had been named as being responsible for igniting these attacks. A designated spokesperson claimed that '[t]he alleged incidents do not seem to be the result of any film' (Jensen 2009). This, however, did not prevent the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Jensen 2009) from speculating as to whether the film had been 'drawing an audience predisposed to violence'. This comment was of course made in reference to the young working-class Arab men who were depicted in the film and thus, likely to attend to see people like themselves on screen.

To ignite the controversy further, Ali Haidar, who plays Zeus, Charlie's best friend, was unable to attend the premier of *The Combination* as he was in custody following a physical altercation in Sydney's CBD, where he was charged with occasioning actual bodily harm (Kennedy & Sams 2009).

### ***The Combination: A Synopsis***

George Basha wrote *The Combination* with inspiration from Italian-American and African-American films. He cites *The Godfather* (1972), directed by Francis Ford Coppola, and *Boyz 'n' the Hood* (1991), directed by John Singleton, as being especially influential. Basha speaks of telling a collective 'our story', not just his own. By this he means the story of not just the Arab community in Australia but also Australians more broadly. He explains: 'I've actually met a lot of blonde women who've dated Lebanese and they've said that film is spot on. So you know it hits a lot of people.' In this instance 'blonde women' represent a female Anglo-Australian experience of the Lebanese-Australian community, one that differs greatly from the Anglo male experience, as is evidenced in the analysis of the Cronulla Riots above.

*The Combination* is set in Sydney's western suburbs and follows the story of John (played by George Basha) and Charlie (played by Firass Dirani), two brothers of Lebanese descent. John, the older brother, has recently been released from jail and is determined to turn over a new leaf, urging his younger brother to choose an alternative to the life of crime and drugs.

16-year-old Charlie seems desperate to make his own way in the world, and ignores the advice of his brother, regularly getting into fights with the Anglo-Celtic boys at school and agreeing to sell drugs for Ibo, the local drug lord. Eventually John discovers Charlie's drug supply and flushes over \$7,000 worth of drugs down the toilet.

Meanwhile Zeus, Charlie's best friend, has had enough of the Anglo-Australian boys at his school treating him and his friends like outsiders and he decides to confront Scott, the leader, at their school dance. Here Zeus fearlessly shoots Scott in the stomach as pay back for years of rejection and non-acceptance. Charlie, now operating on his own without help from Zeus, who is in jail, panics, knowing he is unable to produce the money for the drugs his brother disposed of and asks Ibo for more time to get the money. Ibo refuses to oblige Charlie's plea and commits a drive-by shooting on Charlie's house while his family is home. John attempts to repay Charlie's debt to Ibo by agreeing to become a boxer for the owner of the local gym from whom he borrows the money to meet the debt. Despite receiving the money from John, Ibo murders Charlie in cold blood as he walks home from school one day in order to demonstrate to his subservient drug runners that he cannot be taken advantage of, and perhaps also as a warning to viewers that one cannot escape this fate once they have entered this world.

John's narrative trajectory differs greatly from Charlie's in that it seeks to offer hope of reformation. John falls in love with a beautiful Anglo-Australian woman, Sydney. While Sydney's parents disapprove of her relationship with John she continues seeing him and eventually becomes pregnant with his child. Once Charlie is killed, John attempts to avenge his brother's death by beating Ibo as his neighbours, who clearly dislike him, watch on.

On the whole, Charlie's story is not particularly hopeful; he is an adolescent navigating a difficult road made almost insurmountable given his socio-economic disadvantage. While it is clear that Charlie has agency, the real 'hope' in the film lies in the story of John and Sydney.

The story of forbidden love is hardly original. In *The Combination*, however, Sydney, more so than John, proves that learning a new culture is not a completely impossible task. Her introduction to John's family is through the experience of food and dance. While some scholars, including Hage (1997), believe food to be a superficial element of multicultural societies, others, such as Beardsworth and Keil (1997) and Wise (2011), see it as an important 'marker of cultural hybridisation' (Ang et al. 2002, p. 30) and a way of bringing 'people together [to] foster intercultural conviviality' (Wise 2011, p. 83). In saying so, however, Sydney's introduction to John's cultural background seems to also involve desensitisation to violence in addition to delicious foods and exotic dances. This is evidenced in Sydney's role as a spectator on numerous occasions when John either attempts to stop Charlie from being in the presence of Zeus while in possession of a gun or in the instance where he attempts to seek retribution for the death of his brother by using a gun. In what can only be described as an attempt to thwart the escalation of violence between John and Ibo to a full-blown bloodbath, John puts down his gun and uses his fists. Although still inflicting a great deal of pain upon Ibo and causing him to fall unconscious, John's decision to fight with his hands shows an aversion to a cowardly violence, while still reinforcing the stereotype that men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds settle disputes by physical aggression.

The film ultimately deals with issues of prejudice and social exclusion and the ongoing tension between Arab- and Anglo-Australian men for space, belonging and women. The film makes clear the prejudices held on both sides of the divide and how these affect the interaction between young men from either group. The obsession with 'respect' and the capital that comes with attaining it are explored through the film. This respect, in the eyes of these young men, is often closely linked to monetary wealth. A similar sentiment is explored in Serhat Caradee's *Cedar Boys*. This argument will be further explored in Chapter Six.

### ***The Making of Cedar Boys (2009)***

Turkish-born Serhat Caradee grew up in what he describes as a 'working-class, western suburbs, poor background' (Caradee 2011). Caradee studied acting in 1990. After completing a number of short courses, he began acting and 'once work dried up' he went into producing and directing plays at Downstairs Belvoir. Belvoir Street Theatre is one of Australia's most acclaimed theatre companies, comprising of the upstairs and downstairs theatre, hosting some of the country's greatest writers, actors and directors, including Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Rush, Kate Malvany and Wesley Enoch.

[I]n the mid to late '90s the writers who were writing the material for the people we see on our screens were mostly Anglo Saxon characters and, if you were in a TV series or you were a guest or whatever, you were either a panel beater or a criminal. Terrorist wasn't as common I must say ... But you were mainly a criminal or a drug dealer, or some sort of, you know, negative stereotype. So anyway I think that's probably why most of the work was running out. (Caradee 2011)

In 2000 he completed a directing course at AFTRS (Australian Film Television and Radio School). In that same year he directed a short film *Bound* that toured international festivals. Upon returning from his success with *Bound*, Caradee began writing *Cedar Boys*. The writing process took four years to complete. Caradee applied for funding in 2006 and 2007 and the film was shot in early 2008 to be screened in cinemas across Australia in 2009.

Like *Basha*, Caradee wrote *Cedar Boys* as a way of creating roles for people from minority backgrounds.

I tell all my students the fastest way into the film industry is with your own screenplay. So stop trying to become an actor and write a screenplay first.

Get the material out there; you can put yourself in it, and also you set a benchmark or a trend for other people trying to get into the industry. Create your own work. (Caradee 2011)

Writing his own characters meant that he could offer depth and three-dimensionality to the stories of young Arab men that were not often told on Australian screens. Caradee reconciles the difficulty in writing about young Arab men, when not being one himself, with the fact that young Arab men, Lebanese boys in particular, 'were in the media a lot'. '[T]here was a lot of drive by shootings out west – the Darwiches and that Sam Ibrahim and his gang and John were doing stuff in the Cross. There were the Lebanese boys rape cases, those cases with Bilal Skaf and that was happening', so Caradee felt that he had plenty of material to work with.

Growing up in Sydney's western suburbs, Caradee witnessed the identity politics that young men are required to contend with and wrote (and later directed and acted in) *Cedar Boys* as a response to the negative portrayal of 'Middle Eastern boys':

I wanted to give an insight into this world and at the time I started writing it the Middle Eastern boys were portrayed in a very negative way and they were only on the news when they did something wrong. No one asked why they were doing things wrong. No one asked how or who their role models are and how and why they make these choices to fall into this world. (Caradee 2011)

Caradee sought inspiration from the film *Mean Streets*, set in New York's Manhattan, which depicted the story of young Italian men who felt ostracised from and lived on the outskirts of the city.

*Mean Streets* is very close to *Cedar Boys*, where you have this nucleus: collective groups of people living outside the city who create their own little worlds and ... every now and then they'll come into the city ... as an

escapism from where they are and they come into the city and out into the suburbs again. (Caradee 2011)

Caradee's description of the life of Italian Americans and their relationship with Manhattan is similar to the experiences described by Butcher (2003) of people residing in their respective parts of the city and coming together in Sydney's CBD. This same description details the relationship that young Middle Eastern men from Western Sydney have with Sydney's CBD. Caradee explains:

And I thought, 'who's our equivalent of Italian Americans in Australia?' Yeah Lebanese boys, yeah similar and, like I said, I picked them because I wanted to ... make them three-dimensional. I wanted to see how these boys perceive the world. (Caradee 2011)

How successful Caradee was in achieving three-dimensionality amongst audiences will be explored in Chapter Seven. The story of Tarek and his friends, however, like Basha's, attempts to achieve a level of resistance.

### ***Cedar Boys: A Synopsis***

It is ironic that, although Caradee takes issue with the fact that as a new actor he could only find work in the industry as a criminal or a panel beater, he proceeds to write his central protagonist as a frustrated panel beater turned drug dealer. Caradee centers *Cedar Boys* on the lives of three young men in their early twenties. The central protagonist, Tarek Ayoub (played by Les Chantery), is a Muslim male born in Australia to Lebanese parents. Residing in Condell Park in Western Sydney, Tarek works as a panel beater for very little money and possesses very clear middle-class aspirations. While we understand Tarek's family to be Muslim, there is no explicit mention of religion or religiosity, until we witness Jamal (Tarek's older brother) praying in his cell.

Our initial impression of Tarek is one of a young man determined to transition into a middle-class lifestyle through his own hard work. He discusses with his friends

his ambitions of buying a Porsche, owning his own workshop and a home in Sydney's eastern suburbs. In the opening scenes we learn that Tarek is also family centric. He gives a part of his weekly earnings to his parents and takes care of his younger sister, Aya. Despite not being the eldest, Tarek views this as his responsibility since his older brother, Jamal (played by Bren Foster), is serving a sentence on a robbery charge (the details of which are not specified).

Tarek maintains regular contact with his brother, visiting him once a week. Jamal relays to Tarek the difficulties of being in jail and urges him to stay away from the criminal underworld, 'don't let anybody tell you, you're a hard cunt for going to jail. Everybody ages twice as fast in here, you know that?' – advice that Tarek initially adheres to. Much of Tarek's self-righteous determination to make his money through hard work in a legitimate profession comes undone when his love interest, Amie (played by Rachel Taylor), enters the picture. This coincides with a time where Tarek is presented with an opportunity to help pay for his brother's appeal. Tarek embodies the strong desire of young men from cultural minorities to climb the social and class ladder, which will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Amie is a woman in her early twenties from the eastern Sydney suburb of Bondi. She is a tall, blonde, Anglo Australian who moonlights as a stripper, information she initially keeps from Tarek. Tarek and Amie meet in an inconspicuous bar, where she first tells him she's an interior designer. He naively believes her, despite being privy to the knowing glance and sly giggle she shares with her best friend, Brigid (played by Erica Lovell). Tarek pursues Amie adamantly, initially wooing her with promises of a good, drug-filled time. He ends the relationship abruptly when he discovers her line of work.

Tarek seeks validation from both Amie and her peers. His desire for acceptance from the white middle-class mainstream, coupled with wanting to assist his brother in paying for his appeal, overrides his belief and commitment to a life that is free of crime. Through first providing Amie and her peers with drugs, Tarek is able to enter the life of those living in Sydney's east. The drugs serve as a kind of



capital, in exchange for which Tarek and his friends are allowed to enter the eastern suburbs social scene. In the same way we see Malik used for his cultural capital (discussed further in the following chapter), Tarek and his friends Nabil and Sam are invited into the 'elite' circles only when it becomes apparent that they can supply the drugs. The film's tag line, 'When you're on the outside all you want is in', perfectly captures the aspirations of Tarek and, to a lesser extent, Nabil and Sam.

Tarek's closest friend Nabil is a cleaner, who we learn will one day inherit his father's cleaning business. Nabil, until now, has avoided experimenting with crime or drugs, instead making a legitimate earning from his job. Eventually Nabil proves to be a pragmatist and unveils a plan to Tarek that could result in both of them receiving a large sum of money. This presents itself as a lucrative offer to Tarek, who is desperately seeking to move up the class ladder accompanied by Amie.

Nabil: I want you to come in with me on something. Hey listen I'm serious man. I dunno, there could be something for both of us.

Tarek: Like what?

Nabil: You know that apartment I clean on Francis Street?

Tarek: Mmm.

Nabil: About a month ago we had to clean one of the units because it was vacant, right? Since then this steroid gym junkie moved in. Cuz, I think he uses the place as a stash house or storage or something. I'm watching him come in and out. And he doesn't stay that long. I know he looks at me while I'm working. He drives one of those black American jeeps. A couple of times he's come in one of those small convertible black Mercs. And he always carries a sports bag.

Tarek: And?

Nabil: Well I need to get a key cut and I need someone to look out for me while I go in.

Tarek: What? Me?

Nabil: Yeah.

Tarek: Nah. Nah I don't wanna.

Nabil: Cuz, if there's something in there we'll go halvies.

Tarek: Can't you find someone else?

Nabil: It's fuckin easy man. What's wrong with ya?

Tarek: [raises voice defensively] Nothing. [Voice returns to normal volume]  
I just don't think it's worth it.

Tarek's initial hesitation does not withstand his desire to impress Amie, nor his desire to help pay for his brother's appeal. Tarek's twofold reasoning for participating in Nabil's plan (which results in Tarek's eventual death and injuries for both Nabil and Sam) reflects his strong commitment to family and his craving for social acceptance. While Nabil certainly shares Tarek's financial aspirations, his views on social acceptance tend less toward searching for it, and more toward challenging the terms on which race politics appear to have been built, somewhat ironically given his eventual life choices. Both motivations will be more fully discussed in Chapter Six.

The dealers from whom Nabil and Tarek have stolen the drugs eventually catch up with the boys, resulting in a meeting that the boys are very anxious about attending. Jamal, Tarek's older brother, assures them that he's spoken to his connections in jail and no harm should come to them. The boys still turn up to the meeting armed. The argument about the drugs escalates, guns are drawn and shots are fired on both ends. This results in the death of Tarek and leaves Nabil and Sam injured. The film ends with the arrest of both Sam and Nabil.

### **Being Heard**

Films like *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* are certainly not without their shortcomings. However, their merits must also be considered. These films were created to fill a glaring gap in the Australian film market. For years Australian feature films seemed to ignore the diversity of Sydney's western suburbs. While

films such as *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000)<sup>26</sup> and *The Wog Boy* (2000),<sup>27</sup> acknowledged the, at times, frictional relationship between migrants and the mainstream (mostly through humour), it was not until 2009, with the release of *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, that the part of the story of Arab migration to and life in Western Sydney was explored on the big screen in Australia.

Unlike *EW101*, these films tell the story of young men from working-class backgrounds. Both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* give voice to a cohort of people not often heard from in the mainstream. Both Charlie and Tarek are examples of the ongoing struggle that working-class, Arab men experience living in Australia. These young men are often spoken about, but rarely with, in discussions about their struggle to belong and their outward expressions of difference. It is for this reason in particular that films like *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* are necessary. These films expose us to the narrative of struggle and sometimes despair through the eyes of young working-class Australian men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. Secondary to this, it also reveals the diversity of Australians from Arabic-speaking backgrounds, in particular that not all are Arabs and Muslim.

Like Grewal (2007), Betts and Healy (2006) observe that it is difficult to talk about being Lebanese without a discussion of Islam. Not because the majority of Lebanese Australians are Muslim but rather because the association between Islam and the Lebanese community has become so marked that, since the 2001 gang rape trials where 'Muslim' and 'Lebanese' were strong markers of the identity of the perpetrators (Humphrey 2007, p. 11), social commentators have claimed that Sydney has a 'largely Lebanese Muslim problem' (Betts & Healy 2006, p. 25). Grewal (2007, p. 117) argues that this association has been strengthened over the last decade and a half through Australian political discourse. The continual framing of Australianness as excluding Muslims and Arabs has led to the continual framing of Arab Muslims as outsiders (Aly & Green 2008, p. 4).

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<sup>26</sup> Directed by Kate Woods and starring Pia Miranda.

<sup>27</sup> Directed by Aleksis Vellis and starring Nick Giannopoulos.

Given the controversy surrounding young men from this background in the decade leading up to the release of these films, as outlined in Chapter Two and discussed by Caradee above, films like these become important in understanding the perspective of young men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds who do not fit the mould of the 'good' migrant. Through a demonstration of protest masculinity, as discussed in Chapter Six, both Basha and Caradee highlight the fluid nexus between class, gender and ethnicity in Sydney's western suburbs in the way that they are experienced by these young men.

Poynting, Noble and Tabar (2003, p. 133) point out that discussions of criminality and ethnicity both in the press and in academia generally fail to acknowledge class considerations. A body of work emerging in the 1970s known as The New Criminology, does take this into account (Taylor, Walton, and Young 2013). This body of work however, does not provide an Australian focus. In Australian criminological literature, while ethnicity is considered or disputed as a factor in the criminalisation of certain groups, class is often ignored. In order to understand the experience of marginalisation and the expressions of 'protest masculinity' by these young men, we must understand how class and race intersect with gender. *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* offer a glimpse into the often unpleasant realities of this intersection.

### **The Good/Bad Arab**

As has already been established, the events of September 11 and the resulting War on Terror blurred the distinctions between 'Arab', 'Middle Eastern' and 'Muslim'. As the Cronulla Riots demonstrated, such confusion led to the indiscriminate attack on anyone who looked 'Middle Eastern'. Thus, the obsession with distinguishing between the 'good' and 'bad' migrant becomes important, particularly when all Muslims and 'Middle Eastern' migrants seem as if they may pose a threat. While this will be touched upon in greater depth in the following

chapter, a discussion of the 'good' Arab as being Christian is somewhat important for understanding appropriate expressions of masculinity. In their research with young Arab men of both Christian and Muslim backgrounds Tabar, Noble & Poynting (2010, p. 99) found that young Lebanese-Australian men from Maronite/Catholic backgrounds often differentiated themselves from Lebanese Muslims in order to frame themselves as 'good' Lebanese. They recognise Christianity as a marker of Anglo sameness and 'convert their (religious) ethnicity into the cultural capital of whiteness which is religiously defined as Christian' (Tabar, Noble & Poynting 2010, p. 99). Men from a Lebanese Catholic background are not rapists and violent thugs; they are 'good' men like their Anglo-Celtic counterparts. This, however, is a binary that Basha refuses to play into.

Basha (2013) explains that in many interviews people would begin by asking if he was Muslim or ask him to comment on a recent event involving Muslims:

You know, the amount of people I've met, even when I do interviews and stuff, the first thing they ask me is if I'm Muslim ... I hate when people ask me that. I hate when people ask me if I'm Catholic ... So, you know, whenever somebody asks me, I say it's none of your business mate, it's between me and God ... I remember I did an interview one time where I walked in and I was taken aback. There was a big issue with one of the Sheikhs saying something. I can't remember exactly what it was. He'd just said it and I walked in and that was the first question they hit me with on radio, live radio, and I said mate, I'm not here to talk about that.

Basha refuses to engage in the kind of conversation that attempts to differentiate between the 'good' and the 'bad' Arab, as he does not wish to further assist in dividing an already targeted and marginalised population. Unfortunately political figures did not share Basha's reasoning, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The distinction between 'moderate' Muslims and their necessary counterparts, the 'radical', 'fundamental' or 'extremist' Muslims, was made apparent in public

discourse in 2005 when then Prime Minister, John Howard, in light of the London bombings, called upon Muslim leaders in Australia 'to resist radicalisation' and pursue a 'moderate' Islam' (Aly & Green 2008, p. 1). This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. However, it is significant to illustrate that similar arguments were made of the 'barbaric' Lebanese at the time of the gang rapes, as discussed in Chapter Two, implying that culturally they were unable to integrate. Films like *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* allow for an exploration of these stereotypes from the perspective of these young men. Demonstrating that the 'bad' migrant or the 'barbaric' Arab also have a right to a legitimate expression of belonging, these stories were one of many ways in which this right could be expressed.

As Poynting et al. (2004) demonstrate, culture is not the single underlying issue leading to social exclusion but rather alienation and a compromised sense of belonging add to this experience. It is Zeus who makes this evident in *The Combination* when he and Scott encounter their final altercation. As Zeus stands on a dispersed dance floor at his school dance looking down at Scott, in an effort to exert one final expression of power over him he reminds us that Scott's fate comes as a result of his refusal to accept Zeus as his equal. The frustration expressed by Zeus in the act of killing Scott comes from a deep-seated desire for acceptance. While Basha does not attempt to justify Zeus's actions, he does offer insight into why disenfranchised young men might behave this way, proposing an answer to the question of 'why?' that doesn't rest with a 'cultural' but rather political answer, challenging the misconception that Arab culture is predisposed to violence.

### **Challenging Australian Masculinity**

Expressions of national identity including the flag and slogans that screamed patriotism and clearly rejected the unAustralian, operated in *The Combination* as shorthand for difference and exclusion. The frequent name calling, 'dirty wog',

'camel rider' or 'skip' and the appearance of the Southern Cross tattoo on Scott's back allude to the exclusionary measures such icons carry.

As Charlie is encouraged by his friends to fight Scott for 'disrespecting' him by 'putting him on show', an act viewed as an assault on his masculinity, when Charlie tried to talk to Scott's girlfriend at lunchtime he approaches Scott behind his friends. Zeus explains to Scott, 'one of my boys wants to have a go with you bro' to which Scott smugly replies 'yeah typical of you wogs, can't fight one on one'. At this point Charlie pushes Scott while making mocking noises. After some teasing Charlie turns to Scott's girlfriend, Anna, and asks 'how can you go out with this Skip, he doesn't like fuckin' wogs? I'm sure you're a wog, aren't ya?' Anna is not given the opportunity to respond before Scott replies, 'yeah but you're a dirty wog, bro?' Charlie reacts with a punch to Scott's head.

Scott makes the distinction between his girlfriend, Anna – a 'wog' – and Charlie and his friends – the 'dirty wogs'. Anna's feminine 'wogginess' does nothing to disrupt the status quo or challenge Scott's claim to the ultimate 'Australian' masculinity. If anything, it reinforces Scott's superiority as a white man who has successfully saved a brown woman from a barbaric brown man. Anna does not make a point of exaggerating or even expressing her 'woginess'; rather, she behaves in the way that Scott asks her to, distancing herself from other wogs, rarely speaking to Charlie when he speaks to her, making her unlike Charlie the 'dirty wog'. Anna allows the tension between Charlie and Scott to be played out between them and, despite being treated like property, Anna never questions Scott's orders or authority. When Charlie attempts to 'check her out' during their mathematics class, Anna remains silent while Scott kicks the back of Charlie's chair and calls him a 'towel head'. When Charlie approaches Anna in the playground asking, 'what's up sexy?' and seats himself beside her, she responds with, 'I don't think you should be talking to me,' to which Charlie retorts slyly, 'I know you want me.' Instead of pursuing the conversation, Anna demonstrates Scott's masculine dominance by stating, 'my boyfriend doesn't like me talking to guys'. For Anna, the problem isn't 'guys' but rather 'dirty wogs', who already threaten Scott's expression of

masculinity by asserting their right to belong in a space where he believes he ought to dominate (the school yard). Much like the desire to protect 'our women' expressed during the riots in Cronulla (Evers 2009, p. 195), keeping Charlie away from Anna is not for her protection but rather for the preservation of Scott's manhood. Ultimately the tension between Charlie and Scott due to Anna reduces her to property. She is no longer the subject of their attention but rather the object of their desire. The man who wins the girl wins the fight.

At the conclusion of the film, prior to Charlie's tragic death, we see Anna take comfort in Charlie's arms after the death of her boyfriend and we see her clearly distraught at Charlie's funeral. While Charlie may have ended up with Anna, he does not behave as if he has won her; rather, he sees the elimination of Scott as an unnecessary tragedy not a victory to be celebrated. This humanises the barbaric Arab and attempts to delineate between the few like Zeus and the majority who, like Charlie and Tarek, show remorse and regret for their mistake, although we see it is too late. This indicates a clear limit to the performance of bravado enacted by young Arab men like Charlie who simply seek recognition. The attempt at forging sympathy through Charlie and Tarek shows a different side to the working-class 'Leb' as humane and compassionate – a voice that is lacking in other places.

### **Conclusion: We Exist Whether Or Not You Would Like Us To**

Through Charlie, John and Tarek we understand the pressure of a working-class upbringing and aspirations of greater wealth, and we also understand the consequences of impatient wanting. Ultimately, however, and the findings of Chapter Seven emphasise this, the stories of Charlie, John and Tarek remind Australian audiences that Arab- and Muslim-Australians are an integral part of the national landscape whether or not attempts have been made to silence or erase their stories. Their inclusion on Australian screens reminds audiences that their stories are an essential part of the Australian story. These films are reclamation of the Australianness of continuously marginalised groups, a way to legitimate their



belonging and write their stories onto the public record; it is a very powerful statement, even if not always well received. It is a way of saying: I exist even when you would rather I did not.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GOOD WHITE ARABS: ACQUIRING WHITENESS

*You know Malik, you've got cultural and language skills that are in demand. I mean I know you turned down affairs, but if you came across to us, you could make a difference.* Skerritt to Malik, during a stakeout, *EW101*

#### **Introduction**

As I argued in the previous chapter, recognising that experiences outside of the mainstream are a valuable part of the Australian narrative adds to the complexity with which Australians understand their own identity. *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* locate the experiences of young Australian Arab and Muslim working-class men within a broader spectrum of competing Australian masculinities. In this chapter I explore why Malik is revered as a character and held up as a glowing example of successful multiculturalism.

The introductory quote above describes not only the relationship between Malik and the police force but also the relationship many migrant groups share with the state (Hiebert, Collins & Spoonley 2008, pp. 9-14). Under the guise of the 'productive diversity' approach to multiculturalism, instated in 1992 by the Keating Government, the differences of migrant groups were presented as an asset valued by mainstream institutions (Hiebert, Collins & Spoonley 2008, p. 14; Pyke 2005, p. 1). The previous two chapters have explored the intentions of producers and the accomplishment of adding diverse voices to Australian cinema. This chapter will furthermore unpack the underlying criteria of Malik's success and acceptance as a 'good' Muslim/migrant, both as a fictional character and as a model of successful productive diversity. I will posit that Malik's success is rooted in his accumulation of appropriate capital relating to Australian nationalism. This

capital comes in the form of cultural capital, which is closely linked to 'whiteness' (Hage 1998, p. 20). Throughout the discussion Malik's character will be compared to the experiences of other characters within *EW101*.

Finally, this chapter will highlight how this acquisition of cultural capital reinforces the place of productive diversity and multiculturalism as strategies of benefit to the neoliberal nation. It will unpack how and why diversity of culture and language is not intrinsically valued in the series but rather, considered significant insofar as benefit is attained by the 'white centre' (Elder, Ellis & Pratt 2004, p. 211) and the status quo goes undisrupted.

### **Cultural Capital in the Australian National Context**

As outlined in Chapter One, Australian anthropologist, Ghassan Hage, has applied Bourdieu's concept of capital to the Australian context. Through this application he recognises whiteness as a key social marker in Australia. The accumulation of whiteness therefore leads to a greater sense of national belonging. Revisiting Moreton-Robinson's (2004, p. 75) definition of whiteness as 'an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life', we are able to connect whiteness as a discursive construction to Knapman and Wyld's portrayal of Malik. Malik becomes an example of the exceptional Muslim/Arab male, who is in possession of more whiteness than other Muslim/Arab characters in the series. The material effects to which Moreton-Robinson refers (2004, p. 75) frame the relationship between the white subject and the non-white Other. In Malik's case this framing becomes an oppositional relationship between himself and Detective Sergeant Crowley and Agent Skerritt, as well as a second oppositional relationship between himself and other Arab/Muslim males throughout the show.

In taking Bourdieu's premise that capital is acquired so that it may be transferred into power, we pay particular attention to the field of whiteness as a driving force that underpins continued involvement in an ongoing aspiration to dominate. Hage

argues this goal is embedded in the desire to achieve a form of racial purity, a place where everyone is white (Hage 1998). There is, in this instance, a direct correlation between whiteness and power. One needs to be *whiter* to be more powerful. This correlation is obviously complicated by the naturalisation of whiteness (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. vii).

The naturalisation of whiteness is rooted in an idea of racial superiority not unlike that discussed by Said (1978). One of the effects of naturalising whiteness is that discussions concerning race most often exclude discussions of whiteness or, in Said's case, the Occident, because race is a description thought to be reserved for the Other or the Orient. Some examples are evident in the nation's response to multiculturalism, where the white, 'neutral' population, must mediate between various immigrant and Indigenous communities (Elder, Ellis & Pratt, 2004). The assumption that white is the neutral standpoint, and treating it as such, cements the power relations inherent in colonial cultures and in so doing creates the category of Other.

Thus, naming whiteness becomes essential in understanding the dynamics of national identity. In discussing the field of whiteness, and the naturalisation of it as a key feature in the success of a white nation fantasy, we understand that by virtue of having the physical characteristics of an Anglo European you are involuntarily viewed as occupying a higher position than someone who does not 'look white'. Embedded in the Australian approach to whiteness is that it is seen as the standard to which all other ways are required to adapt.

Moreton-Robinson argues that whiteness is 'a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority, which becomes normalised and forms part of one's taken-for-granted knowledge' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p. 76). For white superiority to have social meaning, it requires an Other, an inferior group of people. Much the same as Said's (1978, p. 1) statement that 'the Orient has helped to define Europe' by offering a steady point of comparison, non-white Australians

have helped to define the privilege of white Australians as they are constantly placed in opposition to one another.

Although Australia prides itself on its embrace of cultural diversity, this embrace is limited to practices that maintain the superiority of whiteness and those who conform to it. As discussed in Chapter One, Hage (1998) terms this conditional multiculturalism, 'Cosmopolitanism' or 'White multiculturalism'. This approach to multiculturalism maintains the status quo and embraces cultures on a superficial level. Such an understanding of multiculturalism is echoed in Australia's approach to migration during the 1990s, as will be further discussed below.

### **EW101 Accumulating Capital – A Character Comparison**

The remainder of this chapter will investigate Malik's acquisition of whiteness in *EW101* and situate him in the field of national belonging. In order to understand the position of Malik we must compare his character with other male characters in the series. A comparative approach to understanding Malik's position in the field of national belonging is important to understanding what makes Malik successful as a character and a professional. To highlight the benefit of Malik's accrued whiteness his character will be contrasted with other Muslims in the series, in particular that of the refugee Amin Khoder (played by George Kanaan). Malik will also be compared to other male characters that comprise the MCS, specifically two of those against whom Malik is pitted in Seasons One and Two, namely Sergeant Ray Crowley (played by William McInnes) and Agent Richard Skerritt (played by Gerald Lepkowski).

#### ***Malik and Crowley***

*EW101* readily explores the relationship between the white and non-white male. While the representation of white males in the series is not always favourable, we are made aware of their generally superior social position. In Series One we are presented with the character of Sergeant Ray Crowley. Inspector Patricia Wright

frequently appoints Crowley to cases investigated by the MCS. The team rarely questions his authority when this assignment occurs. Aside from the occasional disagreements with colleagues, Crowley is not required to prove he is capable of leading; rather, his authority as second in charge in the squad goes unquestioned. Malik on the other hand is required to prove his loyalty and his talent as a superior detective. His authority is primarily challenged by Crowley himself.

At first glance the relationship between Crowley and Malik resembles Hage's (1998) discussion of the manager of the state and the managed. Crowley's presence can be perceived as an embodiment of 'assimilationist' attitudes, by his continuous urging of Malik to distance himself from his Arab and Muslim heritage and exhibit acts of whiteness. Examples of such will be discussed below.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, *EW101* begins with the shooting of Malik's father and cuts to the manslaughter of a police officer in the Western Sydney suburb of Parramatta. In the first episode audiences are introduced to the tension between Malik and his senior colleague, Detective Sergeant Ray Crowley.



**Figure 2: Sergeant Ray Crowley (played by William McInnes).**

Crowley is an 'old school' detective, whose attitude is reminiscent of assimilationist social policy. He openly expresses his dislike of Arabs and Muslims. Crowley is a typical 'manager' of the national space, as detailed in Chapter One. He perpetuates strong binary ideas rooted in Orientalist discourse. The place of the 'cop' for Crowley is the equivalent to that of the Occident for the Orientalist. He sees the police force as embodying all the virtuous aspects of society, in contrast to the Orient, which embodies the lesser, more vile (criminal) aspects, as echoed in Said's understanding of the Orient (Said 1978, p. 40). This strong and clear divide for Crowley justifies his extreme processes of governing, which violate basic rights of Arabic-speaking communities. His actions reflect his belief that, by virtue of being inherently deviant, Arab men need not be afforded the same protection rights as white men. Evidence of such is embodied in Crowley's attitude toward Talal Laban and his friend, as discussed in Chapter Three. By ignoring the evidence that alludes to Talal and Ali's innocence, including their own affidavits, Crowley silences the young men and constructs them 'into passive objects to be governed by those who have given themselves the national governmental right to "worry" about the nation' (Hage 1998, p. 17). Crowley's position as both a white male and a police officer seems to legitimise his position as not only a 'worrier' of the nation but, furthermore, as someone who takes this worrying a step further and physically intervenes in the governing of the nation as a form of authoritarian control. Crowley doesn't simply demonstrate concern, but a right to police with force.

Crowley's demonisation of the collective Arab Other extends to Malik. Despite Malik's admission into the police force, an institutional recognition that he too is worthy of managing the nation, Crowley resists Malik's worthiness. Crowley's actions are evidenced in his name-calling, in particular in the incident where he scowls at Malik, calling him 'a dirty Arab' and professing that he is 'going to do [him]'. This name-calling demonstrates that he sees Malik as a threat that has infiltrated an institution designed to protect citizens from people like him.

Crowley reinforces this sense of distrust and suspicion by continuously accusing Malik of protecting 'his own' and believing that, as a result of both his religious and cultural identities, he is unable to perform his duties with the same degree of objectivity as someone like Crowley who does not come with the same 'cultural baggage'. In these instances Crowley assumes a position of white neutrality. These dynamics are evidenced in the encounter below, where Malik and Crowley discuss the involvement of Talal and Ali, in the shooting of Johnson. Crowley's universal suspicion of Arabs and Muslims who are not 'like us' is not new. The American produced series *Homeland* is based on the very idea that anybody, even the regular Muslim family next door, could be a potential terrorist. A classic example of this narrative is *The Siege* (1998),<sup>28</sup> where an Arab who is thought to have been on the side of the Americans turns out to be working against them leading to the conclusion that they are 'all the same' (Shaheen 2009, p. 461).

As discussed in Chapter Three, the youths accused and wanted for the death of police officer Mick Johnson are young Lebanese-Australian university students Talal Laban and Ali. They are chased by police officers Duffy and Johnson after a call is put out to patrol cars in the Parramatta area, alerting them to a local 'armed hold-up'. The perpetrators are described as 'male, Middle Eastern, about 160 centimeters tall, one wearing a blue hooded jacket, one carrying a black backpack and a baseball cap'. They are further warned that they 'could be armed with a hand gun' (Season One, Episode One). The chase results in the death of Johnson. Through Malik's liaison with a local elderly Arabic-speaking witness, we come to learn that it was in fact Duffy who accidentally shot his partner and attempted to frame the young boys for the crime. Crowley, however, is blinded by prejudice and is initially convinced that the perpetrators are in fact Talal and Ali, despite the conflicting evidence. Malik, however, in liaising with the elderly woman, believes there is more to the story and takes it upon himself to go looking for answers.

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<sup>28</sup> Directed by Edward Zwick and starring Denzel Washington.



After talking to Talal's family Malik discovers that after the shooting of the police officer Talal came home, changed his clothes and left; his family have not since heard from him. Malik relays this information to Crowley who takes this as enough reason to detain both Talal and Ali for the crime. Malik objects to Crowley's approach insisting that they do not have enough evidence:

Malik: We've got nothing on this kid; all we've got is suspicion.

Crowley: He's got priors and so does his mate. What they were wearing matches Duffy's description. Plus he pissed off to the side after the incident.

Malik: That doesn't mean it was him.

Crowley: His family thinks he was involved, that's good enough for me.

Malik: That's not what I said. I said they're worried about him.

Crowley's justice-at-all-costs policing is contrasted with Malik's sensitive approach. While Malik's consultation with the community (and his skills as a 'transversal enabler' as outlined in Chapter Three) is credited with solving this case, his commitment to justice and desire to produce solid evidence is at heart. Malik is not reluctant to convict 'his own' but he is conscious of the problematic discursive construction of Arab and Muslim minorities (Poynting et al. 2004). Malik is an advocate for liaising with communities rather than asserting the dominance and power afforded to the police. This puts forward an alternative image of what we typically associate with Arab men – that is, images of violence loving, thrill seeking and, ruthless criminals (Poynting et al. 2004).

Malik's approach to the situation is to build networks with the community, develop causal links and then detain suspects. Crowley believes his own approach to be correct and possesses an overwhelming desire to see justice served to a rogue young man (Talal) who he believes has no respect for the law and by extension mainstream society. In *EW101* the police force is an institution that becomes constitutive of the nation. Any legal transgression therefore becomes a transgression against the nation, questioning the place of the perpetrator within the nation state. Thus, Crowley justifies his approach of detaining suspects first

and asking questions later as being in the national interest. Malik eventually confronts Crowley about his method, justifying his own, to which Crowley retorts:

Crowley: They're hoping their mate on the inside might get 'em off.

Malik: You know what, they're looking for someone to trust.

...

Crowley: I want the bastard that killed him [Johnson] locked up.

Malik: You think I don't?

Crowley: I got 48 hours, that's my deadline. What's yours?

(*EW101*, Season One, Episode One)

In this confrontation Crowley makes the assumption that Malik's loyalty is tied to the *ummah*, the global Muslim community, before his nation, drawing the distinction between Muslims and Australians. It is not uncommon to separate a perceived Other from our understanding of the nation. Historically, Australia's most threatening Other has always been its neighbouring Asian nations, in particular Indonesia – not because it is a predominantly Muslim country but because it is underdeveloped and overpopulated (Hage 2011, p. 161). But the increasing number of Muslim migrants and the recent War on Terror has shifted our focus to a universal Other. Currently there appears to be an increase in the number of 'seriously religious' Muslims, a phrase used to identify people who allow God's law, not secular law, to determine every aspect of their life (Hage 2011, p. 163).

A Muslim who is 'seriously religious' (Hage 2011, p. 164) is difficult to govern for a number of reasons. These reasons are rooted in the approach to multiculturalism as adopted in Australia, which essentially states that a minority can adopt a lifestyle of their choosing provided the practices of such are within the laws of the dominant culture. That is, the dominant culture cannot change to suit minorities but rather minorities have scope to do as they wish within the framework that already exists. To put it simply, 'the dominant culture has to be the encompassing culture and the law of the other the encompassed culture' (Hage 2011, p. 163). For

example, it is considered perfectly reasonable for Muslims to participate in the biannual celebration of *Eid*, but *Eid* is not recognised as a national holiday.

The conflict lies in the fact that, for Muslims, 'migrant integration in the host nation becomes a matter of finding a space for these national laws within the all-encompassing laws of God' (Hage 2011, p. 164). In addition to this, and perhaps encompassed within it, Muslims have a demonstrated allegiance to a global *ummah*. According to Hage (2011), such an allegiance operates as a form of transnationalism, meaning that many Muslims believe that they have a responsibility to assist other Muslims around the globe if they are in situations of oppression. In light of events such as 9/11 and the London and Bali bombings this transnationalism becomes a threat and the transnational will of Muslims becomes the transnational 'will of the enemy' (Hage 2011, p. 165). For nationalists any connection, in particular a demonstrated connection, to an Islamic culture, through, for example, religious practices such as prayer, or dress such as *hijab*, is seen as resistance to 'Australian values' and signifies a 'radical' inclination (Levey & Moses 2009, p. 97).

It is Crowley's understanding of Malik as part of the wider *ummah* that leads him to make these assumptions. The tension between Malik and Crowley does not subside. It is clearly a metaphor for the tension between East and West. Knapman (2010) explained:

In the first series it was obviously, you know, Malik versus Crowley and that was your East/West thing. In the second one it was slightly more complex because that level of the Skerritt character, and the Australian intelligence and secret service behavior particularly in relation to boat people.

As the series continues and the stakes are raised for Crowley, the tension between Malik and Crowley mounts. In Episode Two Adam King, an Aboriginal lawyer, has been killed and it is suspected that this death is linked to his desire to legalise heroin. King's crusade to legalise the substance and his desire to rid Redfern of

drugs due to a number of heroin related deaths is thought to have agitated drug dealers who might have been affected by the legalisation. The prime suspect is a man by the name of Jamal Basha, and we later discover that Basha is also responsible for selling Crowley's son, Paul, the heroin that led to his eventual overdose. This heroin was paid for with valuable items that had been stolen from Crowley.

Crowley plays a significant role in Season One and his prominence makes him a good point of comparison to Malik. As a matter of likeability the viewers are made to sympathise more deeply with Malik, as he is framed as generous and genuine. Crowley on the other hand appears bitter and resentful. He represents an 'old' Australia that is hierarchical, authoritarian, and uncomfortable with social change, especially in relation to cultural diversity. This is the Australia that feels threatened by multiculturalism and responds with hostility towards anyone who is not white. Their hostility is framed as a sincere desire to preserve the 'foundations' of the nation but, in so doing, it symbolically, violently and actually excludes all non-white citizens.

This contrast between Malik and Crowley serves two purposes. It firstly places Malik in the position of the hero who overcomes great hurdles with integrity, even when faced with daily unprovoked and unwarranted attacks from his own colleagues. Secondly, it eases the discomfort of audiences from the dominant culture when viewing prejudicial behavior by characters who symbolise this dominant culture. In this instance Malik and Crowley are not simply two individuals at odds with one another; they come to stand for two factions of society, East and West respectively. Their tensions are thus emblematic of the tensions thought to be experienced when those from what have been seen as opposing communities are forced to coexist. Every confrontation between Crowley and Malik is a demonstration of what Crowley perceives as a culture clash. Every act of governance Malik performs differently, such as liaising or 'workshopping with [his] buddies' (Season One, Episode One), as it is deemed by Crowley, is proof to Crowley that Malik is not 'one of us'.

Though Malik's position as a detective is respectable, it does not guarantee acceptance by his peers. He is first required to demonstrate that he possesses an appropriate level of whiteness as a sign of his loyalty. The more Malik demonstrates that he is Australian, the more likely it is that we can trust him. Unlike his white peers, but very much like his peers from non-English speaking backgrounds, Malik is often used as an unofficial mediator or liaison officer between the police and the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities, as will be demonstrated below. At the end of Season One Crowley refers to him as a 'glorified interpreter'. While on the one hand his cultural capital is an asset that sees him assigned tasks within the communities to which he belongs, on the other hand this cultural capital earns him the distrust of his peers, in particular Crowley, who value only mainstream cultural capital. Malik's intimate knowledge of how the Other operates is a consistent reminder that, while he may behave like 'us', he is still one of 'them'. Such a reminder resembles Bhabha's explanation of the colonised subject who attempts to behave like the Englishman, reminding us that to be Anglicised is to be not English (Bhabha 1994, 125). Thus, when Crowley gives Malik the ultimatum: 'You're either an Arab or a cop,' he is saying that, although you have been given the same badge and permitted to carry a gun so that you may appear like us, we know you are inherently different.

We eventually discover that Malik and Crowley are driven, in part, by similar motives. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Malik's motivation for entering the police force is the pursuit of justice on behalf of his father. For Crowley, tragedy strikes his family and we bear witness to Crowley's pursuit of justice for the death of his son. While Malik searches for his father's assailant, Crowley seeks revenge on the drug dealer Jamal Basha, who sold his young son the heroin that led to his overdose. Placing both men in a position to pursue justice on behalf of their loved ones allows for an easy comparison between the two, with Malik the ultimate hero.

In an argument with Malik (Season One, Episode Five) concerning information Crowley concealed about his father's assailant, Crowley contrasts 'the law' (his idea of justice) with what he believes Malik's ideals of justice include:

Crowley: Closure? Mate you don't want closure.

Malik: So what do I want then?

Crowley: What your mob always want, blood for blood. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

Malik: Look who's talking mate? What happened to Basha huh?

Crowley: What did happen to Basha?

The contrast between 'an eye for an eye', as Malik's form of justice, and 'the law', as Crowley's, again sees Crowley question the compatibility of Islamic beliefs and a Western secular approach to governing. This distinction points to Crowley's underlying assumption that Malik's ideals do not belong in the police force, requiring him to further prove to Crowley, and by extension the mainstream community, that Malik's way of life is compatible with an Australian way of life. By the end of the season, when Crowley's unlawful pursuit of justice is unveiled and it is clear that Malik has done things 'by the book', it is the hope of the producers that the lines of good and bad have been blurred, at least slightly. However, while the audience may soften to Malik as the heroic figure, the status quo remains largely intact. This is embodied in the positioning of the police force as another place where 'white multiculturalism' is enacted and rewarded through governance and exclusion. While Malik might challenge popular assumptions about the Arab and Muslim male as a terrorist or thug, the other Arab/Muslim characters in the series only seek to reaffirm this stereotype.

Jamal Basha's role as a drug dealer of Lebanese heritage seeks to crystallise the disdain that Crowley has for the Lebanese community as his assumptions about it are solidified through personal experience. Crowley's frustration is taken out on Malik because, in the absence of Basha, any Arab will do.

Crowley: Dog

Malik: Sorry mate did I offend you?

Crowley: You're a Leb.

Malik: I'm Iraqi. What'd the Lebs do to you anyway?

Crowley: Same thing.

(*EW101*, Season One, Episode Two)

Crowley's reluctance to differentiate between Iraqi and 'Leb' points to Grewal's (2007) findings that the terms 'Leb', 'Arab', 'Middle Eastern' and 'Muslim' are used interchangeably as a broader essentialising of 'Arab' culture. Crowley's anger, fuelled by his excessive drinking, leads him to an altercation with Basha, resulting in the latter's death.

Basha's death is investigated by Internal Affairs (IA) after Inspector Wright begins to suspect Crowley's involvement in the murder. This subplot reveals the complexity of Crowley and Malik's relationship. Malik is interviewed by IA and, although he does not lie, he is not particularly forthcoming with information as to how Crowley might be linked with the death of Jamal Basha, although he does confess that Crowley had threatened Basha when seeing him at the station. This demonstrates that, although the two are not friends, they feel bound to one another through their work in the police force. If, as I argue, you consider the police force as a metaphor for the nation (as an institution that governs through the reproduction of whiteness), Malik considers himself bound to Crowley by virtue of a shared national loyalty.

This brief moment of civility is undermined when Inspector Wright informs Malik that he is being considered for a position with the anti-terror unit because of his cultural knowledge and his fine detective skills. In order to complete the application process Malik is required to obtain Crowley's signature. This leads to an argument between the two men, resulting in Crowley belittling Malik by referring to him 'a glorified interpreter'.

Crowley: What makes you think you need special treatment?

Malik: I don't, I just want that application form in by the due date, which is tomorrow.

Crowley: [laughs bitterly] You poor, dumb sod. You actually think this is a promotion don't you? You really do think you're something extraordinary? They're not courting you because you solved the Wanda Beach murders. Let's face it, they're just chasing brownie points. You're just going to be a token bearded wog. A glorified interpreter.

(*EW101*, Season One, Episode Five)

The relationship of Crowley and Malik concludes with an act of redemption on Crowley's part. During a final chase Crowley is pushed over the edge and falls to his death, but not without a redeeming moment where Malik has him within his grip saying 'I gotcha'. Crowley insists 'let go you silly bloody Arab'. This moment is intended to resolve the longstanding conflict between the two men and acts as a moment of realisation for Crowley. His death is framed as a suicide because it is the only way that audiences might remember Crowley with any real affection. The tragic fall to his death reminds us that he was a troubled man. His suicide is viewed as an individual act, meaning that we no longer view Crowley as a representative of the nation but rather as a prejudiced individual. Thus, by eliminating Crowley, the program repudiates the 'old Australia' represented by this character – but it is a blunt instrument, given that Crowley was almost a caricature of the unreconstructed, unsophisticated racist. It fails to challenge the source of his power, which is his membership of the white mainstream. Neither does it challenge the status of the police force nor question its operational culture, despite the fact that it was this institution that placed a corrupt individual like Crowley in a position of power.

Crowley's suicide concludes the season with feelings of positivity toward a harmonious coexistence, despite the show never having addressed the issues of institutional racism. However, the feeling is temporary as the next series centres on an investigation into homegrown terrorism. It is during this second series that



we meet Richard Skerritt and Amin Khoder, two men who will be used as a point of comparison with Malik.

### ***The Influence and Effect of Cultural Capital as Demonstrated in East West 101***

#### *Malik and Skerritt*

Season Two opens with the explosion of a panel van outside a printing store, which kills undercover National Security Organisation (NSO) agent John Barlow. This event begins an investigation into Barlow's murder headed by senior NSO agent Richard Skerritt. As it seems that Barlow's death may be connected to issues of 'Islamic' terrorism, Malik is asked to take a covert role on the case that will utilise his language skills and cultural knowledge.

As has already been discussed in the comparison between Sergeant Crowley and Malik above, Malik was used in a liaison role by the police force. In the first episode of Season One, where Malik's Arabic language skills are used to obtain the statement of the elderly Arab woman, proving Talal and Ali's innocence, audiences are provided with narrative evidence that such an approach to policing works. Additionally, Malik's success in solving this case propels the narrative down the line of cultural appreciation for the benefit of social order. Time and again in Season One we see how Malik's cultural knowledge was used to restore order to the white nation after disturbances caused by Arab and Muslim 'others' wreaked chaos. Season Two continues to demonstrate the value of Malik's knowledge for the benefit of maintaining the superiority of the white centre.

The very presence of Malik as a cultural negotiator reaffirms the perception of whiteness as natural. Season Two, Episode One shows Malik liaising with a number of men from a local mosque who have been herded down to the police station after NSO agents, believing the men to be connected to outlawed organisations, raid the mosque. Malik speaks in particular to Amir Khoder, a recently arrived refugee from Kabul. Malik insists that he be the one to speak to the men as he feels Skerritt

and his agents are treating them as criminals though they have no information to verify their guilt.

From the very beginning we see Malik advising his colleagues as to how to deal with the Muslim community, the Arabic-speaking Muslim community in particular. This action in itself identifies the community as an Other to be understood. His warning not to 'antagonise the community' (Series One, Episode One) when looking for suspects and his assertion that the community is looking for someone they can 'trust' further highlights the difference between mainstream culture and a marginalised community that requires explaining. Just as Said argues that the Orientalists viewed their interpretation of the Orient as a science that only some could understand (Said 1978, p. 128), Malik takes on this colonial mindset (Fanon 1986) and voluntarily extrapolates information from Arabic speaking members of the community. This need for a middleman, in this case Malik, who understands the ways of the Muslim community only seeks to highlight the foreignness of Arab and Muslim Australians.

The framing of Malik as a hero that stands out from amongst other Arabs is achieved through the police force's productive diversity approach to multiculturalism. Productive diversity is a framework that encourages the migration of skilled migrants for the financial gain of the host country. This reinforces the neoliberal view of migrants and migration that Australia has come to adopt. Over the last 20 years Australian migration policy has shifted from an emphasis on family reunion to one on skilled migration, which now comprises the majority of the migrant intake. The language around migration has shifted toward an understanding of migrants primarily as an economic asset (Hierbert, Collins & Spoonley 2003). The move toward skilled migration, as one of its key advocates, Fitzgerald (1998, p. 1) points out, 'is critical if immigration is to contribute to enhanced economic performance and improvements in living standards in the longer term'. With an increasing air of xenophobia during the 1990s it was unlikely that the Australian public would have continued to support levels of immigration

without the added argument of economic benefit from incoming migrants. It was from this mindset that the approach of productive diversity was first implemented.

Productive diversity therefore refers 'to a strategic managerial process that aims to understand, value and work with diverse people within organisations for the mutual benefit of individuals, groups and to organisational productive capacity and the financial bottom line' (Pyke 2005, p. 2). Initially developed to value diversity within the business realm, it has come to define how cultural diversity is valued within the nation as a whole – namely, that it is valuable if it provides an economic dividend. In the world of *EW101*, the notion of productive diversity helps explain the achievements of Malik, whose cross-cultural competencies are valuable in his profession.

Malik's cultural understanding, in particular his language skills, are useful, not because a language other than English is viewed as valuable or enriching for Australian society but because they assist in advancing the agenda of Anglo Australians in promoting Australian values and keeping citizens 'safe' from the Muslim Other. Thus, in the second season we see his cultural knowledge assist in foiling the plan of terrorists (some of them 'homegrown'). Having Malik solve the case is significant because while on the one hand it demonstrates the dedication of some Australian Muslims to keeping Australia safe, on the other hand it (perhaps unintentionally) creates a distinction between 'good' Muslims who will assist us and 'bad' Muslims from whom we require protection.

The second season of *EW101* features a 'radical' preacher by the name of Omar Anwar. Anwar seems to be grooming disenfranchised young men to become suicide bombers. Malik refers to Anwar's teachings as 'offensive *Jihad*'. A number of young men have been mobilised by Anwar's teachings and are planning a local terrorist attack. Through an interview with one of the young boys, Latif, Malik discovers that the bomb will be detonated on the ANZAC bridge on ANZAC day. Malik is only brought in, however, after Skerritt is unable to obtain any information from Latif.

Malik: Are you going to be proud when your bomb dismembers hundreds of people? Is that going to ...

Latif: They're not my people. They've never accepted us here and they never will.

Malik: You were born in Australia. Whether you like it or not, this country is your home. You had every opportunity to succeed here, to practice Islam. You can do whatever you want; nobody's stopping ya.

Latif: Bullshit.

Malik: I understand. Look at your parents, they came out here with nothing and they succeeded without resorting to crime.

Latif: My dad doesn't understand. He's a slave to paying off a mortgage. Chasing the bullshit Aussie dream. Well my duty in life is not to pay off a mortgage my brother ... these innocent countrymen you speak of; they have blood on their hands. Look at what's happening in Afghanistan, Iraq, Gaza. Their national day is ANZAC Day. It's a day in which they celebrate the invasion of a Muslim country, in a war that resulted in the occupation and colonisation of Islamic lands. My brother, ANZAC Day, you know we stood at school right? Under the Aussie flag, we mourned the death of the Christian soldiers, those crusader wannabes who invaded and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Muslims. They had no reason being there.

Malik: Today is ANZAC Day. So what today is your day of revenge? (*EW101*, Season Two, Episode Thirteen)

The above exchange between Malik and Latif serves a dual purpose. As Malik and Latif converse it becomes apparent that Malik's identification as a Muslim resonates with Latif. He refers to Malik as part of 'us' when explaining that 'they've [white Australians] never accepted us here' and then later refers to him as 'my brother', an affinity he doesn't extend to 'those crusader wannabes' who 'have blood on their hands'. Latif references the international War on Terror as proof of broader society's lack of tolerance toward Muslims and as evidence that he is retaliating against an enemy that is sadistic enough to ask them to 'celebrate the

invasion of a Muslim country'. While Malik has to work on plying information from Latif, he gains more traction than Skerritt's attempt at an interview. This serves as an example of the effectiveness of approaching multiculturalism from a productive diversity perspective. Malik's affiliation with Latif leads to the acquisition of important information.

Additionally, this scene further highlights the good/bad Muslim divide. Malik's approach toward Latif is an attempt to distance himself from Latif's beliefs. Unlike his approach to Talal in Season One, Malik's approach to Latif is less sympathetic. Talal's innocence allows Malik to affiliate with him without being questioned about his own loyalty; Latif's guilt, however, or at least his part in the theft of the bomb material, requires Malik to maintain his distance lest he be considered guilty by association. Despite Malik claiming to 'understand', when Malik reminds Latif that he 'had every opportunity to succeed here, to practice Islam. You can do whatever you want, nobody's stopping ya', we are shown that he does not in fact understand Latif's situation. As has been discussed in Chapter Four, Latif, like Basha, feels misinterpellated in the Australian context and unable to experience a sense of belonging. Thus, his understanding of 'us' and 'them' is polarised. In making these statements Malik reinforces to Latif, and to audiences, that Australia is not the problem, Latif is the problem.

In this way Malik embodies not only a glowing example of productive diversity but also the revered illustration of a 'moderate Islam', despite the fact that in order to prevent the terrorist attack from taking place, Malik must shoot in cold blood the young boy who is about to detonate the bomb atop the bridge. The murder of this young man, however, is framed as a victory for the force because it maintains the status quo. Malik's use of violence therefore becomes institutionally sanctioned and, rather than being arrested for murder, he is awarded with a medal for bravery in the beginning of the next season. Although Malik feels guilty about the death of the suicide bomber, he is further revered as the ideal moderate Muslim because this death was viewed as an act of loyalty. The scene whereby Malik goes to Omar Anwar to discuss the content of Anwar's classes supports these depictions.

Malik to Anwar: Look I know what you teach and I know where it's headed.

Anwar: I teach the Quran.

Malik: You teach your interpretation.

Anwar: You should take one of my lessons you might learn something.

Malik: What would I learn? Politics? How to hate the society I live in? You teach these young men, some of them are teenagers, you teach them what? That this country hates them? That they're being persecuted? What you teach is offensive – offensive *jihad*.

Anwar: What do you know about *jihad*?

Malik: At the end of the last battle what did the Prophet say? The lesser of the struggles has just finished and the greater struggle is about to begin, the struggle between you and yourself. Incitement is a crime – remember that.

(*EW101*, Season Two, Episode Thirteen)

These scenes are but two of many scenes that serve to illustrate Malik's categorisation as a 'moderate' Muslim. This scene in particular references the broader concerns of the Howard government that Islamic clerics were inciting acts of terror to their congregation. In 2005 Prime Minister Howard, along with Immigration Minister, Amanda Vanstone; Citizenship Minister, John Cobb; and Attorney General, Phillip Ruddock, gathered in Australia's capital, Canberra, with 14 of Australia's 'enlightened, open-minded Muslims' (Munro 2005) to discuss how they might openly denounce acts of terror to their congregations.

The Australian government then continued to overtly target Muslims, pointing to their lack of integration into Australian society as a cause for alarm. To assist with solving the problem they called for the teaching of 'tolerance' and 'Australian values' in Australian Islamic schools and noted that they would go into mosques to verify that these clerics were not condoning terrorism (Kuhn 2009, p. 64). Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship, Andrew Robb, then called on Muslims to 'in their own way ... address the fears and misunderstandings of the broader community' (Robb 2006). He continued:

It may seem tough, it may seem unfair. But all of us find ourselves, at times, in situations that are not of our own making. Yet we have to take responsibility for addressing a problem. It is life.

...

I encourage all Australian Muslims to challenge the preconceptions, the misunderstandings and the generalisations of other Australians. To put them straight. To take responsibility. If the Muslim communities can find this strong, unambiguously Australian voice, they will find that the support of the Australian Government and the broader community will follow.

In saying so, Robb, the Australian government, and of course mainstream Australia, saw the 'moderate' Muslim voice as apologetic and awaiting broader approval, while their 'fundamentalist' counterparts were a clear cultural threat to national security and secularism (Humphrey 2007, p. 10). Robb framed moderate Islam as taking responsibility for the situation, despite having little to play in causing it, and working to gain the trust of the 'broader community'. As if chiding young school children, Robb lectured the Muslim Community Reference Group about the unfairness of 'life', something that the moderate Muslim should simply accept. Most clearly, however, the moderate Muslim is looking for a 'strong, unambiguously Australian voice', anything outside of that very unclear categorisation is not accepted as 'moderate'.

An example of this is social commentator Waleed Aly an Australian-Egyptian Muslim, from a middle-class, well-educated background, who often writes opinion pieces in Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, appears on nightly news program *The Project*, and is a radio host on ABC's Radio National. Aly is often seen as representative of the ideal Australian Muslim-Arab male – well adjusted, well integrated and clearly successful. The success of people like Aly leads to a perpetuation of the myth of meritocracy and the misinformed conclusion that belonging is easy, if only you would try. While it would be incorrect to argue that all Australians accept Aly as so being, he is often held up as the voice of moderate

Islam and celebrated as an example of effective multiculturalism (Stephens 2014), much like the character of Malik in *EW101*.

Robb's address above demonstrates the lack of acceptance that Muslim communities are afforded by the mainstream community. This is communicated through his acknowledgement that the support Muslim communities need to counteract this lack of acceptance will only come when the Australian Government is satisfied with the 'unambiguously Australian voice' that Muslims present. This emphasises the lack of loyalty to the nation that is assumed to be a characteristic of Muslim communities. The address itself assumes that all Muslims have alien values that need to be curbed and that they need to prove their neutrality before they can be trusted. The responsibility to do so, however, falls squarely on the shoulders of Muslim communities, while the government is free to absolve itself from any involvement. He continued, 'I believe that the unfair stigmatisation will not change materially until all Australian Muslims take responsibility for addressing the situation they find themselves in', again ignoring the function of government and media discourse in the stigmatisation of Muslim communities as a minority group.

Knapman and Wyld (2010) continue the discourse of 'taking responsibility' through Malik's heroic ventures in Season Two. In this season Malik's motive for remaining in the police force shifts from gaining justice on behalf of his father to obtaining justice on behalf of the Muslim community. Malik openly states in a conversation with his wife, Amina, 'the point of this is to find out who did the terrorist attack and prove it wasn't Muslims behind it' (Season Two, Episode Seven). In this he recognises that his multiple cultural capitals are valuable in acquitting the community of blame. Much like a standard hero, Malik uses his power for the greater good. But in doing so there is also the stark recognition that Muslims operate from a position of inferiority, continuing to have to prove their innocence and their acceptability as citizens. In this season Malik's interactions with Skerritt take the struggle of the average Muslim, as witnessed through Malik in Season One, and demonstrate how this affects broader community relations.



Poynting et al. (2004, p. 181) argue that certain leaders within the Arabic-speaking, specifically Lebanese, and Muslim communities, were complicit in painting parts of their communities as responsible for the moral panics that ensued after the gang rapes and other criminalised events that were discussed in Chapter Two. They detail the example of Labor Party representative Eddie Obeid and NSW Governor, Marie Bashir, both of Lebanese descent, who singled out 'Lebanese' youth as being responsible for the incidents and argued that they have ruined 'the good name' of Lebanese Australians (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 184). In identifying the criminals as 'Lebanese' both community leaders participate in an act of 'self-criminalisation' that suggests the community ought to take responsibility on some level for the actions of these individuals. It also creates clear categorisations of 'good' and 'bad' Lebanese, adding to the discursive construction of the Arab as Other (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 188). These categories also play into the productive diversity framework by distinguishing between the types of diversity that are productive and non-productive. Malik adopts a similar perspective. While he doesn't suggest the community is responsible for the actions of individuals, he internalises the belief that he is responsible for proving that they weren't responsible in order to clear the reputation of Arab and Muslim Australians.

In his address referenced above, Robb further highlighted the position of Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005, p. 22), who see the 'moderate' Muslim as someone 'we need not fear'. Aly and Green (2008, p. 1) add that this form of 'Islamic practice ... does not challenge the hegemony of the nation state and ... is coherent with the principles of secularism'. Aly and Green (2008, p. 5) found that Australian Muslims felt compelled to keep silent on issues concerning terrorism whether or not they agreed with the opinion being espoused by colleagues or friends, for fear that it may one day be used against them. Conclusively, moderate Islam does not disrupt the status quo through either obvious difference of opinion (moderate Muslims are like us) or by drawing attention to the disadvantages afforded those from Muslim and Arabic-speaking backgrounds due to their difference. Rather, moderate Muslims take responsibility and quietly solve their own issues, accepting the curtailing of their right to free speech as a necessary price for their integration.

Mamdani (2004) applies the distinction between the 'good' and the 'bad' Muslim in the American context, much like Humphrey (2007, p. 10) discusses the 'good' and 'bad' migrant in the Australian context. Just as Howard pushed an agenda to divide the 'moderate' from the 'radical' Muslim after September 11, Bush pushed for a distinction between the 'bad' Muslim responsible for the terror attacks on the United States and the 'good' Muslim who would not only denounce these acts of terror but would support the War on Terror (Mamdani 2004, p. 15). Only Muslims who did this would be awarded the respect and the acceptance of the mainstream because 'good' Muslims are modern and 'enlightened', whereas 'bad' Muslims are 'pre-modern ... conduits' who are 'resistant to modernity' (Mamdani 2004, pp. 18-19).

Malik's continued desire to prove the innocence of Muslims sees him agree to go undercover because, as Skerritt taunts him, 'you're so desperate to prove that Muslims weren't behind it you'll believe anything' (Season Two, Episode Ten). Skerritt's sarcasm, combined with the quote at the beginning of the chapter, are but one of many examples where Skerritt seeks to exploit Malik's language and cultural skills in order to gain intelligence, knowing that Malik feels that he is responsible for proving that Muslims were not responsible. When Skerritt and Wright approach Malik about becoming a covert agent, they do so by handing him evidence that shows the bomb used to kill Barlow was one of a number of stolen explosives. Wright begins to explain to Malik that there is a chance to 'infiltrate Akmal [Fahd]'s<sup>29</sup> group using an undercover operative'. Malik replies 'let me guess? A cop with an Arab background would be perfect for this.' As is consistent with the literature on productive diversity, Malik's shared cultural background allows him to build an easy rapport with Fahd who becomes the prime suspect in the death of Barlow. Skerritt believes that Fahd is working with others in the Muslim community and misleadingly capitalises on this as 'an opportunity to

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<sup>29</sup> Skerritt describes Akmal Fahd as 'forty years old, born in Beirut to a Russian mother and Northern Lebanese father. He migrated here [Australia] when he was eight years old. He owns private property in Australia, the United States, Lebanon, Dubai, Hong Kong. Main business is food import/export. We believe this is a front for arms trafficking, people trafficking and the sale of explosives. We have strong information that he has links to insurgent groups all over the world.' (*East West 101*, Season Two, Episode One).

screen people we haven't previously had access to'. This declaration is proof of the manner in which Skerritt benefits from Malik's cultural and language skills. Skerritt knows with certainty that Fahd could not have been behind the murder of Barlow because it was Skerritt who orchestrated it but he continues to deceive both Malik and Wright in order to obtain information on potential 'radical' Muslims to further the agenda of NSO.

Malik, under the alias of Ali Rafik<sup>30</sup>, successfully infiltrates Fahd's closest circle of confidants and business partners, giving NSO access not only to information about the whereabouts of the missing explosives but importantly about the details of a number of Fahd's associates. In one instance Wright and Koa suspect that Malik's identity has been compromised but Skerritt refuses to allow Wright to extract Malik from the case for fear that it compromises the 'greater mission'. Here again Skerritt treats Malik like a pawn in his quest for information rather than as a friend and valuable colleague.

The character of Skerritt in Season Two can also be seen to further highlight this point. Skerritt first presents himself to us after the explosion of the panel van in the first episode of the season. He condescendingly refers to Inspector Wright as 'princess' and insists her team hand over the case as it is now considered a matter of national security. Although Wright stands her ground, Skerritt's initial impression proves to be an accurate portrayal of his character. In addition to being exploitative of both his contacts and his colleagues, Skerritt plays a pivotal role in demarcating between the 'good' and 'bad' Arab/Muslim. Primarily, his attempt to charge Khoder with involvement in the death of Barlow proves to be a ploy to cover up the involvement of himself and other NSO agents in what is proven to be the orchestrated murder of John Barlow. In building the case against Khoder, Skerritt utilises the prevailing discourse around asylum seekers and terrorism to suit his own agenda and to direct Malik's suspicions away from himself.

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<sup>30</sup> Malik's alter ego, Ali, is a computer expert, who hopes to bring his cousin out from Basra in Iraq. He comes to Akmal wanting to purchase arms to deal with the killers of his fictional fiancé Jamilla, who was killed just weeks before their wedding day.

Skerritt's distinction between desirable and undesirable migrants follows the Howard government's approach to productive diversity that was based on the belief that skilled migrants are valuable to the nation. When Knapman and Wyld wrote the character of Skerritt they did so because



**Figure 3: Agent Skerritt (played by Gerald Lepkowski).**

one of the purposes of the show, was in our own way, [to] at least fight against that jingoistic, ill informed, stupidity that underpins most of federal politics really. And that's why in the second season we had a bit of a shot at, effectively, what was the Howard regime and the appalling behaviour of the Howard regime in relation to how it treated boat people. (Knapman 2010)

Thus, the purpose of including Skerritt is to demonstrate the problematic nature of the Howard government's approach toward refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, intertwined within the story of 'homegrown terrorism' is the accusation that Khoder, a recently arrived refugee, is himself a potential terrorist. The story fits with the rhetoric perpetuated by the Howard government during the 2001 Tampa Crisis, previously discussed in Chapter Two. *EW101* goes further, however, in order to uncover Australia's involvement in a questionable policy known as 'disruption'.

Disruption was a process invoked by the Howard government after two unauthorised vessels landed on Australia's east coast in 1999 (Howard 2003, p. 36). After the sinking of the MV *Tampa* in 2001 the Australian government began 'Operation Relex', aimed at preventing boats suspected of carrying asylum seekers from entering Australian waters (Howard 2003, p. 38). Indonesia agreed

to cooperate to disrupt [the flow of unauthorised arrivals] by taking concerted action to intercept people who are breaching Indonesia's immigration laws and to take an active approach to putting an end to the operations of people smugglers who are based in Indonesia. (Howard 2003, p. 41)

This meant that Indonesian police were complicit in allowing or not allowing asylum seekers to board vessels made available to them through 'people smugglers'. While it cannot be proven that the Indonesian authorities were involved in sinking vessels that carried asylum seekers en route to Australia, Australian authorities have repeatedly declared that they had no way of knowing what was done to 'disrupt' people smuggling operations, despite insisting that they had not asked Indonesia to engage in illegal activity (Howard 2003, p. 44).

Regardless of what took place on Indonesian soil or in its waters, this process of disruption meant that passengers (refugees from war torn countries) could not be brought to Australia for resettlement. This policy is another act embedded in a neoliberal agenda to keep potentially undesirable immigrants off Australian shores. It is another mechanism of discerning between 'us' and 'them', reinforced by ideas of who is an appropriate migrant, who is desirable and who does not belong. The public discourse painted asylum seekers as unskilled migrants who do not deserve the sympathy of a civilised people (Stratton 2009, p. 678). This is emphasised by reinforcement of the rhetoric that 'boat people' are 'queue jumpers' who take the place of more deserving refugees waiting in UN refugee camps without the financial means to pay a 'people smuggler'.

In exploring this angle Knapmann and Wyld were able to garner sympathy for the struggle of asylum seekers and point to the horrific treatment of maritime arrivals under the Howard regime. This story, told primarily through the interactions between Khoder and Skerritt, on the one hand humanises asylum seekers like Khoder. However, as it takes the heroic Malik to salvage Khoder's reputation, we see that it takes a certain level of whiteness to be dissociated with claims of terrorism.

Khoder is a middle-aged Afghan refugee who arrived in Australia from Indonesia on a vessel carrying 367 asylum seekers. Through Khoder's story, the policy of disruption is humanised and problematised. He tells us about his dealings with Separta, an Indonesian man, who is solicited by Skerritt to carry out 'disruptive' processes to ensure passengers who board vessels in Indonesia do not make it to Australia. Khoder describes Separta as a 'liar' who 'promises refugees safe passage to Australia'. It is through Khoder's narration of the story that we understand Skerritt's place in the process of 'disruption'. Khoder explains:

When I saw the boat I could see it was too small for all these people. Three hundred and sixty seven of us could not fit onto this boat. Separta kept telling us there was a bigger boat further out to sea. But out in the ocean hours later we realised there was no bigger boat; this was it. And then the boat started to lift. There was panic. 367 people. People from below deck trying to get out. People trapped inside. Women. Children. We tried to push out the water but it was coming in too fast. I heard my wife's voice, I swam to her. She was crying, 'look for our children'. I tried to find them. I dove under the water but it was impossible to find them. My wife was beside herself. I tried to hold her above the water and then she was gone. We waited in the water for many hours, in the dark, in the cold and then in the darkness we saw a light. We saw a light, we were waving and shouting. There were two Australians on that boat. We had seen them on the beach talking to Separta. According to the authorities the boat that came to

observe did not exist. It was what do you say? A figment of our imagination. I know what I saw ... And then an Indonesian fishing boat appeared. A fisherman pulled us from the water. Of the 367 people who were on board only seven of us, only seven of us.

(*EW101*, Season Two, Episode Seven)

Khoder then explains that the two Australian men he saw on board were Barlow and Skerritt. Skerritt banks on the fact that the information provided by Khoder, an asylum seeker with no cultural capital, will be dismissed in favour of his account of the events, an assumption he makes based on knowledge of his superior position in the hierarchy, as was the case when Crowley dismissed the information of the 'Arab kid' in favour of that provided by Duffy in Season One. This knowledge has its roots in an Orientalist understanding of the inferiority of the Orient. On the back of centuries of Orientalist discussion, Skerritt convinces his colleagues (in particular Wright) that Khoder is 'irrational' while Skerritt is calm and collected. An example of his attitude is illustrated below.

Prior to Khoder's detailed account of the sinking of the *Sea Rose* and Skerritt's part in disrupting the vessels headed toward Australia, Skerritt accuses Khoder of being an 'enemy of Australia'. In an intense interrogation about Khoder's prior dealings with both Separta and Barlow and his possible role in the explosion, Skerritt posits:

Skerritt: You're not an Australian citizen; you're on a residency Visa. If we suspect you're an enemy of Australia we can kick your arse out of the country.

Khoder: I am no enemy. I was in Afghanistan to open an orphanage for children.

Skerritt: We know you are lying about that. We know about the ammonium nitrate.

Malik: Do you know anything about the making of a bomb?

Khoder: No! No!

Malik: Just tell us the truth and we'll sort this out.

Khoder: This goes against everything I believe in, everything I have worked for.

Malik: Tell us the truth.

Khoder: Who the hell are you to accuse me?

Khoder's answers are emotive, defensive and desperate. While Skerritt's questions are straightforward and matter of fact, thus illustrating Said's categorisation of the Orient and the Occident. The Orient is 'irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; in contrast, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal"' (Said 1978, p. 40). Khoder's response, 'who the hell are you to accuse me?' stems from his knowledge that Skerritt has been complicit in acts of 'terror'. Khoder is visibly distressed but Skerritt persists with the interrogation. He uses threats of torture to try and obtain a false confession from Khoder. The interrogation only further seeks to illustrate the difference between Khoder's 'irrationality' and Skerritt's cool maturity.

Skerritt: We believe that you are working for Separta. You have colluded to plan a terrorist attack involving mass murder.

Khoder: You? You accuse me? What is terror? It is the look on the face of children when a bomb goes off. Or when their boat begins to sink and they know that death is going to claim them. No one will save them and their last moments are filled with the injustice of mankind.

Skerritt: With respect to that we are different and we will stop you.

Khoder: Building schools?

Skerritt: You've got family in Afghanistan. You've got a brother, you've got a sister, you've got two nephews. I will arrange to have them taken away to security services where they will be vigorously interrogated until we determine ...

Khoder: You want to torture my family?

Malik: Nobody will be tortured.

Skerritt: We already have your son.



Wright: Ok, suspend the interview.<sup>31</sup>

In his interrogation Skerritt focuses on the 'difference' between himself and Khoder. 'We are different and we will stop you,' he insists. Such language points to the Orientalist understand of 'us' as morally superior people who do not condone and will not allow terrorist activity, and 'them', who will not hesitate to engage in these actions. Skerritt's hostility toward Khoder reflects his hatred of Muslims as people. Skerritt's actions differentiate between 'useful' migrants, who we are expected to reward, and 'useless' migrants, who can be mined for information but ultimately discarded. While Khoder occupies the latter position, Malik is evidence of the first. The reasons for such are discussed below.

The character of Skerritt, like Crowley, occupies an extreme position in the politics of multicultural Australia. Like Crowley, Skerritt is ruthless, corrupt, sadistic and morally bankrupt. However, as opposed to Crowley, Skerritt recognises the value of Malik's cultural capital, and seeks to use it for his own advantage. Rather than expressing hostility to all 'foreigners', he distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' migrants.

As such, Skerritt has a friendly relationship with Malik and the two work closely together. Ultimately, however, the relationship is an instrumental one on Skerritt's part. He is only interested in Malik because of his ability to help achieve the goals of Skerritt's mission. This instrumentality – and the subsequent marking out of 'good' versus 'bad' migrants – exposes the failure of the productive diversity paradigm to enact a genuine multiculturalism. When cultural difference is only valued for being 'productive' there is no genuine appreciation of diversity. There is no acknowledgement that diversity might be valuable in its own right and that

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<sup>31</sup> Wright suspends the interview as she witnesses Skerritt morally blackmail Khoder. Although Wright does not display any sign of being manipulative or underhanded, she sometimes seems oblivious to the power dynamics at play within her team. Her romantic involvement with Skerritt and her desire to believe he is good at times outweigh her professional judgment. While a full analysis of her character is not possible here, Wright symbolises a progressive attitude toward multiculturalism, although her position in the force means that she has a clear agenda when it comes to Malik.

migrants might have valuable contributions to make, even if these are not definable in material terms. In this context Australian multiculturalism will always construct migrants in a hierarchical manner, leaving certain groups to languish as 'undesirables'.

Below a comparison of Malik and Khoder will further explore how possession of multiple cultural capitals allows one to advance. However, those without adequate knowledge of the dominant culture or a sufficient accumulation of cultural capital are typically exploited.

***'Good' Muslims as Useful Muslims: A Comparison of Malik and Khoder***

The differentiation between the good/bad Muslim has been touched upon above. Here the dichotomising of characters continues with a contrast between Malik as the good and useful Arab, and Khoder as the undesirable migrant. Contrasting Malik's character with other men within the Australian Arab and Muslim communities assists in understanding how Arab men come to be valued or devalued within Australian society. Those who are devalued possess less cultural capital; therefore, they are in possession of less whiteness. This lack of capital is a key factor in the experience of marginalisation.

In Hage's analysis of the issue of nationalism he discusses the acquisition of 'national cultural capital' as equating to what he terms 'practical nationality' (1998, p. 53). Practical nationality is concerned with a group or individual's accumulation of social practices or cultural styles deemed to hold national value. Practical nationality is converted into national belonging that is valued in the field of whiteness. Simply, one aims to accumulate national capital to turn it into national belonging that will be recognised by the dominant cultural group (Hage 1998, p. 53). The greater the recognition, the greater the acceptance. We see this distinctly in the difference between the treatment of Malik and Khoder. While Malik is more or less accepted by his colleagues as an equal (though he must work to maintain this acceptance), Khoder's lack of national belonging marks him as dramatically inferior.

Many critics of multiculturalism argue that it is not in fact a practice of valuing those who are different but rather a process of integration, a way of structuring society that still maintains a dominant culture (Hage 1998; Stratton 1998, pp. 80-82). Other cultures exist in a hierarchy, with whiteness at the apex. Where individuals fit within this hierarchy depends on the extent to which they can accumulate whiteness, based on their physical features or lifestyle choices. Herein lies the dilemma of assimilation for Muslims, in particular for those who choose to outwardly express their religious affiliation, whether through dress, religious practice in the form of prayer or fasting, or refraining from cultural activities such as the social consumption of alcohol.

In light of such, 'Third World looking' people, those with darker skin, eyes and hair, or perhaps those who dress in attire associated with other non-Western cultures, find it particularly difficult to acquire whiteness as their physical features tend not to be European. This places them in opposition to Northern Europeans who traditionally possess the most natural whiteness. The concept of 'Third World looking' tends to refer to 'ethnics' with very low national capital (Hage 1998, p. 59). Often those who have held onto their traditions and customs and those who are usually not very wealthy tend to have little national capital. As will be further discussed below, this distinction allows us to understand why Malik and Khoder, both of whom have a great deal of cultural capital to offer, benefit differently from the information or intelligence they provide.

Malik has acquired whiteness in the way discussed by Hage (1998). This whiteness is determined by everything from his choice of clothing to his pursuit of an education in a profession that is respected and credited with saving lives and maintaining order. To complicate Hage's notion and application of cultural capital, however, Malik is able to convert his knowledge of Islam and Islamic practices, his Arabic language skills and his standing within the community into symbolic capital. As Hage argues, knowledge of the dominant culture and embodying the *habitus* of the dominant culture (assimilating) is currency for migrants. The case of Malik

suggests that an intricate understanding of Islam and Islamic practices can be converted into cultural capital as in this instance it is a priority of the mainstream.

The official recognition offered to Malik enhances his cultural capital. His position in the force and the medal he receives for excellence and bravery in service at the beginning of Season Three is a form of symbolic capital, a sign that the force values his contribution. This recognition was based primarily on his ability to turn his knowledge of the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities into intelligence to be used in a case of terrorism. While one can acknowledge that his recognition is also attributed to him placing himself in physical danger to carry out this task, others who offer information are in no way rewarded for their contribution to the pursuit of justice.

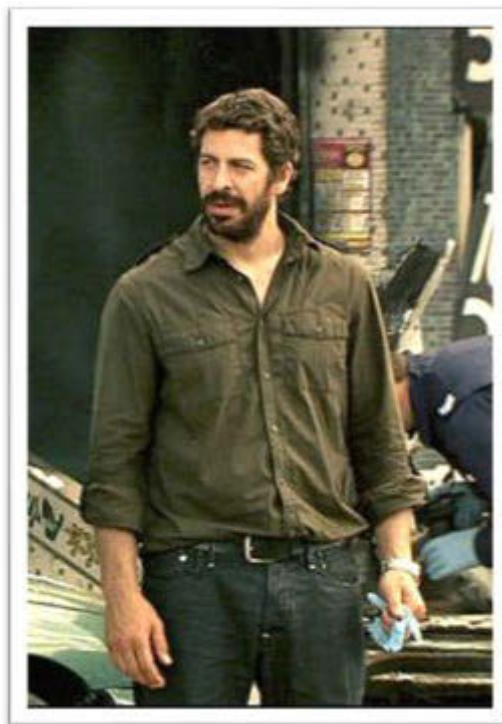
Being Muslim and/or Arab can have a negative value in other circumstances, as we see in the case of Khoder who is interrogated for his strong cultural and religious affiliation. In all examples in *EW101*, language skills, connections and Islamic knowledge are only valued when they are put to use for the police – that is, the nation.

Where, however, cultural knowledge isn't being used for the police it is seen as being negative. Even the characters who receive nothing in return are still 'used' for their cultural knowledge but the more 'Third World looking' they are, the more they tend to first be associated with 'crime' and questioned for assumed illegal activity. In Khoder's interrogation, although his information proves to be helpful and they determine that he is clearly not involved in the terrorist plot, Khoder himself gains nothing from the interaction; in fact he views it as a humiliating assault on his dignity. While Malik is rewarded repeatedly through promotions, awards and, evidently, more whiteness, Khoder's only reward is that he is no longer considered a terrorist. Malik's existing cultural capital allows him to further capitalise on the information he obtains because it is an institutional and national recognition of his acquisition of whiteness as cultural capital. Khoder is unable to capitalise primarily because he does not possess a significant enough level of

whiteness to begin with. While in some instances we see that Khoder's fluency in English places him above other refugees, his heavy accent, long beard, long hair, traditional clothing and job as a cleaner are all markers of Muslimness that generate no reward and thus no further acquisition of white symbolic capital.

Malik's whiteness and his value however, lie in the neoliberal approach to migration that Howard outlined. His cultural and language skills are used to ensure a level of social stability (Hiebert, Collins & Spoonley 2003, p. 14) without which white Australians could be harmed. Malik, as most migrants in these situations, is treated as a commodity, useful for his *other* cultural capital. This, however, is only useful insofar as it is coupled with a certain acquisition of whiteness. Malik therefore becomes what connects *us* with *them*.

Malik is able to navigate the field of whiteness with more ease than many other non-white characters portrayed in *EW101* because he possesses fewer outward markers of Muslimness; thus, less of his external appearance is a direct affront on whiteness. While he is still the victim of repeated racial discrimination, his experience is unlike that of Muslim men who wear traditional clothing. For example, in contrast to Khoder's traditional-style of loose fitting clothes, Malik often wears fitted shirts and t-shirts and belted jeans. His standard wardrobe resembles that of a typical Western male. Khoder's does not. Khoder allows his cultural and religious background to have a greater influence on what he wears.



**Figure 4: Detective Malik.**

This is also a sign of his recent arrival to Australia. Khoder also wears a kufi cap, a small white knitted cap worn by many practicing male Muslims, under which his long hair is tied back. Khoder, like Malik, has a beard but his is longer and less groomed, giving a more unkempt and unsophisticated air to his character, resembling something of a wild savage. Khoder wears a long cloth over his shoulder as is very typical of more traditional Muslims who seek to emulate the dress of the Prophet Muhammad. His shoes are often open sandals, sometimes worn with socks. Malik's shoes are more like sneakers, more practical in his line of work, but such footwear also helps to make him appear more assimilated (less ethnic) in this regard. A final point of difference is that Malik's beard is trimmed and neat and much lighter than Khoder's. His hair also is much neater, giving it a less 'traditional' appearance. Malik's clothes are symbolic of Western dress whereas Khoder's symbolise a devotion to the East.



Figure 5: Amin Khoder (played by George Kanaan).

To continue the contrast, Malik's university qualifications were attained in Australia, while Khoder's engineering degree was attained in Afghanistan and is therefore devalued in Australia. This non-recognition of his qualifications means that Khoder must work as a cleaner, one of the lowest status occupations in Australian society. Finally, while Malik speaks with an Australian accent, Khoder has a strong Afghan accent. As such, Khoder is not able to receive anything in return for the information he is able to provide to the police force, and moreover, is suspected of being a terrorist himself.

### **Conclusion**

Season Two of *EW101* is an example of the manner in which productive diversity as an apparatus for genuine multicultural encounters, has failed, in so far as it continues to maintain the supremacy of the white centre. It makes clear that whiteness is essential to the success of Muslim and Arab Australians. Without the necessary cultural capital, as in the case of Khoder, one cannot gain a better position in the field of national belonging.

The final words of Malik in the concluding episode of Season Three, are in Malik's response to Wright who hails him a hero. Malik responds with, 'there are no heroes', before the final credits roll over the screen. Malik's final realisation is that the police force is an institution that operates for the benefit of the white centre. In fighting for justice Malik must use violence, oftentimes the same violence from which he seeks to protect ordinary citizens. Malik's realisation is that, regardless of his cultural knowledge or his language skills, his actions make him no different to the people he is expected to fight. In order to protect the world from murderers, Malik must kill. In order to prove that Muslims 'weren't behind it' Malik must show that only some Muslims are inclined to 'offensive *jihad*'. This realisation is a stark one for Malik but ultimately by the end of series three, he has lost faith in the institution that is responsible for the pursuit of justice. His optimism has deteriorated and his commitment to the force has wavered and we as an audience are inclined to agree.

This chapter has unpacked the limits of *EW101* as a text that producers Knapman and Wyld (2010) feel boasts progressive cultural diversity. In demonstrating the limited success of Khoder, and even at times Malik, the series includes people from culturally diverse backgrounds but happily leaves intact a culturally hierarchical status quo. The following chapter will unpack the limitations of both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* as progressive texts that seek to generate a clearer understanding of Arab-Australian men.



## CHAPTER SIX

### **MAINTAINING DICHOTOMIES: REINFORCING A WORKING-CLASS, CRIMINAL UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB AUSTRALIA.**

#### **Introduction**

This research has recognised the significance of films such as *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, acknowledging the importance of sharing Arab-Australian narratives within the context of Australian cinema. These films have given voice to experiences that are, for the most part, entirely overlooked. However, it is also important to realise that they are still read within the context of Arab Australians who are stereotyped as working-class criminals. The previous chapter outlined the limitations of representations in *EW101* and discussed the prevalence of whiteness in the depiction of Malik, understanding how a dichotomy between the good and bad Arab was created to boost Malik's likeability and level of whiteness. This chapter will engage in a critique of the films *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* to explore the limitations of progressive representations of young Arab men as budding or actual criminals. Using the concept of Orientalism, this chapter will expose the multiple dichotomies that were cemented within both films, which closed down any space for discussion between 'white' and 'Arab'. It will suggest that such a dichotomy is influenced by the worldviews of writers/directors and their experiences of misinterpellation as adolescents.

#### **Misinterpellation and the Second Generation**

A tendency toward gang culture is often thought to be a result of a lack of assimilation (Levey & Moses 2009, p. 101). When this tendency is exhibited in the children of migrants (particularly those of Middle Eastern descent, as discussed in Hage 2011) it is seen as being particularly alarming because it comes from a generation who were born in their 'host' country rather than a generation who

have migrated. It is therefore expected that these second generation migrants are more assimilated than their parents, making the process of integration far easier. However, the confronting realisation that a minority of second-generation migrants are not 'integrated' and are rather dissatisfied with their place within the mainstream results in the fear that people of 'Middle Eastern' backgrounds simply do not assimilate like those from cultures who have come before them.

Events such as the London bombings and the shock that followed, due to the labelling of the terrorists as 'homegrown', contributed to a growing disbelief as it came to be argued time and again that even second-generation Muslims were not assimilated, drawing a direct correlation between Muslims (and by extension Arabs) and unassimilability. Ideas such as these lead to a further isolation of young men who display any outward sign of national discontent because, as it has also been argued, it was this lack of assimilation that made them angry. In contrast, Hage (2011, p. 166) poses that a correlation, if any were to be made, should note that anger comes 'from a frustrated and unrecognised sense of over-assimilation' and the subsequent 'experience of rejection'.

These feelings of rejection primarily manifest themselves in second-generation migrants, who tend to be younger and whose experiences of racism have a more intense effect than the experiences of their parents. While first-generation migrants often expect to experience racism because they are moving into the homeland of another, second-generation migrants believe they are entitled to a life of belonging and non-discrimination, in particular because the language and culture (both at the heart of racism) are their own (Hage 2011, p. 168). Hage (2011, p. 168) identifies these expectations as 'an idealized sense of non-discriminatory belonging that even non-racialized citizens have no access to'. It is in this sense of entitlement that second-generation migrants are suffering from 'over-assimilation' (Hage 2011, p. 168). This over-assimilation leads to a more attuned sensitivity that breeds an uneasy sense of belonging (Hage 2011, p. 169).

This experience is considered by Hage to be one of 'misinterpellation' (Hage 2011, p. 166; Hage 2010, p. 122). The original concept of 'interpellation' stems from the work of Althusser who argued, using the example of the unborn child, that when parents are expecting they begin to live their lives in preparation for a child that is to come. In so doing they create a space into which the child is born and continues to occupy. Such is similar with citizens of the nation state: 'It [the nation state] has already allocated symbolic and structural locations, such as "worker", which simply hail or interpellate a person to fill the already existing space' (Hage 2011, p. 169). First-generation migrants experience 'non-interpellation' (Hage 2011, p. 169; Hage 2010, p. 121) or 'negative interpellation' (Hage 2011, p. 170; Hage 2010, p. 122). The former refers to a phenomenon where, unlike the unborn baby, there is no allocated space for the first-generation migrant to occupy, as the nation does not recognise them as legitimate subjects of the state. The latter refers to being recognised as being less than human and thus being treated as inferior (Hage 2011, p. 170). Second-generation migrants, however, experience neither of these; their experiences are more complex. They recognise 'themselves as being interpellated only to find out that they are not' (Hage 2011, p. 170). Hage (2011, p. 170) continues:

When the nation hails you, 'hey you citizen', everything in you leads you to recognize that it is you that is being hailed, but when you do say, 'yes it is me', you experience the shock of rejection where the very ideological grid that is inviting you in the nation expels you through the petty and not so petty acts of exclusion ... You say 'it's me' and the ideological structure of society replies with cruelty: 'No. Piss off. It is not you I am calling.'

I argue that young Arab-Australian men – like George Basha and Serhat Caradee – see themselves as legitimate subjects of the state but, upon coming to occupy that space, they are told that in fact it is not they who are being called. While multicultural policy has attempted to rectify non- and negative interpellation, it does not address misinterpellation. It is here that the place of gang culture takes the place of citizenry interpellation in the representations of some second-

generation Arab/Muslim men (Hage 2011, p. 171), as is evident in *EW101* Season Two, *Cedar Boys* and *The Combination*.

The desire of the second generation therefore, is not recognition of their own culture within Australia but the acceptance of their offer of assimilation to the nation. However, this offer to assimilate is rejected time and again, resulting in what Hage (2011, p. 171) terms 'assimilation fatigue'. This is where one has become tired of attempting to assimilate only to be told one cannot, while simultaneously being told one must (Hage 2012, p. 125). It is in this tension of trying to belong and realising one does not that young people have turned to other groups to experience a sense of belonging. As is evidenced in *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, some young men find this sense of belonging not in gangs but in their friendship groups. This is an important recognition for understanding the representation of Australian Arabs and Muslims in Australian popular culture.

Before embarking on an understanding of how the theme of misinterpellation plays out in the films, it is important to explore the subject positions of both Basha and Caradee in order to explain the worldview that these films appear to reflect.

### ***Misinterpellating Basha and Caradee***

As mentioned in Chapter Four, both Basha and Caradee identified, to differing extents, with the characters in their films. The motivation to write *The Combination* was extremely personal for Basha, as discussed in that chapter. His own experience with the solidarity of a friendship group inspired the dynamics between Charlie and his friends, while his sense of reason and understanding as an adult informed the approach of John. The experience of misinterpellation rings true for Basha in more ways than for Caradee.

Basha mentions early on that he was bullied by 'Anglo' kids during his school days for being Arab. It was in these early stages of his life that he learnt he wasn't considered one of the Aussies (Basha 2013). As a result of this social exclusion, Basha sought affiliation with young men from similar backgrounds. His friends

offered support and understanding that were not forthcoming from the Anglo kids in his community. This experience of growing up as an outsider is mirrored in the character of Charlie.

Basha experiences an epiphany of sorts when his friend is doused in petrol and set alight by a drug dealer, and he decides to move out of the life associated with illegal activity and violence and makes a contribution through artistic expression (Basha 2013). In deciding to become an actor, Basha then experiences a second level of rejection, this time not by children at school but by institutions that do not recognise his difference as an asset. As he fails to gain employment in the film industry because of his ethnicity, Basha again feels he does not belong despite his attempts to do so. The lack of belonging is only solidified when he realises that 'all the friends I made through the industry were getting work, you know. But they were blonde kids' (Basha 2013).

The remark by Basha's agent summarises the root of his frustration: 'People don't write for you' unless they are casting a criminal or gang member (Basha 2013). Such a realisation not only angered Basha but also assisted in bolstering his understanding of how the film industry, an extension of white power, operates along cultural and ethnic lines. Caradee shares this experience, acknowledging that the Australian film industry was comprised of 'mostly Anglo-Saxon characters and if you were in a TV series or you were a guest or whatever, you were either a panel beater or a criminal' (Caradee 2011). For Caradee, however, his frustration seems to be defined less by ethnic and cultural barriers and more by class difference.

Caradee (2011), upon being asked to describe himself and his professional background, begins by saying he came from a 'poor background' in comparison to the 'blonde kids' who, throughout the interview, he repeatedly conflates with 'rich kids' from the 'eastern suburbs'. For Basha, however, the 'blonde kids' are the 'white kids', using whiteness in a similar vein to Hage, who attaches to it a certain superiority.

These dichotomised worldviews were only exacerbated with Caradee and Basha's experience in the Australian film industry. Indeed, it was this very realisation that little work existed for them and people like them that led them to write their own screenplays. For Basha, however, the 'rejection' does not end there. As he attempts to secure funding for the script he is turned down on numerous occasions and asked to incorporate what he sees as more stereotypical images of Arab men, including a 'rape scene'. Basha's frustration continues as he realises once more that funding bodies seem unready to back the voice he aims to project, assuming the Australian public is not yet ready to hear it.

The above experiences are examples of the perils of Hage's concept of misinterpellation, which comes to explain the way Basha and Caradee approach the writing of their films. Having attempted to 'assimilate' and having their offer of assimilation rejected by managers of the white national space as children, adolescents and as professional adults, their views of cultural and ethnic relations in Australia have become dichotomised. The issue is not simply about prejudice and racism toward a minority culture but deep cultural exclusion that prevents them from achieving on a professional level. This offers some insight into why the films are so clearly dichotomised. However, we should also acknowledge that the genre of both films – crime drama – channels the films towards polarised worldviews with its overwhelming framework of 'good' and 'evil', 'right' and 'wrong'.

### ***'Us' Versus 'Them': Maintaining Binaries Through Genre***

Identifying a film or a text as belonging to a particular genre also means attaching to it an expectation of what will occur through the course of the plot (Lacey 2000, p. 135) via an element of intertextuality. This involves narratives drawing upon other narratives and it is in this way that they make sense to their audience. *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* are no different. They draw inspiration from the social and political climate around them and aim to explore the underlying issues that drive some young Arab males to a life of criminal association. In so doing, they

cement the idea of a marginalised existence for working-class Arab-Australian men, separate from the mainstream.

The crime genre has been adapted from the Western genre (Silverblatt 2007, p. 53; Shadoian 2003, p. 24) simply with the alteration of certain trappings; that is, those symbols and signifiers that come to be associated with the genre (for example, horses and Stetson hats). By replacing the horse with the police car and the hat with a badge, the symbolic trappings of the genre are altered but the basic plot (good versus evil) remains. This forces a fictional 'us versus them' that is clearly mirrored in polarising depictions within both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*.

According to Silverblatt (2007, p. 23), the crime genre has four subsets – the 'super cop', the 'spy', the 'detective' and the 'gangster' film. Categorically speaking, both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* might be viewed as falling into the 'gangster' subset, despite insistence from Basha (2013) in particular, that the film is a 'love story'. While there are certainly elements of a love story, this takes a backseat to the drama of the criminal underworld, a trait that the film shares with the 'gangster' film genre more generally (Shadoian 2003). While the 'gangster' genre is not a big part of Australian cinema, both films borrow from their American counterparts, with Basha referencing *The Godfather* (Basha 2013 and Caradee heavily basing *Cedar Boys* on *Mean Streets* (Caradee 2011).

As the crime and gangster genres require a dichotomy of good/bad, us/them in order to succeed, films of this ilk often rely on the representation of two incompatible factions of society battling for power in order to determine who reigns supreme. Examples such as *Underbelly: The Golden Mile* blur the lines between good and evil by unveiling the corruption that occurs within the police force in the form of bribery and abuse of authority, as well as the abuse of other officers. In the instance of both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, however, the dichotomy is less about institutional approaches to regulating behaviour, although encounters with the police certainly feature but rather centers on interactions with other cultural groups within society. In both instances the line between the

two very distinct 'Leb' and 'white' groups becomes evident. The films follow a classic 'underdog hero' narrative, with the 'Leb' outsiders battling a system stacked against them, one governed by an exclusivist, privileged white society.

The following section will explore the dichotomy of the insider/outsider in both films. It will further comment on the social ramifications of such a black and white distinction between groups as supported by the findings in Chapter Seven, outlining the audience response to these films.

### *White Versus Leb*

Both films raise questions of belonging for young working-class Arab-Australian men. Unlike *EW101*, however, they fail to open up spaces for expression and negotiation of complex identities. Rather, as I will argue, they firmly delineate between what I have termed 'white' or 'authoritative insiders' and 'brown' or 'powerless outsiders'. The powerless outsiders are continuously searching for validation from the authoritative insiders. The insiders are seen as authoritative because they belong to the dominant ethnic group whose experiences are considered national norms. This means that those who occupy subject positions lower in the social hierarchy tend to want to emulate their ways in order to be accepted, as we see in *Cedar Boys*. Otherwise they wish to express themselves in alternative ways while still seeking validation and acceptance from the dominant group, as we see in *The Combination*.

In *The Combination* Charlie's group of friends consists of Mo, Tom, Zeus, Yas and Nipper. With the exception of Nipper, this group boasts little cultural diversity, consisting primarily of young men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds.

Nipper, being from an (unspecified) Asian background, however, is embraced as he is bound through his experience of difference. Nipper understands what it is to be an outsider and is thus accepted as one of the boys.





**Figure 6: Charlie, Nipper, Zeus, Mo and Tom.**

By the same token, the group of 'Skips' is also monocultural. Scott and his unnamed friends are entirely 'white', with blonde and brown hair and blue eyes. As will be discussed below, these become markers of whiteness and thus symbols of status.



**Figure 7: Scott and his friends confront Charlie.**

While Charlie Morkos and his friends are not a 'gang', the way they travel in a large group, always together, and drawing on common portrayals of young Arab men who form gangs, they are easily misperceived as so being. It is this power in numbers that gives their peers a reason to fear them. By the same token, however, the young 'white' boys from Charlie's school also travel in similar-sized groups, instilling a similar level of fear in their peer groups. It is this tension between the two ethnically differentiated groups that creates the idea that there is some ongoing warfare over 'turf' and girls. Initially we perceive the turf warfare as restricted to dominance of the schoolyard. However, in the final confrontation where Zeus draws his gun to shoot Scott we see that, for Zeus in particular, the 'turf' could in fact refer to the nation, as will be discussed below.

Mistaking peer groups for gangs has been a real concern for young men in Western Sydney, particularly Bankstown (Collins et al. 2000, p. 40). *The Combination* plays on this confusion and presents the boys as a group of friends, marked by their belligerent nature. Importantly, the depiction of Charlie and Zeus's involvement with drugs and their constant clash with other peer groups draws on imagery of gangs in South Western Sydney. In this way, Charlie's experiences seem to echo those of Basha. Basha mentions: 'I used to be bullied by Australian kids when I was younger and ... I learned to hate Aussie kids' (Basha 2013). The strong 'hatred' that seems to exist between the boys, at least on part of the 'Lebs', is due to the experience of misinterpellation. The frustration for Basha, and by extension Charlie and his friends, is rooted in a desperate desire to belong.

Charlie's group of friends seems to lack any meaningful affiliation to either the nation or their families. Thus we see in them a strong desire to belong to something greater. This 'something' happens to be their peer group. This is made apparent throughout the film where Charlie asserts that he would do anything for his mates, such as visiting them in jail and going to their aid in a physical altercation. John (Charlie's older brother) repeatedly reminds Charlie that prison is a lonely place and that his friends had also once made similar promises.

John is the closest character we see to a father figure in the boys' lives but his comments and concerns fall on deaf ears. The boys' desperation to find affinity in something greater overrides their concern for abiding by the law. The boys find this belonging in one another because they never question each other's right to belong or their place as a legitimate member of that group. To be seen as rightfully belonging to a particular place, in this case Australia more broadly, and to have your choice of girl is to be valued and respected. The issue for Charlie and his friends is that they do not feel others perceive them as being 'real' Australians (Stratton 2005, p. 79). This lack of acceptance only further reinforces the divide between them and the 'Aussies'.

Within the first five minutes of the film Scott has referred to Charlie as a 'Leb', 'wog', 'camel rider' and 'towel head', all derogatory terms that imply Charlie's outsider status. Despite these overtly racist taunts Charlie reacts with the least amount of force as compared to his friends. This general status as an outsider, however, sees Charlie and his friends attempt to differentiate themselves, on some level, from their 'white' rivals at school. While Charlie is less concerned with this distinction than his friends seem to be, he goes along with the name-calling and the physical violence that allows them to assert their difference, until this violence includes weapons. It is at this point that Charlie recognises the limitations of what he will engage in to be accepted.

Charlie's best friend, Zeus, however, equates acceptance with respect. Zeus believes that gaining respect is akin to gaining acceptance and, since neither his class nor cultural status appears to warrant immediate respect, he resorts to gaining respect and, therefore acceptance, through fear. Zeus (below) carefully sculpts an image of a fearless warrior. His toned physique suggests both his physical and sexual prowess, warding off potential threats. Zeus's haircut, shaved on the sides, short on the top and long at the back, is atypical, signifying his non-conformist attitude, immediately placing him outside of the mainstream. In the image below, featured on the marketing posters for the film, Zeus holds his hands

over his chest in the symbol of a gun, almost daring people to ‘mess’ with him. In this way Zeus asserts pride in his difference.



**Figure 8:** *The Combination* promotional cover.

Charlie’s character stands in contrast to Zeus’s bravado; an example being Charlie’s haircut, which is conformist and fails to draw attention, symbolising his partial assimilation. Even Charlie’s attitude toward violence, although he does go along with it at certain points within the film, have more to do with intimidating his peers than harming them. In the following scenario we see Charlie shrug off his friends’ insistence of a fistfight. While he eventually concedes and punches the unsuspecting Scott, who later takes his revenge on Tom, Charlie seems mostly unfazed by what Zeus deems to be ‘disrespect’, although he chooses the side of the ‘Leb’ in almost all instances to maintain his level of affiliation, knowing he is still unwelcome with the ‘skips’. Below is an example of this group mentality.

Tom: Let's go find the fucker.

Charlie: Forget it.

Tom: You're dogging it.

Charlie: Nah man, it was my fault. I was hitting on his missus so.

Zeus: Man, straight out that Aussie prick put you on show. You gotta earn your respect around here.

Nipper: He's right bro. We can't let these Aussies disrespect us.

Mo: Bro, we're wasting time talking, let's go man.

Yas: Charlie, don't think twice *yallah*.

While Charlie is initially reluctant to engage in the violence, he eventually gives in to the pressure and fights Scott. On the one hand, it is evident that Zeus and his friends are aggravated by the lack of respect offered to them by the 'Skips' and that their attempts at engaging in physical violence is a manifestation of this aggravation. On the other hand, they are also desperate to seek the approval of the 'Skips' demanding they recognise them as equals.

This depiction reflects the findings of a study conducted by Noble, Poynting and Tabar (1999, p. 35) with a group of young men from Lebanese backgrounds. The study found that respondents felt that in Anglo-Australian culture the idea of respect was lacking. The general assertion that Anglo-Australian culture lacked respect either for family or for those who were considered to be unAustralian was an accusation much like that stated by Zeus above. 'Respect is a form of honourable recognition' (Noble 2007, p. 334) and is therefore translated into symbolic capital, but only when it comes from people who are viewed as important and 'whose social standing carries a broad reach' (Noble 2007, p. 334).

Charlie displays a form of 'protest masculinity', albeit more hesitantly than the others, and in a way that closely resembles the experience of young Lebanese men as discussed in the research of Poynting, Noble and Tabar (2003, p. 136). Their research centres on two sets of male peer groups in Sydney's west. The first is a group of three young boys from a Catholic boys' high school and the second a

group of three young boys from a state coeducational high school. Both groups of men refute the idea that their friendship group is a gang. Rather, they see their associations with friends as a matter of 'stick[ing] by each other' in order to protect one another from racist or offensive remarks and attacks (Poynting, Noble & Tabar 2003, p. 137). They define this as being a point of difference between themselves and the 'Aussies' who 'don't stick up for each other' (Poynting, Noble & Tabar 2003, p. 137).

In *The Combination*, Charlie's friends group together in order to secure recognition beyond the group and hide 'injuries of class and race, recuperating a sense of dignity' (Noble 2007, p. 334). Due to the ongoing discrimination and harassment encountered by Charlie and his peers, they regain a sense of self-respect or dignity by engaging in an exaggerated performance of masculinity. The boys withhold respect to those who do not afford them a similar respect and this serves to instill a sense of unity in men who have been similarly injured.

Zeus, however, is unlike Charlie and wishes to distinguish himself from the mainstream without any of the consequences of marginalisation. He wishes to mark his difference without the loss of legitimate belonging or the loss of respect. This desire places 'Lebaneseness' in contrast to 'whiteness', encouraging the audience to consider them as mutually exclusive. Such tension is evident in the scene where Zeus enters the school dance with a gun and makes his way onto the dance floor in what we initially perceive as an attempt to frighten Scott into submission. Zeus walks directly up to Scott and throws the first punch. After a brief physical altercation, Zeus draws the gun and points it at Scott as he tries to regain his balance.



Figure 9: Zeus (Ali Haidar) points a gun at his classmate Scott.

Zeus: Don't even think about it Scotty. Time to die, you motherfucker.

Charlie: What the fuck are you doing, bro? Hey, Zeus you don't want to do this, you gotta think about this, yeah.

Zeus: How do you know what the fuck I wanna do? It's us against them, can't you fuckin' see that?

Charlie: There is no them

Zeus: Look at them. Blonde hair. Blue eyes.

Charlie: No that's bullshit. That's bullshit.

Zeus: Ask him

Charlie: Ask him what?

Zeus: Ask him. Ask Scott if he thinks you're a fuckin' Aussie!

Charlie: I don't care what he thinks, bro.

Zeus: Ask him.

Charlie: Ok, Ok [out of breath]. Tell him. Tell him that I'm Australian.

Zeus: The truth or I'll blow your fuckin' head off man.

[Scott is panting and unable to speak.]

Zeus: I can't hear ya, cunt.

Scott: Yeah, you're Australian.

Charlie: See [reassuringly]. Put the gun down. Put the gun down.

Zeus: You're a fuckin' liar

[Zeus fires two consecutive shots. Scott collapses. Zeus moves closer to the body and fires a third within close range. The room is completely still. Zeus turns to his audience with his arms outstretched turning and smiling while flaring his chest. He then blows the end of his gun looking pleased with himself before we see him carted away by police.]

Zeus perceives 'Aussies' in a very stereotypical light. Scott's rejection of Zeus as a legitimate Australian causes Zeus to question his sense of belonging more generally. Scott's fair features come to symbolise Australia more broadly as reflected in the way that Basha understands mainstream Australia. We see this in his reference to 'blonde women' and 'blonde kids' that are again referenced by Zeus: 'look at them. Blonde hair. Blue eyes.' he says. While Charlie reacts to the marginalisation with snide remarks that barely rattle the status quo, Zeus wishes to eliminate the source of his discomfort entirely. The scene where he kills Scott therefore functions as a metaphor for Zeus's desire to eliminate the standard to which he is constantly compared. He is unlike Scott, therefore making him unAustralian. By eliminating Scott there is nothing by which Zeus can be compared and therefore one can conclude that Zeus is no longer less than anything.

This episode does little but reinforce the idea that Australianness is not inclusive of otherness and, in this instance, Lebaneseness. While this statement may in fact be an accurate reflection of the struggles young Arab men face, as we will see in the audience responses to it in Chapter Seven, in the minds of young Arab men the film only cements the divide between their cultural and national identities. For most of these young men this film is a rare depiction of characters like themselves on the big screen and, in this depiction, their characters are represented as unequivocally and unalterably opposed to mainstream white Australia. Meanwhile most of the representatives of white Australia are depicted as possessing nothing but hostility towards Arab Australians. The question then arises: while these films are necessary in that their narratives were previously lacking from the Australian



cinema landscape, are they simply feeding existing intolerance and does this outweigh the good they purport to do?

This further raises questions pertaining to the social responsibility of cultural producers. What is the impact on audiences of the social context within which films are made? And most importantly, if one is claiming that these films give voice to the voiceless, is it not necessary to understand the effect these films will have on how the wider population views the 'voiceless' and the effects these depictions have in allowing them to speak in future? Are these films valuable simply because they add a voice to the landscape or is their value dependent on the *kinds* of voices they add to the landscape?

These questions also apply to both *Cedar Boys* and *EW101*. The writers of both films embarked on their projects with a clear sense of purpose about representing 'their' communities, meaning that they understood the importance of countering the dominant, overly Orientalist depictions of young Arab men. However, the filmmakers do little themselves to steer away from resorting to traditional Orientalist stereotypes to make their point.

#### *The Lebo Hero*

In addition to the focus on culture and ethnicity, *Cedar Boys* brings class into the picture. The film plays on an exaggerated and rigid understanding of class differences across cultural groups in Sydney, as per Caradee's understanding of the 'wog'/'white' dichotomy. Unlike Basha, Caradee sees class difference as defining cultural tension. For Caradee whiteness equates to the upper middle class and 'Leboness' encapsulates the working class experience in Western Sydney. In *Cedar Boys* Tarek believes that the only path to class mobility is to be 'whiter' and thus begins his desire to accumulate symbols of whiteness.

The western suburbs of Sydney have always been seen as inferior to Sydney's northern and eastern suburbs (Gwyther 2008, p. 155). Initially 'considered lowbrow, coarse and lacking education and cultural refinement' (Gwyther 2008, p.

155), those residing in the west were considered *déclassé* and problematic. Although in the past this area was considered old stomping ground for mostly Anglo-Celtic families in fibro houses (Gwyther 2008), recently definitions of the 'Westie' (a derogatory term used to encapsulate the lower class nature of those residing in Sydney's west) have expanded to include a racialised otherness (Gwyther 2008).

Through Tarek we are presented with a very distinct representation of the authentic 'Leb', or what he labels the 'Lebo Hero', in contrast to the 'Rich Kid'. The Rich Kid is always white, residing in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney. The Lebo Hero lives in Western Sydney, comes from a working class background and is always ethnic. Tarek posits the behaviour of the Lebo Hero in opposition to the behaviour of the Rich Kid and views the latter as being more desirable, as a national citizen.

We are first introduced to Tarek's disdain for the Lebo Hero early in the film when he attempts to subtly slip away from his friends in search of a different crowd. Nabil notices Tarek's discreet exit and follows him to a bar they do not ordinarily frequent. Tarek immediately joins the fast moving queue behind a young couple in order to get into the bar. When he is denied entry by the bouncer, who explains: 'Sorry mate. Members only tonight,' Tarek replies with 'Can I pay?' To which the bouncer responds: 'There's people behind you. Step to the side.' We then see the bouncer allow another young couple into the bar. We catch a glimpse of women behind and in front of Tarek who are fair with blonde hair. Tarek loiters outside the bar longingly observing patrons (almost all blonde) when Nabil surfaces.

Nabil: Oi, what are you doing?

Tarek: How did you know I was here?

Nabil: I saw you when I was coming out of the toilet. *Shu [what]?* What are you doing?

Tarek: I'm sick of those fuckin' Lebo Heroes man.

Nabil: Pfft what are you? *Yallah emshi* [come on, let's go], the boys are waiting.

Tarek: No. I wanna go in.

Nabil: What for? [voice rising]

Tarek: *Hak* [because] alright! I wanna meet some different chicks.

Nabil: Bro they're never going to talk to you man.

The above dialogue introduces us to two very important distinctions for Tarek, the first of which is the Lebo Hero. We understand the Lebo Hero as everything Tarek never wants to be. We see this typified in the exchange between him and Sam when the same bouncer again refuses them entry to the same bar for the same reason: 'Members only tonight.' Tarek's lack of membership is an obvious reference to his status as an outsider with patrons of the bar and the group they represent – that is, mainstream Australia. Sam and Tarek again loiter in front of the bar waiting for Brigid and Amie to appear.

Sam: Fuckin' steroid gym junkies.

Tarek: *Khallas* [enough] Sam [as he texts Amie]. Listen you're not at Excess all right. And you're not hanging out with your homies in the fuckin' hood.

Sam: Fuckin' hero.

Tarek: Do me a favour; turn your phone off when we're with them.

Sam: Come on bro it'll be on silent.

Tarek: No man, turn it off. Or at least don't answer in front of 'em.

Sam: OK OK. I'll have it on vibrate.

Tarek: Let's try not to be so woggy around them, all right man? Otherwise we're going to look like two Lebo heroes on their phone every fuckin' five minutes.

Sam: Relax bro. I'll be on my bestest behaviour.

Tarek: How's my hair?

Sam: It's good. It's good.

In the above example Tarek conflates 'woggy' behaviour with the behaviour of the Lebo Hero. At the crux of both labels Tarek hints at the fact that the Lebo Hero isn't white. He therefore contrasts the behaviour of Sam in particular to that of Brigid

and Amie. He asks Sam to behave more like the girls in order to gain respect and admiration from them. For Tarek this is his ticket into the dominant culture, the place in which he is so desperate to belong.

Tarek reiterates his contrast between the Lebo Hero and the people who belong to Amie's world when he apologises for the behaviour of Sam at the party of Josh and Candice, Brigid's friends. 'Sam's being a hero, sorry', he says to Amie. 'It's OK they're all tossers anyhow' she responds. Tarek's comment comes after walking away from a conversation about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in which Sam continues to engage. The two men, David and Renim, are arguing in favour of the existence of the state of Israel. Sam takes an opposing stance and argues that regardless of whether Jews once populated the Holy Land they have no right to use violence against the people of Palestine. Tarek distances himself from his Arab affiliation by rolling his eyes and walking away from the situation. Sam on the other hand uses his cocaine supply as a way to bond with Brigid and her friends. While Sam proudly adopts the stereotype often associated with being Lebanese – that is, he embodies the drug dealer from the Western suburbs prototype – he does so for his own benefit. As he later tells Tarek: 'I'm gonna clean up on these rich kids cuz.' While Tarek looks down upon Sam's behaviour, we can see that he is using Amie because he too realises that he has something to gain from her. Tarek's end game, however, is more about social and cultural capital than it is about economic capital. The economic capital for Tarek is simply a stepping-stone to attain Amie, who offers him entry into her world (Lagerberg & McGregor 2012, p. 252).



**Figure 10: Amie and Tarek at a bar.**

For Tarek, Amie is a trophy, a symbol of ultimate whiteness and thus wealth. She is symbolic of having entered the Western world, a place that young men like Tarek are seldom allowed access to (Lagerberg & McGregor 2012, p. 253). Amie's long blonde hair is no coincidence; the blonde is emblematic of another world that Tarek desperately seeks entry to. Nabil highlights this very argument when he tries to convince Tarek to give up on dating Amie: 'If she was a wog chick you wouldn't have even noticed her ... you're only interested because she's an Aussie,' he says to Tarek as they drive home after a night on the town. Tarek does not deny the accusation. Such a mentality is what led to the accusations that the gang rapes in 2000 were race-based attacks by Middle Eastern men against 'white', 'Western', 'Caucasian' women (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 116). The media discourse around young Lebanese/Muslim men suggested that they considered young 'white' women as 'fair game' and 'sluts' (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 116) that were available for sexual gratification, while women of their own cultural background were respected. Thus, Tarek's pursuit of Amie based on her cultural affiliation only seeks to reinforce these ideas.

Like all blonde hair, Amie's comes to symbolise both sexual purity (Lagerberg & McGregor 2012, p. 257; Handyside 2010, p. 292) and sexual attraction (Burton 2012, p. 133). As Burton (2012, p. 134) argues, since medieval times Eve and Mary Magdalene were represented as blondes who epitomised temptation and 'vice', while the Virgin Mary, also blonde, symbolised 'virtue'. These polar categorisations

create ambivalence around the display of blonde hair as being both pure in an angelic sense but also sexually desirable and provocative. In the 1950s blonde American actress Marilyn Monroe epitomised that nation's ideal and way of life. Her fair skin and blonde hair made her the 'sexual and racial embodiment of perfection' (Handyside 2010, p. 292). In the same way that Monroe became a 'white icon' (Handyside 2010, p. 292), Amie comes to be Tarek's ticket to national belonging. Her blonde hair and fair skin give her an allure of 'white Australian cultural "purity"' (Lagerberg & McGregor 2012, p. 257). If we take the time to unpack Tarek's understanding of Amie as culturally pure, we recognise that Tarek has internalised ideals of the White Nation fantasy. He understands that he fails to attain this ideal simply by being Lebanese.



Figure 11: Sam, Tarek and Nabil.

The tagline of the film: 'When you're on the outside, all you want is in,' delineates insider and outsider status as depicted through and Amie and Tarek. Tarek and Amie are depicted as epitomising the 'Western Sydney' versus 'East Sydney' class dynamic but, in so doing, both have been reduced to stereotypes, as will be explored below. As Caradee explains in his interview, *Cedar Boys* is very much about groups of people who reside outside of the city and attempt to enter a world

that is not theirs, an idea adopted from *Mean Streets*.

*Mean Streets* is very close to *Cedar Boys* where you have this nucleus, collective groups of people living outside the city who create their own little worlds and ... every now and then they'll come into the city ... as an escapism from where they are and they come into the city and out into the suburbs again (Caradee 2011).

While Nabil and Sam are happy to come in to the city and then return to their suburbs on the outskirts, Tarek is less content with this arrangement. Tarek wants an all access pass to the inside. Throughout the film Caradee repeatedly references the ethnic and class differences between Western Sydney and the Eastern suburbs. Much like blonde women stand for something greater than themselves in this film, so too do the Eastern suburbs. Both seem to stand for a Western culture that Tarek is not a part of. Caradee explains this in relation to a question he received from a woman during a question and answer session following a screening of *Cedar Boys*, when she accused him of making the film about issues of religious conflict between those residing in Western and Eastern Sydney:

It's about class ... these kids are from the Western suburbs they go to a rich kid's house and they're admiring the house and they overhear a conversation, and being of a Lebanese, Middle Eastern background they think that they have an affiliation with what's going on in the Middle East so they throw their bit in. It's got nothing to do with religion. It's got to do with class (Caradee 2011).

All elements of the film come back to a clear class distinction between Tarek and his friends and Amie and her circle of friends and acquaintances. In the following conversation with Nabil, Tarek expresses his desire to be a part of 'rich' Western culture through his strong desire to live in Sydney's Eastern suburbs:

Tarek: It's all right for you, you know. You work in the family business and when your parents retire it's gonna to be yours.

Nabil: I've still got brothers and a sister.

Tarek: They'll probably go to Uni right? You're the oldest so you end up with the business.

Nabil: Yeah so? I worked hard for it too.

Tarek: Yeah but at least it's yours man. Fuck. When Jamal comes out I wanna have a business of my own too you know. Maybe live around here.

Nabil: What?! Where?

Tarek: Rose Bay, Eastern Suburbs.

Nabil: How you gonna do that? Marry a rich chick?

Tarek: Maybe.

Nabil: Who the fuck is gonna to let their daughter marry a Lebanese panel beater from the Western suburbs?

Tarek: Yeah? Well maybe I'll make the money and I'll buy an apartment around here.

Nabil: [pause] What? Rob a bank with Sam?

Tarek: [pause] No.

Nabil: Then what? What you are gonna to do? Be a stockbroker?

Nabil quite willingly accepts that he will never be a part of the Eastern suburbs crowd. By doing so he, like Tarek, also accepts both his inferiority as someone who comes from the Western suburbs and the superiority of those who identify with and are accepted by a Western culture. This is the basic premise of an Orientalist understanding of the self and others. The inferiority felt by the young men in *Cedar Boys* assists in maintaining the supremacy of the 'White Nation'. Their feelings of inferiority are almost entirely based on their lack of material wealth. This can be clearly seen through their awe at the size of the houses in the Eastern suburbs when they're invited to Josh and Candice's party.



Tarek: Are you fucking kidding man? Look at these houses.

Nabil: Yeah. Rich. Do you wanna have a line here or what? Roll up a \$100 note.

Tarek: I haven't got one.

Nabil: Then a fifty.

Tarek: I haven't got that either.

Nabil: Well fuck Tarz, what have you got?

Tarek: Just twenties.

Nabil: Great. Good look that is.

And later when Tarek and Sam walk into Josh and Candice's home for the first time, admiring their extravagant staircase that reaches three floors.

Tarek: Sam, check this fuckin' place out.

Sam: This place looks like Saddam's fuckin' palace.

The juxtaposition between the expansive dwellings and the \$20 notes carried by Tarek draws our attention once more to the disparity between elite Western culture that has become synonymous with the Eastern suburbs and those who exist somewhere outside it. What *Cedar Boys* does when positing the boys (Tarek, Nabil and Sam) and their circumstances (working-class, urban-dwelling men) against the lifestyle that Brigid and Amie maintain, is to continue to dichotomise groups within Sydney. Instead of opening up a space where the middle ground between these two cultures can be explored, it instead sends everyone back to their metaphoric corners and asks you to stay on your side.

This categorisation of the western suburbs as being impoverished and working class is, to an extent, accurate. However, the film's depiction of Western Sydney as exclusively 'ethnic' and working class recreates a somewhat outdated stereotype of these suburbs as defined by their disadvantage, which ignores the social diversity within them. For example, it ignores the sizeable Anglo-Australian population of the area, some of whom are traditional working-class residents, while others, a growing number, are part of a lower-middle class also known as 'the aspirational

class' (Scrase & Robinson 2008, p. 127) or 'aspirational' (Gwyther 2008, p. 155). Many members of this group have moved into gated communities or master-planned estates, which have become increasingly popular in the area in the last few decades. Many of these estates feature 'McMansions', which have become a staple part of the western Sydney landscape. These dwellings are 'larger, more ostentatious, status-oriented homes' (Gwyther 2008, p. 158). Despite the grandiose nature of these houses, they are still viewed by others as lacking in quality. They are seen as 'gaudy, overblown, mass produced, cheaply constructed and environmentally destructive - much like the famous burger chain after which they style was named' (Gwyther 2008, p. 158). While people living in the eastern suburbs and beyond deride these homes, it is such infrastructure that has allowed for the creation of a significant middle class in Sydney's west. *Cedar Boys*, however, entirely ignores this demographic and therefore any semblance of complexity within Western Sydney. As a result we see Western Sydney depicted as everything Sydney's east is not - poor, uninspiring (the boys have come into to city in order to entertain themselves), 'ethnic' and ridden with crime and social and structural problems.

Tarek attempts to resist these stereotypes of Western Sydney residents as being somehow less than other Sydneysiders, but ironically he fails. Eventually Tarek becomes exactly what he was determined not to be - a 'Lebo' stereotype. Like the young men in Collins et al.'s (2000, p. 159) study, Tarek was attracted to dealing drugs because it allowed him to experience the thrill and status of power that attaches itself to money until he can make his own through legitimate means.

When Tarek first meets Amie at the bar he hesitates before approaching her. He tries to erase any sign of their cultural differences. But Amie is desperate to categorise him in the same way he labels her. Both Amie and Tarek draw conclusions about one another based on the extent of their visible cultural capital. Tarek and Nabil stand awkwardly at the bar observing Amie and Brigid as they sit casually on the couch. Their contrasting body language indicates the extent of their

belonging within this space. Tarek and Nabil clearly feel out of place but are desperate to appear natural. Tarek hesitantly approaches the girls.

Tarek: Can we buy yous a drink?

Brigid: Have you guys got coke?

[Amie laughs.]

Tarek: No.

Nabil: Why would you say that?

Brigid: Sorry bad joke I guess.

Tarek: Relax.

Nabil: No, no, no. Do we look like drug dealers?

[Pause as the girls exchange an exasperated look]

Nabil: *Emshee* [walk] bro, let's get out of here.

Amie: Come on, sit down. She was only joking.

Nabil is offended by Brigid's assumption that he and Tarek must be drug dealers. Nabil goes on to insult Brigid later in the conversation, asking if her 'sugar daddy' bought her car for her this year. Nabil attempts to use the stereotypes against Brigid in order to make a point about the offensive nature of assumptions. The stereotypes by the girls are the identical behaviours to those that Tarek calls Sam out on, after which he labels him a 'Lebo Hero'. Even when Amie calls Tarek after meeting in the club and asks him to bring 'Charlie', a codename for cocaine, Tarek cannot see that she views him as only a stereotype, using him for his easy access to the drug.

Amie continues to press the boys for information about their backgrounds.

Amie: So where are yas from?

Tarek: What? Nationality?

Amie: Yeah.

Tarek: We're Australian.

Amie: Yeah but what's your background?

Tarek: We're from umm ...  
 Nabil: Iran.  
 Amie: Right? Really? Mmm.  
 Brigid: It's all the same isn't it?  
 Tarek: Our parents are from Lebanon.  
 Amie: So are yas Muslim?  
 Tarek: [lying] No, we're Jewish.  
 Amie: [laughs].  
 Tarek: Why? Does it matter?  
 Amie: I guess not.  
 Tarek: What do you guys do?  
 Brigid: We're both interior designers.  
 Tarek: That's pretty cool. Do you do cars?  
 Brigid: Yeah we do cars.

By their naming of their Lebanese background, Amie immediately assumes the boys must be Muslim, in line with the discourse discussed in Chapter One. As Tabar, Noble and Poynting (2010, p. 99) have also found, the distinction between Lebanese Muslims and Lebanese Catholics is viewed as important by young Lebanese men themselves, based on how they believe mainstream Australians perceive each category. When interviewing over 40 young Lebanese men and women from Christian and Muslim backgrounds on the topic of how ideas of sexuality are influenced by culture, they found that many young Lebanese Christians wished to identify themselves accordingly. That is, they believed it important to specify that they were Lebanese Catholics because the assumption that all Lebanese are Muslim is widespread. A participant, Boutrous, explains:

I think people when they read in the media, in the papers or even television, they mention Lebanese, and they mention Lebanese Muslim such and such, straight away when you say you're Lebanese, they say 'maybe he's Muslim ...' Me personally ... I wouldn't want somebody rubbishing my background ... if you tell them you're Catholic, they consider you, 'oh you're one of us', so

to speak. (Tabar, Noble & Poynting 2010, pp. 98-99)

Boutrous, like Tarek, recognises the value of distancing yourself from your religious identity if that identity happens to make you Muslim. It is for this reason that Tarek evades Amie's question, although his evasion presents itself as admission of his religious affiliation. It is this affiliation, however, that makes Tarek more distinctly stereotypical and 'other', separating him from Amie's world more firmly.

Both Amie and Brigid are strippers who pretend to be interior designers. While the lie may seem innocuous when told to two boys they meet on a night out, once Amie begins dating Tarek the situation has deeper implications. Throughout the duration of their relationship Tarek continues to provide Amie with her cocaine fix and when she offers to pay him he refuses payment because for Tarek, Amie is payment enough.

Amie's deception shakes Tarek to his very core. It brings undone his idealised image of what the dominant culture might offer and indeed what it is. Upon discovering that Amie is in fact a stripper, his ambition of entering the realm of belonging is shattered. As he purposefully walks into The Galleria, Amie's place of employment, to see Amie dancing seductively to an audience of very attentive men, wearing nothing but a short black wig and lingerie, he recognises his image of Amie as pure and perfect as an illusion, almost mirage-like. He finally begins to recognise that he cannot achieve the belonging he seeks in the place in which he seeks it, in this case Amie, primarily because Amie is not who Tarek has built her up to be. This discovery acts as a metaphor for Tarek's disillusion with the realities of national belonging more generally. His dissatisfaction comes from the fact that it is now confirmed that like all 'western' women Amie too is 'immoral and sexually promiscuous' (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 151). In reaffirming his prejudice of white Australia, Tarek sees that with Amie there is no hope of belonging. He has yet again been cast out, shown that he is in fact not a member.

### ***They Have Their Fun With Us***

In *The Combination*, John has similar uses for his girlfriend, Sydney. Although the outcome for John is one of harmony and coexistence with the discovery that Sydney is carrying his child, their relationship is not without tension. Contrary to Tarek's relationship with Amie, John and Sydney discuss the issue of belonging more frankly. Their story is pitched as being one of forbidden love, Romeo and Juliet style, with both families objecting to the union. The core of their objections lies in the 'incompatibility' of cultures. Once again, however, the depiction of this incompatibility throughout the film is polarising. For example, the continued portrayal of Sydney's parents as virtual alcoholics does little but play into existing stereotypes about Australia's heavy drinking culture.

Sydney's parents are themselves caricatures of white Australia, emphasising in particular characteristics of excessive alcohol consumption and blatant racism, an attitude explained in greater detail in Chapter Two. The limited understanding of Arab and Muslim Australians, as demonstrated through Sydney's parents, is reinforced in the dialogue below, where we are introduced to the two-dimensional images of young Arab men as 'using' white girls, much like in *Cedar Boys*, and the equating of Arab with Muslim.

Sydney's parents, in particular her mother, are wary of John's motives from the very first time they meet him. When John comes to the door to pick Sydney up for their first date she asks John to wait outside while she goes to speak to her daughter. Sydney emerges from her bedroom looking for John, surprised that he is not in the lounge room with her parents. Later, when Sydney returns from a subsequent date with John, her mother forbids her from seeing him, explaining that John does not take their relationship as seriously as Sydney does.

Sydney's Mum (SM): Syd, they have their fun with us, but they marry their own kind.

Sydney: He's not like that.

SM: They all are. They have to be.

Sydney: What are you talking about?

SM: Muslims.

Sydney: Muslims? [Sydney scoffs and laughs.] You have no fuckin' idea.

SM: If you want to keep living under our roof, you will stop seeing him.

Sydney: And if I don't?

SM: It's your choice.

Like Amie, Sydney's mother equates John's Arabness with Muslimness. Sydney scoffs at her mother's naivety but does not challenge it in any meaningful way. Her mother's insistence that 'they have their fun with us, but marry their own kind' points to the perception that Arabs and Muslims do not integrate. Sydney's parents also view Islam or Arabs as incompatible with their values. Behaviour such as 'marrying their own kind' is seen as an example of a lack of respect toward non-Arab, non-Muslim women. In fact much of Islam's incompatibility with Australian culture seems to stem from a misunderstanding of Islam as misogynistic, violent and uncivilised (Poynting et al. 2004, p. 117; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay 2007, p. 582; Dunn 2001, p. 291; Mason 2004, p. 235). These associations ultimately lead to a non-desire and lack of acceptance of Arab and Muslim Australians, leading more generally to non-support of multiculturalism.

Although Sydney's father is depicted as wielding less power than her mother, he too is of a similar belief, attempting to reason with Sydney and assuring her that the 'Lebanese' are not like us. In a didactic monologue Sydney's father begins:

When I was running the Depot I had a bloke, he was Lebanese. Nice enough. We were getting along well you know, no problems. Now I'm not a racist but when I had to let him go because he couldn't do the job, he was waiting for me in the car park and he reckoned he was going to get me, and he came back every day for a week threatening me. Saying he's gonna kill me, shoot me. I mean they're different, mate. I remember when this whole area was full of Australians. You didn't have little Lebanon and the whole thing going on. Not that that worries me, but the place wasn't full of guns, people being

stabbed and you can't tell me you feel safer Syd. That's not being racist, that's just the way it is. I mean you don't see Australians travelling in gangs looking to beat up or rape people, do ya? I mean it's all about fitting in. I mean if we go to another country to live, we gotta live like whoever they are. If you come to this country you act Australian or don't come. That's just a fact. I got nothing against John. I don't even know him.

Sydney's father links the presence of Lebanese Australians in the area in which they reside to what he perceives as an increase in gun ownership and stabbings, a stereotype discussed in Chapter One. Linking crime with ethnicity is not an original position concerning Lebanese Australians. In the early 2000s, following a shooting of a young school boy in Punchbowl (Collins et al. 2000, p. 1), a series of gang rapes by young Lebanese men and the drive-by shooting of Lakemba police station, the focus on Middle Eastern gangs and the disruption they had caused to the neighbourhoods they frequented (mostly in Sydney's southwest) was overwhelming. Not long after the *Daily Telegraph* ran a story delving into the specific nature of ethnic crime, suggesting that purchasing a semi-automatic weapon, was 'easier than buying a pizza' (Collins et al. 2000, p. 2). Then NSW premier, Bob Carr, cemented the link between Lebanese youth and violent crime by publicly stating that a Lebanese gang was responsible for the shooting of Lakemba police station despite there being no witnesses (Collins et al. 2000, p. 3). Such public condemnation of a particular ethnic group paved the way for more racialised political and media discourse to emerge. Hence Sydney's father without 'knowing' John can make a claim about the effect his Lebaneseness has on his community.

This lack of knowing is pertinent to understanding the Orientalist stereotypes that exist around Arab and Muslim Australians. 'I got nothing against John, I don't even know him' is an interesting admission on the part of Sydney's father. Her father is less concerned with John himself, and instead takes issue with what he believes John represents. Ultimately John represents something that is other than Australian. 'If you come to this country, you act Australian, or don't come', he offers.



What it means to 'act Australian' is not defined, however, as Sydney's father contrasts it with criminal behaviour, we come to understand 'acting Australian' as not carrying guns, stabbing, raping or 'beating people up', and particularly not engaging in this behaviour in groups or gangs. The absurdity of this comment is later contrasted by the inclusion of the Cronulla Riots in the film's plot, framing Anglo-Australians as indiscriminately aggressive toward outsiders.

While Sydney's parents and John seem to sit on the same end of the spectrum with respect to their lack of understanding of the other culture, it is only Sydney who attempts to understand her place in both worlds. Sydney's parents are evidently xenophobic and have little interest in gaining a deeper understanding of John's world. Therefore their own prejudice is made more concrete by both news bulletins and the current political climate. On the other hand, John seems resolute on viewing himself as a victim of a society 'built on racism'. After Sydney tries to end the relationship with John they enter into a heated argument where John accuses Sydney of being racist but also insults her own cultural affiliations.

John: You know, Lebs have this saying, if a mother is good, so is the daughter.

Sydney: Well sorry.

John: I should have guessed. You never once invited me to your house.

Sydney: You don't understand, you don't.

John: [yelling] No you don't fuckin' understand, Sydney. You can't handle being with a Leb.

Sydney: Oh that's what it's all about John, you're fuckin' culture. Never once have you considered mine. [Cries.]

John: What culture? Football, cricket and meat pies.

John reduces the tension between himself and Sydney to purely ethnic terms. His one-dimensional view of himself is problematic because it reduces those he interacts with to the same ethnic dimension. He and Sydney are not simply two people who fell in love but a 'Leb' and an 'Aussie' who fell in love. By creating this

clear cultural distinction and placing himself on the outside of 'Australianness' John prevents any possibility of the fluidity of identity. He sees himself as primarily (and only) defined by Lebaneseness.

With John's dismissal of Sydney's 'culture' as being merely a series of Australian icons he is accepting the invisibility of whiteness, the very thing that leads to his perceived oppression. John does not acknowledge that Sydney's culture also requires her to behave in culturally appropriate ways or that he might be required to understand its nuances in any meaningful way. Rather, he resorts to a series of stereotypes and projects them upon his girlfriend when she tells him she can no longer see him. At realising John's apparent polarisations, Sydney also resorts to viewing him as a stereotype who was using her because she was 'easy to fuck'.

John: Why don't you just admit, you're a racist?

Sydney: And you're not? I'm just some dumb Aussie bitch who was easy to fuck. You take me to the gym to show off your white bitch. You asshole.

John: You think I used you for sex? [grabs her roughly] You must have been shit scared of me raping ya, coz you know that's what us Lebs do.

Sydney: You're fucking pathetic.

John: See I don't blame you 'coz you don't know any better. This society was built on racism.

Sydney: [crying] oh you are so full of shit, John.

John: Have a look at Mundine and Green. You think that's about boxing? That's about the white man against the black.

Sydney: Do you ever fucking stop and listen to yourself John? [Cries]

John: You just broke up with me simply because I'm Lebanese.

Sydney: I broke it off with you because you were going to fuck me and dump me for something better.

John: And is that what *you* really think?

Sydney is exasperated by the situation at hand. She refuses to believe that everything is simply about 'us' versus 'them' in whichever context it might appear.

While this might be the film's one acknowledgement of the potential for non-binary thinking, Sydney's character is too marginal to have any real impact on the audience's perception of these binaries. In addition to this, Sydney has, from the film's commencement, been framed as a 'blonde woman' from a 'white' culture, a frame that undermines any of the non-binary thinking she seems to purport. Additionally, she comes to accept the cultural stereotype that Muslims (meaning Arabs) 'marry their own', despite knowing that John cares about her.

To make his point, John likens the situation he and Sydney are facing to the 'white man' versus the 'black man' and uses a boxing metaphor to indicate the ongoing struggle. While it may be that there are ongoing cultural tensions between people from specific cultural minorities and broader society, the continual positioning of 'us' versus 'them' does nothing but cement an existing binary. The only character throughout the film who attempts to seek an understanding of cultural hybridity is Sydney who, motivated by love, is driven to understand the nuances of Lebanese culture in order to establish genuine social harmony within the family she will begin with John. As Basha (2013) reminds us, 'it's a love story ... showing that no matter how our cultures clash we can always still make it work if we want to'. However, this, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, is not the understanding that the audience is left with. While it may be true that Basha meant to explore ethnic conflict through love, the message of hope and understanding is lost on the audience due to the collective actions of the remaining characters who are overly preoccupied with cultural divisions.

Eventually Sydney refuses to stop seeing John after she discovers she is pregnant with his child and her mother asks her to leave. As Sydney packs her bags we see her parents watching footage of the Cronulla Riots unfold on their television screen, a counter-image to the one Sydney's father attempts to portray of 'Australians' who don't 'travel in gangs looking to beat up or rape people'. While we see that white Australia has little claim to the moral high ground where unprovoked violence is concerned, what we also see is a community adamant on destroying itself. As Sydney packs her bags we simultaneously view Charlie

watching the riots on his television while Ibo, who has not received the drug money Charlie owes him, shoots at his house. The footage of violence on screen is paralleled by the attack on Charlie's family. The film highlights that the attack on the Arab community does not come only from outside. Charlie is evidently afraid of the consequences of his actions, the repercussions of which can be felt from his own community.

### **Maintaining Polarities**

As mentioned earlier, the polarisations that occur throughout the film are no coincidence. They stem from the polarised understanding of Sydney as a city that may be seen to stand in for a wider polarised understanding of 'Western' and 'other' cultures. Both Caradee and Basha see their world through a binary framework due to their own experiences of marginalisation by mainstream white society. This mindset has clearly influenced their art. Basha and Caradee use two separate terms to differentiate between a vaguely 'Anglo' culture and the 'western suburbs' where for them, the non-Anglos reside.

Throughout the interview Basha refers repeatedly to 'blonde kids' and to the character of Sydney as 'the blonde girl'. Speaking of his early years in the film industry as an actor, Basha states: 'I remember all my friends I made through the industry they were getting work you know, but they were blonde kids and it kind of pissed me off. I was thinking you know I'm Australian but I can't help it if my parents are of Arab descent.' Basha uses bloneness as a distinct marker of Australianness. Thus bloneness comes to embody more than just hair colour. It stands in for the dominant culture; this is exactly how we see John relate to Sydney in *The Combination*. When John and Sydney argue about her being racist, his concern is not so much with Sydney herself but with the dominant culture he believes she represents. John dismisses Sydney as an individual and sees her as part of a blonde collective. Basha again makes a similar distinction when he claims to 'represent my own people' through the making of *The Combination*. Basha

explains, 'Honestly, this was for our people, this film.' His reference to 'our people' differentiates his audience from those 'blonde kids'. It may be that such distinctions are inevitable in a climate where young Arab men feel victimised, however, as Chapter Seven will indicate, this distinction only solidified the disconnect of 'our people' from the 'blonde kids', who then believed their vitriolic hatred of the other to be justified, as we will see in the online discussions.

In making a clear distinction between 'our people' and the 'blonde kids' John takes it upon himself to bring Sydney into his life and make her one of 'our people'. John behaves as Sydney's saviour, hoping to show her the error of her ways, an alternative to the status quo, by bringing her into his Lebanese community. Basha (2013) explains that 'Lebanese culture is one of the most accepting cultures in the world, I reckon.' He contrasts this with an inhospitable Anglo culture as demonstrated through Sydney's parents. On the other hand, when Sydney meets John's mother, Mary Morkos (played by Doris Younane), in the restaurant at which Mary works, Mary orders the waitress to bring Sydney a sample of almost every dish on the menu and attempts to make her feel at home. That is, until Mary realises how serious John is about Sydney, at which point she tells John that Sydney is not 'for him'. John's mother presumably prefers that John marry from his own culture, as Sydney's mother suggested earlier, but eventually comes to accept Sydney as John's partner with little objection. Such a depiction of Arab culture comes from Basha's (2013) understanding of the Lebanese culture as 'one of the most accepting cultures in the world ... we don't stop giving'.

A significant part of Basha's (2013) intentions were to show 'the dark side and I've got to show the good side, the funny side of our culture'. 'Our culture' refers specifically to Lebanese culture. The dark side to which he refers is the young men who find themselves absorbed in illegal activity, unable to escape the realities of criminal behaviour. The good side seems to be the hospitality: 'We give, we don't stop giving' (Basha 2013). The criminal elements depicted in the film attempt to explain a particular subculture that has arisen amongst young Lebanese men in Western Sydney. As a result there are very strong links between being Lebanese

and being a criminal. The focus on 'giving', however, is peripheral and does not balance the criminal elements. While it may never have been his intention, Basha reduced the 'good' elements of Lebanese culture to a banquet facilitated by John's mother and the *dabke*, a traditional Arab dance performed at weddings and parties. Thus, while John attempts to 'take her to this whole world that she's never seen and everyone's like, yes come in' (Basha 2013), he limits her experience of his culture to superficial elements of food and dance. When Sydney accuses John of not letting her in he tells her to 'fuck off'. His refusal to allow Sydney to see a deeper side of him suggests he has a very superficial understanding of not only his culture but also cultures more generally, consistently reducing them to stereotypes. While he criticises Sydney for a culture based on 'football, cricket and meat pies', he fails to engage with his own culture on a deeper, more meaningful level by looking at the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of cultural practices. Instead he simply considers the symbols and icons that come to embody two-dimensional representations of a given culture such as banquets and folk dances.

Caradee's polarisations do not differ greatly from those made by Basha. Caradee too makes the distinction between his two target audiences. Unlike Basha's description of 'our people', for Caradee this is replaced with 'people out west' and the 'eastern suburbs crowd' that stands in for Basha's 'blonde kids'. The distinction of Caradee in particular is a class distinction. Thus, by referring to the 'eastern suburbs crowd', what Caradee actually means are 'rich white' kids (Caradee 2011). The division is not purely based on where one happens to reside but how rich or otherwise these people appear to be, as seen above in the example of Sam likening Josh and Candice's home to Saddam's palace. Even when describing his own upbringing Caradee (2011) indicates that he 'grew up [in a] very working class, western suburbs, poor background'. He projects these similar circumstances onto his three young protagonists. They all work in low paying trades – panel beaters in the case of Tarek or cleaners in the case of Nabil – and see their prospects of class mobility as being very slim. It is only Sam, the drug dealer, who seems to have money to throw around and entertain a lifestyle where drugs, alcohol and girls are plenty. Indeed, Sam is the first of the three to purchase his own apartment where

he can 'bring back chicks', a luxury that both Tarek and Nabil must forgo while residing with their conservative families. The temptation of selling drugs becomes more alluring as the prospect of the ultimate freedom and independence also hinges on their financial situations.

While aiming to depict these boys in a more humane light and giving voice to the struggles of young men whose lived experience reflects that of Tarek, Nabil and Sam, Caradee, perhaps unintentionally, resorts to stereotypes. As Foster (2009) summarises in an SBS review of the film:

Cedar Boys goes to great lengths to capture the daily lives of the disenfranchised young men of Sydney's South-west. Clichéd images reinforce the greater population's one-dimensional view of the city's ethnic enclaves – doof-doof speakers in customised cars; racial tensions amongst Asian, Australian and Middle Eastern youths; the fascination with American gun culture and violent iconography.

Tarek and his friends cruise through the city, in their customised cars, whistling at and attempting to pursue 'blonde girls'. This behaviour specifically plays into the media preoccupation with crime and hypersexuality that is attached to Lebanese youth (Tabar, Noble & Poynting 2010, p. 96). Unfortunately, this has led to the assumption that young men (in this case of Middle Eastern appearance) ought to be treated with suspicion. That is, they are often thought to 'want' Anglo girls and thus go to any means to secure them, including rape. Thus, when John says to Sydney in *The Combination*: 'You must have been shit scared of me raping ya, coz you know that's what us Lebs do,' he refers directly to this stereotype of 'Leb' boys raping and claiming 'blonde' girls.

While there is no mention of rape in *Cedar Boys*, the idea of sexual prowess is explored through Tarek who seeks Amie at the cost of reverting to the stereotypical Arab from Western Sydney. The only way he finds acceptance in her world is through becoming everything he has resisted. Because he feeds her

cocaine habit, she allows him to enter her sexually and therefore enter her world socially. This penetration, both sexual and social, is a sign of great success for Tarek, however, he can only achieve this penetration by being her drug dealer. When he attempts to win her over at their initial meeting in the bar Amie is uninterested. It's not until the moment when she asks him to bring 'Charlie', a code name for cocaine, that Tarek gains any traction with her.

In the same way that Tarek is a cliché from western Sydney, Amie is a cliché 'blonde' from the Eastern suburbs. Firstly, Amie's profession as a stripper plays on stereotypes of blondes being more sexually liberal than their other female counterparts. Secondly, the depiction of Amie and Brigid as cocaine addicts reinforces ideas of 'rich white kids' who have nothing better on which to spend their money. Neither the depiction of Tarek nor that of Amie is particularly helpful in offering a space within which to discuss a hybridity that Tarek might experience. Everything Tarek does tends to separate his 'wogginess' from his 'Australianness' rather than offer any negotiated interaction. Thus, while the story of Tarek and his friends might resonate with certain audiences from western Sydney and beyond, it shuts off any attempt at discussing the amalgamated experience of 'otherness'.

### **Comparing *East West 101***

It is on this point in particular that *EW101* differs. While the depiction of Malik is by no means unproblematic, it offers us a hybrid space within which we can understand, or at least tease out, the conflicts and opportunities of the hybrid experience.

*EW101* as a series tends to debunk the binary myth regarding the incompatibility of Islam and the West. The 'myth' (Lacey 2000, p. 65) as discussed by French anthropologist Levi Strauss is one that reduces the anxiety of the audience through the creation of binaries. This allows them to resolve the 'contradictions in a culture' (Fiske 1987, pp. 131-132 as cited in Lacey 2000, p. 65). Generally, then, characters



are either good or evil. The traditional story for the Arab Muslim therefore is one where typically he is the outsider, the one who cannot be trusted, the enemy. Even in the rare moment that he appears to be working for the force of the good, his true character is revealed and he of course betrays us. In *EW101*, however, Malik is a police officer, one who is loyal, honest and determined but who also feels the need to prove himself to his colleagues. Malik's position among his peers is underpinned by the context in which the series has been made (discussed in Chapter Three).

In this way, *EW101* positions East and West in opposition to one another but also provides a space whereby hybrid cultures are explored. This is not to suggest that the representation offered in *EW101* is perfect; in ways it is limited. It does offer, however, through the character of Malik, a space where Australianness, Arabness and Muslimness can be explored. As May (2003, p. 205) writes of the Indigenous community, '*Breakers*, along with *Wildside* and then *Water Rats*, gave a space to Indigenous actors to contest the former portrayals of Indigenous Australians as either "spiritual Blackfellas" ... or "endangered exotica".' I too would argue that *EW101* plays a similar role in providing a space for Arab/Muslim characters to be more than the 'submissive other' or 'criminal other'. It allows audiences to consider the Arab/Muslim character on screen in a role they had perhaps never associated with his religious and cultural background and, hopefully, extend this association to Arab and Muslim acquaintances, friends, colleagues and even strangers.

The first episode ends with the tragic death of the young Ali. He is mistakenly thought to be about to shoot Malik when he is in fact surrendering and coming out from behind the train. The emotional ending to this scene, with Malik shedding tears and Ali lying there frightened with blood seeping out of his mouth, is a stark reminder of the danger of labelling and stereotypes, a message less obvious in films such as *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*. In contrast to the unfortunate death of Ali in *EW101*, the death scene in *The Combination* where Charlie is killed is very different. In this scene the drug dealer to whom he once owed money shoots him

from behind while he is trying to run away. Multiple shots are fired and Charlie dies alone. The final moment in the scene of *EW101* seems to be one of understanding and consideration, one where the truth has surfaced and, although Ali had to die, there was some justice in his death – his name was cleared. *The Combination*, however, invokes less understanding and certainly no sense of justice. Charlie is shot like an animal being hunted and, while we feel for the teenager who appears to want to make amends for having strayed, as an audience we feel some distance from both Charlie and his situation. The purpose of his death, one would assume, is that it serves as a brutal warning to other young men pursuing a similar path. However, the lack of empathy toward Charlie throughout the film, and in particular in the final scene, serves to normalise such violence. This seems to conflict with the realisation that Basha himself experiences as a young man in his twenties.

On this level the film may have failed to act as a deterrent, instead reinforcing stereotypes of senseless gun violence in the Arabic-speaking community, as discussed by Sydney's father earlier in the film. Similarly, the death of Tarek in *Cedar Boys* is not necessarily a death of empathy. The death of Tarek is not lost on the audience, particularly when his is the only life guaranteed to be spared due to a deal made by his brother with the leader of the drug syndicate. While we become aware of the significance of violence in the lives of drug criminals, we are not necessarily moved by his loss. While in both instances we may perceive the deaths of the two young men as being a waste, in the following chapter we understand that this is not the message highlighted to audiences, nor does it resonate most powerfully with viewers.

### **Conclusion**

Unlike *EW101*, *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* create binaries without offering a space within which to explore the fluidity and multifaceted nature of identity. This restricted understanding and privileging of ethnic/class identity as being the only

significant facet of one's identity comes from the experiences of the writers themselves.

Caradee and Basha both identify their working-class/poor and ethnic backgrounds as being markers of difference when they were young. Such differences allowed them to feel marginalised in similar ways to their characters; thus the binaries explored in their art are influenced by the experience of their misinterpellated youth. Their choice of crime drama as the genre to present their stories is especially fitting, given that it allows for a relatively clear distinction between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', 'insider' and 'outsider', 'rich' and 'poor', 'East' and 'West', 'blonde' and 'wog'. This allows for both writers to maintain the significance of the binary over the course of the film, continuing to perpetuate a simplistic division based on ethnic affiliations.

The experiences of Basha and Caradee are certainly important additions to the voices in Australian film, as they come from a group that has never before been explored in a fictional realm in this way to such a large audience. However, the almost obsessive distinction between 'blonde' people and 'wogs' or 'Lebs' further reinforces the very social structure that Basha was attempting to undermine. While Basha explores the difficulties experienced by young Lebanese men residing in Western Sydney by addressing the issues that exist for Australians, whose society he claims was 'built on racism', he fails to generate a discussion about the ethnic tensions and their origins or their future. He instead creates a world where these binaries are inevitable and the future is set to repeat itself due to a lack of engagement on both parts.

Caradee approaches *Cedar Boys* in a similar fashion, asking his viewers to consider the struggle of young Lebanese men but limiting the Lebanese male experience to one of poverty and an overwhelming desire to 'get rich'. In so doing Caradee also reinforces existing stereotypes of young Arab men as criminals.

Both films are problematic in this way because, while they attempt to show the marginalisation of Lebanese men, they simply reinforce an exaggerated dichotomy and emphasise the incompatibility of Lebanese culture with Australian culture. Despite the intention of producers to create empathy through an understanding of the choices that some young Arab men may make, or by using this film as a warning to young Arab men to avoid making life choices that mirror the characters in these films, the audience is left with other messages that seem more salient. The following chapter will therefore explore the reactions of online viewers, indicating the general disconnect between the writers' intentions and the audiences' reception.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **'THIS WAS FOR OUR PEOPLE': MAKING PRESENT WHAT HAS BEEN RENDERED ABSENT**

#### **Introduction**

As Williamson (1996, p. 179) mentioned in her address at the Black Film/British Cinema conference, 'I don't see how you can talk about oppositional or political film without talking about audiences.' A similar rationale can be applied to the case studies under discussion. The question of audience has been, until this point, mostly unexplored in this research. Naturally, cultural producers' assumptions of who their audiences are will shape how their texts are produced and delivered. The preceding chapters explored the Orientalist discourses present in each of the three case studies, while also acknowledging the progressive intentions of producers and creative directors. This chapter will explore how audiences interpreted these texts and in so doing will discuss evidence of a disjuncture between desired intention and audience reception.

The scope of this study did not allow for focus group discussions of each of the case studies, although this would have been ideal for an understanding of audience reactions. There has, however, been ample discussion on the SBS and ABC websites, as well as the YouTube trailers for each of the films, by moviegoers and devotees of *EW101*. It is from this sample and a study of audience reactions to *EW101* completed by SBS that the following analysis is derived.

#### **Who Are Australian Screen Productions Made For?**

Throughout the course of this research it became apparent that the creators of television and film material thought of the normative Australian viewer as white

and middle-class. While Australian culture is marketed as laid back and egalitarian, Steve Knapman (2010) and David Field argue that the Australian film industry is dominated by the middle class making films for middle-class audiences. In an interview with the Australian Film Institute (AFI) (Siemienowicz 2009) Field claimed, 'there's a real middle class snobbery in our business towards people who don't sound university educated'. He continued, '... one of the problems of the Australian film industry is that we're making films for our peers ... But these people here in cinemas [who are often not middle-class] are the ones who have to lay down \$15 every time they want to see a film.' Field suggested that Australian films ought to be more working-class and minority friendly. He discusses this as an obstacle to the making of *The Combination*, where he found people in the industry were reluctant to offer financial support. Basha (2013) confirmed the difficulties, noticing a trend of financiers unable to relate to the themes in the film, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Field (Siemienowicz 2009) pointed to the gap between the middle-class producers, writers, directors and funding bodies in the film industry, and the often working-class audiences that goes to the see the film. While films like *Cedar Boys* and *The Combination* undoubtedly have a working-class influence, the funding bodies feel that there is a gap between the stories and what their audience wants. The audience that they have in mind is typically Anglo-Australian. Caradee (2011) defended this perception, stating that it is based on mere numbers. 'You can't blame them for that because the majority of our audience ... are mostly Anglo Saxon.'

In the same interview with the AFI referred to above both Field and the interviewer (Rochelle Siemienowicz) resorted to Othering the residents of Western Sydney. Field stated, 'there are real structural problems that I think this film [*The Combination*] takes on. We don't have a film school out in the west. We don't really give these sorts of people access to the film world.' Field distanced himself from the urban working class but recognises that he has 'a kind of "working class feel" about [him]' (Siemienowicz 2009). He based this claim on the

nature of his previous work. Field is best known for his roles in *Chopper*<sup>32</sup> (2000) and *Two Hands*<sup>33</sup> (1999). *Chopper* (2000) is based on the story of Mark (Chopper) Read, a criminal and self-confessed murderer. In this film Field plays the role of Keithy George, the unofficial prison leader in the division to which Chopper is sent. Here we see Field in the position of a working-class criminal. Again in *Two Hands* (1999) he plays the role of 'Acko', a gang associate. Thus, when Field mentioned that his work has attributed a working-class 'feel' to him it seems that he acknowledged his work on gang films like *The Combination*. However, the same reason that gives him credibility to work on a film like *The Combination* is also the reason that he found it difficult to secure funding for the production. While Field does not overtly state his middle-class affiliations, he does distance himself from the working-class experience out west throughout the interview, as can be seen above. Basha (2013) described him as 'white, but not white'. Field became involved in telling the story of *The Combination* because he felt that the experiences of those who have risen to prominence in the film and television industry were not telling the stories that were reflected in the films that Basha and Caradee write. Basha (2013) explained, 'He's [Field] all for culture and stuff. He loves that. He wants to tell stories about different races.' Field himself explained that he took offence when 'nobody wanted to listen because George [Basha] had a really unique story' (Siemienowicz 2009). Field hoped to tell this story because 'we have no voice from out in the west' (Siemienowicz 2009) and he believed it was important to begin making films in Western Sydney.

Siemienowicz continued to question Field about the audience for *The Combination*, 'So, you're targeting your film at *those* people?' [Italics mine]. 'Those people' are understood to be mostly males of Middle Eastern descent residing in Western Sydney. The discussion about *The Combination* involves little dialogue with those who are implicated in the lifestyles discussed onscreen, instead becoming a

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<sup>32</sup> *Chopper* (2000) is based on one of the books written by Mark Read himself. The autobiography was written while Read was in prison and outlined the finer details of his life as a criminal and a murderer. *Chopper* was played by Australian actor Eric Bana. Passive voice. The film was directed by Andrew Dominik and produced by Michele Bennett (Holden 2001).

<sup>33</sup> *Two Hands* (1999) was written and directed by Gregor Jordan and starred Heath Ledger and Bryan Brown.

conversation between the privileged, middle-class critics who comfortably distance themselves from a different world. Although Field is involved in the making of *The Combination*, his discussion of his reasons for doing so distance him from 'these sorts of people' (Siemienowicz 2009). Films like *The Combination* become cult-like in that they develop a following from within the intended target audience but conversely serve as an 'in' to another world – a world that a privileged majority have not the misfortune of experiencing. This, as will be explored below in the discussion of audience reactions to the films, only solidifies the marginalised status of those relegated to the position of Other.

### ***Audience Statistics***

Australian audience statistics indicate that 66.3% of Sydneysiders patronised cinemas in 2012. These moviegoers visited a cinema on an average of 7.1 times in 2012 (Screen Australia 2013). The largest audience was among 14 to 24 year olds across Australia, 85.8% of whom frequented a cinema in 2012, at an average of 8.5 times that year. This was followed by those in the 25 to 34 category, 73.5% of whom frequented cinemas, on an average of 6.6 times that year (Screen Australia, 2013). It is difficult, however, to determine the socio-economic profile of film patrons. Data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2010 outlines that Australian cinemas were the most frequented cultural venue across all socio-economic status groups and that this did not vary drastically when accounting for their level of education (ABS, 2010), suggesting that the white middle-class model of film patron, as noted by Caradee, Basha and Field may be outdated.

### **Audience Profile of *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys***

Basha (2013) states that he purposely made *The Combination* with 'our people' (meaning the Arab-Australian population) in mind. Consciously attempting to redress the lack of Arab Australians on screen, Basha intentionally catered his work to them, and targets young Arab-Australian men with his message of caution in relation to crime and violence.



It is this outsider perspective that gives Caradee and Basha the ability to create a following amongst Arab Australians through the production of their films. Caradee mentioned of *Cedar Boys*, 'I think it was always going to have a bit of a cult following. It's just a pity that no-one saw enough in the cinema to hit the right notes for us, because they gauge the success of your film by the box office' (Caradee 2011). Of course the issue faced by these filmmakers is gaining access to an industry that appears unready to hear their stories. This in itself creates a whole host of obstacles for men like Basha and Caradee who find their films carry a great burden of representation because of their unique positioning, as discussed in Chapter One.

Like Basha, Caradee (2011) envisaged his audience to be primarily young people '16 to 24 ... out west'. He continued, 'I thought there might be a crossover audience from the eastern suburbs crowd who want to know this world.' While Caradee acknowledged that there was less of the crossover than he expected, he attributed this to the marketing of the film in cinemas, which 'wasn't targeted well' (Caradee 2011), and was focused on selling the film to audiences in Western Sydney. As he explained, the audience statistics indicated a crowd that was mostly from this region. Despite his claims to poor targeting of the film market, *Cedar Boys* was accepted into numerous film festivals, such as The Vancouver International Film Festival and the Dubai International Film Festival, and sold out at both the Chicago International Film Festival and the Sydney International Film Festival. Additionally, the film was screened in Hoyts cinemas across Australia and distributed nationally on DVD through Mushroom Pictures (Serhat Caradee, n.d.). Caradee (2011) was disappointed that the number of DVD sales exceeded the audience number who patronised the film at the cinema. Caradee explained, 'It was always going to have a broader market and broader audience on DVD.'

*The Combination* was under a similarly controlled or targeted marketing strategy, as mentioned earlier. One that saw its release concentrated in cinemas in Sydney's western suburbs, Sydney's the CBD George Street cinema and independent Palace

Cinemas (despite also being screened elsewhere) and suburbs in Melbourne with a large Lebanese population, including Northland, Southland and Knox (Siemienowicz 2009), because that appears to be where their audience was. While this may be true to an extent, the restricted screening meant that people residing outside of these areas who may have been inclined to view the film were mostly unaware of it thus restricting the audience to Western Sydney moviegoers. Marketers seemed to assume that an eastern suburbs crowd would be unlikely to view a film narrated by a working-class, Lebanese-Australian from Western Sydney because they would be unable to relate to it. Despite making the film for 'our people' and targeting their national release, Basha, Caradee and even Field had hoped to take a part of Western Sydney to a greater audience in order to give a 'voice from out in the west' (Siemienowicz 2009).

Targeting the film at audiences from Western Sydney and identifying the audience as disenfranchised working-class youth might have been a successful strategy financially. However, it is likely this strategy restricted the number of people who viewed the film either because they believed, in line with the marketing strategy, that the film was not made for them or because they were not aware that it was screening. This conclusion can be drawn based on Basha and Caradee's concerns that audiences 'didn't see enough of it in the cinema'. Field's explanation that 'we're targeting our core audiences ... in Melbourne it's Southland, Sunshine, Knox and the Lebanese population, a lot of flyers in Turkish and a grass roots campaign in those areas' points to similar conclusions. Had the film been targeted as an Australian film for *all* Australians it may have had wider reach as it could have been seen as an Australian story rather than an Australian-Arab story.

As a result of this framing there appears to be a binary distinction between existing audiences. There is the white audience and then there is 'us' or 'our people' who form the other part of the binary. Much like Mercer (1990, p. 66) makes the distinction between black/white audiences, here I make the distinction between white and Other audiences as being significant because of not only an ethnic implication, but also a class implication. The assumption that white audiences are

middle-class while 'our people' are working-class ignores the diversity across Arab and Muslim communities. It means that to truly speak for or from an Arab-Australian perspective one must be of a working-class background. Field (Siemienowicz 2009) acknowledges this as part of what drew him to the making of *The Combination* – his understanding of the working-class perspective – because of what he sees as his own working-class background. Field (Siemienowicz 2009) in his discussion of audience differentiates between middle-class filmmakers and working-class consumers, stressing the importance of making film for 'those people'.

By virtue of being from minority cultural backgrounds and dealing with content that relates to their community groups, cultural producers like Caradee and Basha are often seen as speaking on behalf of a group, which places an extra significance on their productions, an idea that is at times reflected in audience reactions to the film. The following section will illustrate the common reactions of audiences to both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* as found on two online forums.

### **Audience Reactions to *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys***

#### ***Active Audience***

Ang (1996b, p. 9) observes that discussions of the 'active audience' were a shift from the modernist to a postmodernist understanding of audiences. The modernist view being that audiences were 'victims' of passive media consumption (Ang 1996b, p. 9). Instead, she observes that this shift to thinking of audiences as 'active' consumers is the acceptance of popular media, in particular television, as a site of cultural democracy where viewers make their own decisions about what to watch and how to interpret these programs (Ang 1996b, p. 9).

Primarily Ang acknowledges the limitations of discussing *the* audience, as though it were a singular 'object of study' (Ang 1996b, p. 4). She argues instead that audiences can only be perceived as a 'provisional shorthand for the infinite,

contradictory, dispersed and dynamic practices and experiences of television audiencehood' (1991, p. 14). She therefore posits that the study of audiences is not interesting for its own sake; rather, it becomes a topic of interest 'when it points towards a broader critical understanding of the peculiarities of contemporary culture' (Ang 1996b, p. 4). Ang goes to great lengths to emphasise that the 'power' of the audience, although active, is still marginal, in that it may have a degree of control over how to interpret media messages and the implication this has on their daily lives; however, this 'power' is not translated structurally or institutionally (Ang 1996b, p. 140).

The idea of the active audience recognises that there is not a unidirectional path between filmmakers' intended meaning and how the film is received. Indeed, the constant negotiation between what is presented and how audiences interpret this often leads the recipient to internalise messages that were never intended by the content creator (McClellan 2012, p. 3). Thus, while a text may set out to be politically savvy or resistant, it is not necessarily read in this way by the audience (McClellan 2012, p. 3). As will be discussed below, the makers of *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* had intended for audiences to walk away with an understanding of the need for intercultural conflict to cease. However, this message was not internalised by many viewers, as illustrated in the online comments that pontificated hatred and fuelled existing tensions. It is likely that as 'active' audience members, audiences were able to read the film in their chosen way, without taking account of the intention of writers and producers.

While audiences today are active consumers and producers of media content, particularly online, when it comes to their part in the realm of television or film, their social context plays a significant role in shaping how they interpret mediated images (Livingstone 2004). This is a process that Lewis (1991, p. 14) describes as being 'mediated'. One cannot be assured that the dominant reading will be the one that audiences adopt (Lewis 1991, pp. 58-59). Their interpretation will be limited by 'the message and by their own ideological world' (Lewis 1991, p.

58). In fact, Strinati (2000) argues that three modes of interpretation are possible, namely:

1. The intended or dominant message (Strinati 2000, p. 190): in this instance, this mode refers to those who understand the text as being one of anti-violence and intercultural harmony.
2. The 'oppositional or radical' mode (Strinati 2000, p. 190): this works on the outward refusal to accept the dominant message. In this case, it refers to those who use the content of the text to further justify their dislike of the Other culture.
3. The final possibility is that of a mediated positioning where the audience draws on both the dominant and the oppositional reading to reach a compromised understanding of the message. 'Here dominant ideas are accommodated rather than emphatically endorsed. This means that oppositional ideas are the subordinate partners in this negotiated compromise' (Strinati 2000, p. 190). In this instance audiences see the film for what it was intended to be but also recognise that an oppositional reading might exist.

The audience for productions depicting marginalised communities is often itself marginalised, mobilising a subculture through audience. As Thornton (1997, p. 4) explains, 'the social groups investigated in the name of 'subcultures' are subordinate, subaltern or subterranean'. Typically members of a subculture are viewed as somehow socially deviant and 'perceived as lower down the social ladder due to social differences' (Thornton 1997, p. 4). In the case of the films in particular the difference is based on ethnicity and class as explained in Chapter Six.

The online responses to the two films indicate that multiple readings of the same text coexist. Formal reviews of the films seem to demonstrate a reading of the third mode, as explained above, which marries together both the intended meaning and acknowledges a potentially resistant interpretation of the text (Maddox 2009; Buckmaster 2009). Online commenters on the other hand seem to have failed to

recognise the intended meaning of the films. Arab and Muslim-Australian audiences, presumably people familiar with the lifestyles depicted on screen, recognise that they are victimised by mainstream communities but, like the writers and producers, fail to see the extent of their own simplistic understanding of culture and identity. Instead these commenters use the film to reinforce their own sense of victimhood, examples of which will be discussed below.

### ***Analysis of Audience Reactions***

The following analysis relies on comments posted to two online forums – namely, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) website *At the Movies with Margaret and David* (The Combination 2009; Cedar Boys 2009) and the YouTube trailers for each film (The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008; Cedar Boys Trailer – IN CINEMAS NOW!! 2009).

David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz are renowned Australian film critics with a weekly television segment on ABC1. Each week they review the latest local, international and indie films. The show first went to air in 2004 as a continuation of their long running *The Movie Show*, which aired from 1986 to 2004 on SBS. Thus, the perspectives offered by Margaret and David hold merit with audiences.

Judging by the hundreds of comments on these two forums, we can conclude that both films were generally well received. Basha (2013) stated of *The Combination*, ‘A lot of people love it ... not just Arabs. I’ve gone to a lot of different nationalities that have watched it and love it.’ He explains that his audience isn’t only Arab and, indeed, we can see from the number of comments on the website that many people identify themselves as being other than Arab and admitted to enjoying the film.

Many of the recurring themes in the comments suggested that audiences perceived the addition of these two films to the Australian film landscape as important and ‘brave’. The overwhelming praise for the films came from what audiences perceived as an accurate depiction of young men in these circumstances. Criticisms of the films can be classed into two main categories: firstly, that the script writing

and the acting were substandard for a feature film; and secondly, that the storyline and the characters were clichéd.

Audiences acknowledged that *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* were much-needed additions to the Australian drama landscape. This theme was especially prominent in comments relating to *The Combination*, as it was the first of the two to be released. As Aviiii explains, 'It's about time they made a movie like this.' Sammmiii agrees, explaining that it was the representation of 'Lebs' that made it different, 'this time the lebs arnt [sic] being used as terrorists.' (Aviiii, 28 February 2009; Sammmiii, 6 March 2009, *The Combination* 2009)

One eager viewer of *The Combination*, Sam, is delighted that his suburb in Western Sydney was one of the locations for the shoot. He commented on 1 March 2009:

Never thought I'd be able to see a film shot on location partly in my suburb of Guildford; a place in constant cultural flux since the 1970s, yet still retains a laid-back village atmosphere that still attracts new residents, even with its 'underbelly'. (Sam, 1 March 2009, *The Combination* 2009)

The inclusion of Western Sydney landscapes in the film allows for a broader understanding of urban Australia, in particular Sydney. It depicts the lives of a demographic of people usually left out of Australian films and allows them to identify with the story of Australians told on screen. On a number of occasions commenters expressed that they felt 'proud' to be Lebanese, as in the case of Jackie who stated, 'BEST MOVIE EVER [.] I LOVED IT [.] AND I CANT WAIT TILL IT COMES OUT ON VIDEO...I AM SO PROUD TO BE LEBANESE' (Jackie, 27 April 2009, *The Combination* 2009).

Audiences generally seem to recognise the intention of the filmmaker in his desire to provide a well-rounded depiction of young Arab men. Many of the commenters describe the film as 'relevant'. Jon gives it a five star rating and explains that the

cultural relevance of *The Combination* allows it to add to the 'voice of Australian film':

As the credits rolled I walked out of this film with a smurk [sic] on my face - it was really, really good. - So why is it good? This film has substance and backbone; it's really well written, has great solid acting, is culturally relevant, and uses intelligent photography ...This film gives the voice of Australian Film a much needed wider range. Go and see it!! (Jon, 27 February 2009, *The Combination* 2009)

Viewers commended the ability of the films to depict the 'realities' of cultural tensions in Australia and in particular in Sydney, as well as the realities of the lives of these young men.

This is the only film I've seen that captures what it's like to be born and grow up in Australia but have people tell you that you're not Australian because one (or both) of your parents didn't have white skin. (Jeremy, 6 March 2009, *The Combination* 2009)

Overwhelmingly commenters seem to consider the film an important one in terms of expanding the definition of Australian films. Commenting on the courage it takes to create something new in Australian cinema, Simon wrote on 4 March 2009:

An Australian film that reflects current life. And has an almost classic sense of tragedy. Beautifully acted, directed, shot. And superb music ... Proud to see an Aussie film about an important, relevant subject, that we don't have to make any excuses for! (*The Combination* 2009)

While Jasmine, on 3 March 2009, wrote:

For me, the most impressive aspect was the grasp of culture. The almost perfect portrayal [sic] of arabic concepts of honor, family and so on ... Even



teenage themes of first attempts at awkward courtship!

I live in the north western hills district but was raised were [sic] the film was shot. I'm not lebanese myself . Living far away from those areas now, it really is another world.

Thanks David Field. (The Combination 2009)

As we will see below, like *EW101* audiences, who were far removed from either Western Sydney or the life depicted on screen, valued the insight offered into 'another world', Jasmine's comment helps to situate her in an almost dream-like state of nostalgia by reflecting on being 'raised w[h]ere the film was shot'.

*Cedar Boys* was also warmly received. However, both the YouTube trailer and the At the Movies page for it house fewer comments relating to this film than for *The Combination*. This is perhaps because it was the second of two similar films released in only a matter of months. Also, Caradee mentioned a lack of PR/marketing as an issue. Similarly to *The Combination*, it was considered a valuable voice to the cinematic landscape through its realistic depiction of young Arab men. Leigh, giving it three stars, commented on 14 December 2009:

Cedar Boys is another good, solid and worthy contributor to a very strong year for Australian Cinema. I enjoyed the story, the matter-of-fact precise way the story was told which does give it that authentic feel and thought the final moments of the film were handled brilliantly. However, i must mention some of the acting at times was wooden and it does take a while for the film to find it's [sic] rhythm. (Cedar Boys 2009)

The theme of reality was also echoed in praise of *Cedar Boys*. Jinny, gives the film a four star rating and commented:

A truly remarkable film. I laughed and cried. I left feeling like I wanted to drive out west and open my mind a bit more to the other side of the city I don't see or know about. Les Chantery is a gift as Tarek. One of the most

honest and complex portrayals of a boy in conflict about his identity and place in the world, I have ever seen. The writing is real and authentic. The soundtrack was fantastic. (1 August 2009, Cedar Boys 2009)

Jinny praises the film for its authenticity in depicting identity conflict. Due to the language used by those who left online comments (discussed below), both films seemed to garner a clear following from a young audience (both male and female) who, like Sam above, were desperate to see their communities portrayed on screen. However, others placed less focus on the content of the films and more on their execution. Alex commented:

The script is awful, the acting was pathetic [sic] (especially GEORGE BASHA who looked like a cardboard cutout and FIRASS DIRANI was little better). The camera work was poor and so was the lighting work. I walked out before the movie finished, which tells you just how poor the film is. Don't waste 90mins of your life on this. (1 March 2009, The Combination 2009)

Others agreed the execution was poor, but argued that the story being told was more important than how it was executed. Hannah on 7 March 2009 commented:

Some of the acting is a little stilted, some of the plot a little implausible, and initially the love story between John and Sydney seems unconvincing, but it's a brave film that covers a lot of issues and largely succeeds.

If more Aussie filmmakers would produce stuff this fresh, relevant and of such quality we would have our own film industry, not just Hollywood exports. (The Combination 2009)

Other criticisms deem the film 'juvenile', pointing to the clichéd nature of *The Combination*. This comment from Beau, who gave the film a one star rating on 19 April 2009, explained why:

I don't understand how this film got such a good rating by D&M. It was horrible!! So cliché [sic], so juvenile, so unoriginal, terrible acting, a hardly believable plot. (The Combination 2009)

Beau's criticism focused on the poor execution of the film, which leads to an unrealistic depiction of events. Fin echoed Beau's sentiments:

Juvenile and Cliched unfortunately... this film is as Dated as *Acropolis Now* is to comedy. If you were to watch Alex Dimitriadis [sic] in 'Head On', it would seem the more recent of the two movies. Nothing new or clever here, which is a shame.... but it will appeal to the sheltered audience it is intended for. (1 April 2004, The Combination 2009)

Beau's reference to 'the sheltered audience' is difficult to decipher. On the one hand it is likely to refer to Australian Arabs; however, it might also be a reference to middle-class 'indie' film fans. Regardless, Beau's comment implies that the intended audience does not know better than to accept these 'juvenile and clichéd' representations of Australian race relations. These comments are a clear contrast to those who believed it was important to showcase these voices across the cinematic landscape. Those who stated that the films were unoriginal are correct to the extent that Arab-Australian men are routinely associated with crime and violence in the news media. The reference to *Acropolis Now* may suggest that Beau expects the current representation of Australia's Arabic-speaking community to have progressed beyond something that resembles Australia's initial depiction of its Greek community. Unfortunately however, the lack of representation of Arab-Australian communities across our screens means that the criticisms are valid; current portrayals are underdeveloped and didactic rather than mature and nuanced.

Hannibal commented:

If the film *The Combination* wanted to portray the Lebanese in any positive light, it - generally - failed.

In the end, after seeing the guns, the murder, the drug crime and the total vacuum of Lebanese culture in Australia surrounding these young 'Lebanese-Australians' (an oxymoron). (7 March 2009, *The Combination* 2009)

For Hannibal, *The Combination* reinforces the stereotype that those of Lebanese descent cannot be considered Australian. For viewers such as Hannibal, the prevalence of drugs and crime in the storyline simply alienates an already sceptical audience and does little to promote the understanding that Basha set out to achieve.

Eschholz (2002, p. 41) argues that for marginalised groups that have a history of being linked with crime the representation of them, even in fictional television, as criminal simply makes the image more salient in the mind of audiences. Although her focus is on black men, the analysis can also be applied to Arab men in Australia. As Chapter Two outlined, events of the past decade easily link Middle Eastern men with violent crimes: the infamous Sydney gang rapes in 2000; the Tampa crisis in 2001; the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington; the Bali, London and Madrid bombings; and the Cronulla Riots of 2005. All reinforced a connection between violent crime and the Middle Eastern male. Thus, using similar stereotypes in an attempt to challenge this assertion is not necessarily the most effective strategy.

Conversely, depicting the mainstream population in a negative light also fails to open up a space for dialogue between marginalised minorities and those opposed to multiculturalism. By painting mainstream Australia as 'racist' alcoholics, as seen through Sydney's parents in the flimsy, non-nuanced way that *The Combination* does (as argued in Chapter Six), there is the potential to alienate parts of the mainstream audience who become highly defensive about this representation. This

can be seen below in the discussions about the YouTube trailer of the film. Rather than painting the issue of racism as a structural and institutional as well as individual issue, Basha framed the problem as a solely individual issue. In doing so, he closed avenues for dialogue between Australians from different cultural backgrounds, particularly white and Arab Australians, because both groups feel the need to defend their culture from the accusations pointed at them on screen. As a result both sides appear more justified in their negative opinions of groups more generally.

### ***Online Divisions: Choose A Side***

This section will briefly discuss the polarised reception of both films as found in the comments on their YouTube trailers. These were chosen for analysis because they constitute a rich source of public discussion about the films. In 2013 YouTube boasted over 11,000,000 unique visitors from Australia alone, making it the second most visited social media site after Facebook (Le Huray 2013). Australians post 48 hours of video content to YouTube every minute (Social Mediology 2013), making YouTube a popular place to view movie trailers.

*The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* trailers were viewed 622,735 (YouTube May 2014) and 81,116 (YouTube May 2014) times respectively. Just over 1,000 combined comments were made on the YouTube trailers of the films, suggesting that audiences were relatively enthusiastic about their release. It must be noted, however, that *The Combination* once again garnered significantly greater participation from audiences than did *Cedar Boys*.

These online spaces are also a significant source because of the prevalence of young viewers participating in the discussions and who constitute a key part of the target audience named by Basha and Caradee. The age of viewers, although not usually stated, can be discerned from the frequent use of 'textspeak' abbreviations (Crystal 2001, p. 77) throughout the comments. Textspeak is the language used primarily by young people in text messaging as well as emails, chat groups and blogs (Crystal 2008, p. 80). Bushnell, Kemp and Martin (2011, p. 28) refer to this as

'textese', defined as 'a largely phonological (sound-based) form of spelling'. The common abbreviations such as '2day' instead of 'today' are what they term 'textisms'. Similar language has been used in the online threads analysed in this section.

YouTube users are given the option of remaining anonymous or identifying themselves both through their online username and their choice of display picture. Most commenters choose not to use an image of themselves, instead choosing an avatar or another image that somehow symbolises an aspect of their online identity. For some this image may allude to their cultural or political background, while for others it is an image that is simply aesthetically pleasant. However, in general, these avatars preserve the anonymity of online users. The anonymity provided by the internet enables a level of freedom for users to express their thoughts, which has been theorised as both potentially liberating and dangerous, especially as it facilitates the circulation of hate speech (Morozov, 2012). The implications for this dissertation are discussed more fully below.

YouTube has guidelines in place regulating the content of user comments. One of these guidelines refers to the regulation of hate speech.

We encourage free speech and defend everyone's right to express unpopular points of view. But we don't permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation/gender identity, or their status as a returned soldier).  
(YouTube Community Guidelines)

Clearly the comments beneath these videos were not moderated, as many of them contain content that both attack and demean other participants based on race and/or ethnic origin/religion. The content of these comments forms the basis of the analysis below.

All 1,048 comments were read and thematically coded. Comments relating to the music used in either trailer, whether it was possible to pirate the films, or those that couldn't be made sense of were discarded, leaving 998 comments for analysis.

Interestingly the majority of comments touched more broadly on the themes explored within the film without specifically referencing its content. Commenters used the frame of the film to discuss young Arab men in Western Sydney and issues of ethnic identity more generally. This may be because the comments were based on viewings of two-minute-long trailers as opposed to the full film, although some commenters indicated that they had viewed the film in its entirety. The comments demonstrate that while *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* do not necessarily encourage audiences to think of their subjects (young Arab Australian men) in a more holistic way as men with dreams and ambitions striving for greater things, they do demonstrate how difficult it is to rectify negative representations of the Other.

#### *Self-definition and national identity*

While some commenters focused on the contribution of the films to a deeper understanding of the lives of ethnic minorities in Australia, for others any mention of minority ethnic identity was offensive, as it was seen as undermining a unitary notion of Australianness. For example:

CRAZYSEXYCOOL198989: WTF is wrong with u [sic] complete fuckheads are fighting over aussies [sic] and lebs [sic], australian [sic] is not a fucking RACE its [sic] a nationality... if your [sic] born in Australia you are australian [sic] regardless of your fucking heritage that is your nationality you dumb fools. Aussie pride for life! we [sic] all have a background ... dickhead! be [sic] proud of where your [sic] from, the place that gave your family and yourself a life! (CRAZYSEXYCOOL198989, 2010, Cedar Boys Trailer – IN CINEMAS NOW!! 2009)

CRAZYSEXYCOOL believes that a declaration of pride in your cultural or ethnic background should be secondary to pride in being born Australian, in 'the place that gave your family and yourself a life'. S/he presents us with an understanding of Australian multiculturalism with assimilationist undertones that resemble Hage's (1998) 'White multiculturalism'. CRAZYSEXYCOOL mentions 'Aussie pride' as though it were accessible to those who do not exhibit obvious markers of whiteness. Conversely, the slogan 'Aussie pride' is often used to exclude people from non-Anglo backgrounds, as seen during the 2005 Cronulla riots (discussed in Chapter Four). Given this usage of the phrase, it is interesting that CRAZYSEXYCOOL attempts to frame this as a phrase of acceptance. His abusive language further undermines any accepting sentiment in his comment.

In the early days of the Internet commentators had hoped it would be a space of relative identity-lessness, a space where conventional factors that influenced how people related to one another, including race, gender and ability, would not be considered. However, it was soon realised that racialised identities could not simply be erased through online avatars because the problematic and power laden social dynamics of the offline world were continually reproduced online (Morozov, 2012). Thus, scholars have concluded, and these comments make this clear, that the Internet has not only *not* erased expressions of racism or prejudice, but in fact can amplify their social impact.

In a study undertaken by Harrison et al. (2010), which looked at audience responses to articles about black male athletes on the ESPN homepage during the Fall sports season, it was concluded that 'racism through traditional stereotypes may never fade because the public continues to spread them throughout the digital world through debate and open disagreements' (Harrison et al. 2010, p. 166). In a similar vein the stereotypes associated with Lebanese living in Australia, such as 'sand slaves', a derogatory reference to Arab culture that is thought to have originated in the desert, are employed in discussions of the movie, demonstrating that the bridge of understanding has not been successfully built. Kristov Millsokavic (2012, The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008) comments on *The*



*Combination*, 'Rubbish who wants to watch Mullet monkeys. This is some pathetic attempt to make the sand slaves look like gangsters.' Why 'gangsters' are more acceptable to Millsokavic than 'sand slaves', when both seem to have negative connotations, is unclear, although one might speculate that this has to do with the glorification of the Hollywood gang movie.

The prevalence of such comments online indicates that the film fails to create an understanding between groups of people determined to misunderstand one another. The dichotomies in both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* between 'us' and 'them', 'Lebs' and 'Aussies', are only further reinforced amongst audiences.

HakkenZ10 (2012, *The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008*) says of *The Combination* trailer, 'makes me want to go out and bash a wog' and YouFeud (2012, *The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008*) adds 'Lebanese r [sic] a cancer on Australuan [sic] society ...' In these cases, the films may have exacerbated viewers' hostility towards Arab Australians. The vitriol, however, is not one-sided. CrackingGate posts in response to another commenter Millieeek:

@millieeek so we flew here and you grew he ay????? That's [sic] abit [sic] wrong don't you think??????? its [sic] more like we came in planes and you came in chains..... fucken pedos,rapist [sic] and thieves yous [sic] were.... even England rejected yous [sic] then thought might aswell [sic] steal the Abos [sic] land and about 200 years later we'lll [sic] get the worst PM in Aus history to say sorry to them..... get over it you admitted you stole there [sic] land lock all of aussies [sic] fags up and send them back to England.  
(Cracking Gate, 2011, *The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008*)

CrackingGate engages Millieeek in a volley of racist rebuttal, resorting to stereotypes of Anglo culture in order to counter her originally racist comment, which not only referred to 'Lebs' as 'dogs' but also suggested that they did not legitimately belong because they 'flew here'. Unfortunately, in doing so,

CrackingGate makes a sequence of derogatory comments himself, doing little to foster productive conversation on the topic of rightful belonging.

Izbiz24 points to the irony of the debate in relation to the intended theme of the film:

Do you know what I find hilarious? is [sic] that the whole idea of this movie was to show what happens when little 16 year olds get involved in gangs, bashing, drugs etc... meanwhile all of you are getting angry over racist comments and threatening to bash one another when the majority of you can't even spell... Time to grow up people. (Izbiz24, 2011, *The Combination Trailer (Official) 2008*)

Izbiz24's comment illustrates what is at the very crux of this argument – that rather than break down barriers by inviting people into the world of these young men, films like *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* have instead erected those barriers more strongly. Rather than seeing into the world of the Other and reflecting on their preconceived understanding of the opposing cultural group, viewers simply feel threatened by the images presented to them and become deeply defensive about their positions, which are seen as categorically oppositional to those of the Other side. Most notable is the way commenters categorise those outside their cultural group. 'White' men must be convicts and 'Leb' boys must be thugs. Such a constricted understanding does not allow for greater understanding of the other.

The question, therefore, is what benefit do these texts have in a climate dominated by antagonistic understandings of cultural difference, on the part of both 'whites' and 'Lebs'. After all, audiences cannot help bring with them 'symbolic resources associated with their socio-economic position, gender, [and] ethnicity' (Livingstone 2004, p. 5). It is unrealistic to ask otherwise uninformed audiences to forget all they've heard about Arab Australians through news and other sources

and view Arab men solely through a new lens, in particular when these texts were intentionally made within this climate and in order to counteract these stereotypes.

### **Audience Profile of *East West 101***

In contrast to the two films, *EW101*'s audience was an educated, middle-class, cosmopolitan one. Knapman and Wyld (2010) recognise that they had a 'converted audience' that was sympathetic to the message of their show. According to Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy (2008, pp. 242-243), in contrast to the typical consumer of commercial television, SBS's audience are 'questioning and independent thinkers who seek to experience more than the immediate sphere of their existence may allow'. 'They seek ... the inspiration of new sensations and insights, the enrichment of new knowledge and experiences, and the freedom of individuality and difference.' SBS audiences are generally culturally diverse 'young couples, parents and students who are on the lookout for less conventional entertainment' (Ang, Hawkins & Dabboussy 2008, p. 244). Although difficult to pinpoint an exact demographic, the audience for *EW101* can be assumed to fall in line with the traditional SBS audience. As De Nave (2011) explained that, despite attempting to attract younger viewers with shows such as *Mythbusters* and *Top Gear*, 'SBS is not a young channel. Our audience is older.' She too goes on to describe the typical SBS viewer as someone seeking an alternative to what commercial stations can offer, 'our audience is a curious audience ... more open to a different look at something ... not to say that a commercial audience wouldn't be, but they're never given the opportunity' (De Nave 2011).

*EW101* viewers were able to leave comments online either on the show's page beneath YouTube clips, or on other online forums dedicated to discussions of the series. For the purpose of this research the hundreds of comments left on the SBS page (*East West 101*, SBS)<sup>34</sup> have been coded and analysed, as they were the

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<sup>34</sup> There were multiple comment threads for *EW101* as each episode had a thread devoted to online commenting. For the purpose of this research however, they were all collated and coded together. As comments are discussed the relevant episode and season will be noted.

largest sample, and offered a broader cross-section of views available online. These comments will be discussed below alongside data collected by SBS researchers through a series of focus groups, in order to illustrate some of the responses to the program.

### **Audience Responses to *East West 101***

Georgie McClean (2011, p. 179) and her colleagues conducted six focus groups of eight to ten people each in New South Wales and Victoria, the two states with Australia's highest concentration of Arabic-speaking populations, as discussed in Chapter Two. The focus groups were divided into either purely Arabic-speaking participants or 'culturally mixed' groups. Arabic-speaking groups comprised mainly first generation migrants from Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Sudan (McClean 2011, p. 178). Each group's members were asked to view *EW101* before attending. They were then asked a series of questions that prompted a discussion about 'representations of diversity' (McClean 2011, p. 179). McClean (2011, p. 180) explains that her 'analysis explores *possible* rather than *actual* engagement with television drama' (italics original). This is because the content of the focus groups cannot reflect genuine 'TV talk' on account of the fact that participants are asked to reflect on the series in a way that is not 'natural' (McClean 2011, p. 180). However, certain comments that were found on online threads by audiences, who were presumably not forced to reflect on the show, raise similar issues.

The culturally diverse participants thought about the show in quite favourable terms. Respondents believed it helped provide insight into a community that had long been marginalised and that people had little understanding of (McClean 2011, pp. 182-183). It allowed these respondents to reflect on their own experiences of marginalisation, which resulted in a sympathetic understanding of the situation of Arabic-speaking young men. Referencing real events, be they the Cronulla riots or September 11, gave the show a more realistic flavor. This in itself provided insight into the effects these events have on communities, giving audiences the

opportunity to sympathise more broadly with not only the characters but also the communities they represent.

The Arabic-speaking focus group participants, however, were more concerned with the specific representations of their community because of their acute awareness of the social and political climate of distrust toward Arab and Muslim Australians. While they too identified elements of 'realism' throughout the series, some believed that the representations of their community to not be 'positive enough' or diverse enough (McClellan 2011, p. 184). This points to the prevalence of characters that were depicted as obviously different through appearance, either in wearing the *hijab* or traditional Muslim clothing or through the equating of Arabness with Muslimness. Further concerns that the representations were not positive enough revolved around the depiction of the relationship between police officers and young men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. One young woman was concerned about the way this representation might influence young men into believing that the police were in fact marginalising them and that this could result in an increase in tension between the two groups (McClellan 2011, p. 185). Despite the recognition by participants that these depictions accurately reflected interactions between police and Arabic-speaking youth, participants wanted a more positive ending on screen in order to 'imagine a way out of the frustration' of ongoing unfavourable media depictions (McClellan 2011, p. 186).

In contrast to the call for more favourable portrayals with a happy ending, other participants in the Arabic-speaking focus groups applauded the show for its ability to present an image of Arab Australians that challenged the happy ending narrative we are often used to. These people believed that such depictions were excellent points of discussion among audiences and gave people a chance to discuss issues that they may otherwise have avoided (McClellan 2011, p. 186).

The common themes arising from this research revolved around the participants' awareness that given so few representations of Arabs exist on Australian screen the need for there to be positive representations was essential. Thus, a great many

of the participants viewed *EW101* as an exercise in public relations for the Australian-Arab community (McClellan 2011, p. 184).

From this central theme stemmed the concern that, aside from Malik, other Arabs in the series were still stereotyped with regard to their lack of English language skills and their lack of upward social mobility (McClellan 2011, p. 184). While many acknowledged that presenting cultural diversity as natural was a more positive element of the program and that they could use these characters to relate to their own lived experiences (McClellan 2011, p. 183), others alluded to feeling disempowered by negative media portrayals (McClellan 2011, p. 185). Another common element was the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim Arabs in Australia in the wake of September 11, with non-Muslim Arabs feeling that this show did not represent them or their ways of being (McClellan 2011, p. 185).

Audiences touch on some very important and reoccurring themes that have also arisen in this research. As a result of positively received character construction, it is not surprising that the Muslim and Arab community in Australia view *EW101* as a public relations campaign (McClellan 2011). Members of participating focus groups argued, as I have, that there were positives in exploring everyday difference through the show (McClellan 2011, p. 183). These views were also evident in the online comments I analysed.<sup>35</sup>

Discussing the findings of McClellan (2011) about the view that *EW101* had been viewed by many as a public relations campaign for the Muslim community, the Commissioning Editor of SBS, Caterina De Nave (2011), explained her view. 'I don't think of it as a PR campaign. I just think, okay our primary task is to tell

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<sup>35</sup> This data excludes people without ready access to the Internet. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), over two million Australians had a registered Internet connection in 2013. The 2011 census (ABS 2011) indicated that nearly three-quarters (74%) of all Australians had used the Internet over the last 12 months, with the percentage decreasing to 31% for those aged 65 and older. Those residing in major cities (75%) were more likely to have access to the Internet than those residing in regional (64%) or remote (62%) locations (ABS 2011). Thus, it is likely that most contributors to the forums are those below the age of 65 living in major cities across Australia.

multicultural stories to multicultural people and to Anglos. That's our job and that's what we hope to do with every show we make.'

De Nave makes a distinction between 'multicultural people' and 'Anglos', a framework that normalises 'Anglo-ness', or in this case 'whiteness'. By excluding white audiences from the multicultural mix, De Nave further adds to the marginalisation and 'otherness' of these communities and continues to demonstrate why it is that Malik's character, despite being Arab and Muslim, maintains the status quo.

### ***Analysis***

In total 257 online comments on the SBS webpage for *EW101* (East West 101, SBS) were analysed in addition to the findings of the focus group by McLean and her team (2011). Beneath each comment there is an opportunity for other viewers to respond to the sentiments of the previous poster or simply click 'agree' or 'disagree'. This allows us to gain a better understanding of how popular that view may have been with engaged viewers. Overwhelmingly, the comments online praised *EW101*. On 14 October 2009 Lynne from the Sunshine Coast said of Season Two, Episode Seven, 2009:

OMG!!!! How good is this show... good on you SBS for bringing us such a fabulous program. The portrayal of ethnic and racial tensions is extremely well done. The sensitivity that the actors bring to their respective roles is incredible.

**Agree** (15 people agree)

**Disagree** (0 people disagree)

Lynne's comments speak to the findings of McClean (2011), illustrating that audiences did not necessarily see the depiction of tension between certain groups as exacerbating the issues that exist but rather it allowed audiences to sympathise with the victims.

Fifty-five commenters commended the actors on their performance over the three seasons, while 63 praised the writers for a compelling script. Gayle Henry (Season Three, Episode Fifteen, *Heart of Darkness* 2011) from Eltham, Victoria, commented on 27 April 2011:

This is an amazingly powerful drama depicting victims on all sides. The script is first class and I can't wait to buy the series. My son and I have been following all the series so far, but I have to say this season's episodes are the most emotionally powerful. I am literally glued to the seat. Congratulations and well done to script writers and the actors who project incredibly difficult roles so compassionately and realistically.

**Agree** (8 people agree)

**Disagree** (0 people disagree)

This viewer's praise is based on the ability of the writers to convey the difficulties of sensitive topics in a powerful way.<sup>36</sup>

The praised 'realism' is not simply about the show being believable. Viewers also praise the series for being distinctly Australian. Forty-one commenters applauded the show for giving crime drama an authentically Australian touch. With numerous comments admiring the show's distinctly Australian flavor, in opposition to the American serials often screened on Australian television. Michael from Sydney said on 1 September 2009:

Im [sic] really enjoying this show! Even though it is the substantially the same old cops & robbers / good guy / bad guy drama theme, what i [sic] see is world class acting & production. I just love the fact that it is a lens of Australian reality of contemporary inner city Sydney both real and raw.

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<sup>36</sup> The particular episode to which she refers, deals with the trauma of a young woman, Aisha, who was raped by a soldier in Somalia prior to her migration to Australia. The soldier finds his way to Australia, and begins preaching Islam to her young brother, who idolises him. Aisha tries to keep her brother from the preacher without disclosing the events of the past. Finally, the truth is revealed and her younger brother kills the ex-soldier while his sister attempts to cover for him. The performance of Aisha in particular was viewed as being authentic and 'realistic'.



**Agree** (9 people agree)

**Disagree** (0 people disagree)

(Michael, 1 September 2009, Season One, Episode Three, *Islander Sacrifice* 2007, East West 101, SBS)

Such praise of our distinct national identity is similar to that discussed above concerning both *Cedar Boys* and *The Combination*.

Although most of the commenters responded positively to the program, of the 257 comments analysed, only eight of those were outrightly negative. Six of the 257 comments offered both positive and critical discussions of the series. One of the critiques offered of *EW101* (appearing in four comments) was that the message it was sending out was too obvious. Bruce Millard from Bellingen, New South Wales, stated on 1 June 2011 that, although the message of 'tolerance' is not lost on the audience, the show 'lacks the subtlety of something like *Morse*'.<sup>37</sup> (Season Three, Episode 20, *Revelation 2011*, East West 101, SBS) One person agreed and 17 people disagreed, indicating that this was a minority view among online users.

While many viewers praised *EW101* for its exploration of non-mainstream communities, this was not a universally held view. Michael from Sydney suggested that audiences were being alienated at the expense of too much appeal to various ethnic communities, in this case Muslim and Arab Australians.

### **Balance!**

The last series of *EastWest101* had great appeal to many, as well great entertainment. It incorporated the best of Australian acting & script writing. However I feel that tonight's episode was trying too hard to reach out to too many ethnic communities, at the expense of the average Australian and the quality of the script. One of the great strengths of the previous series was

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<sup>37</sup> Millard refers to the *Inspector Morse*, a British detective television series running from 1987 to 2000, based on the novels by Colin Dexter. Each episode ran for two hours and was based on a single novel.

the way it managed to interweave the multicultural nature of Sydney's suburbs, ethnic groups into a brilliant crime plot.

**Agree** (22 people agree)

**Disagree** (7 people disagree)

(Michael, 13 October 2009, Season Two, Episode Seven, *The Lost Boy* 2009, East West 101, SBS)

It may not be a coincidence that the episode Michael discussed depicts Anglo Australians (men in particular) as intolerant. In this episode, two teenage 'Anglo' boys torture and torment a young Muslim boy by kidnapping him and keeping him in a cage surrounded by aggressive dogs.<sup>38</sup>

The idea that the average viewer was being alienated suggests a level of discomfort with the content being explored. Below are two more examples, this time discussions between viewers about the 'reverse racism', as one viewer, Michelle, explains as the alienating force. A man who identifies himself as Antonio from 'West Sydney' commented on 10 October 2009:

This show is racist towards Aussies, I just seen [sic] the shorts for the episode with the sign saying non mosque area or something like that when the main actor arrests them they all have blond [sic] hair, great way to show in a movie that 100% aussies are racist (sarcasm intended) what a joke ... What if i [sic] made a show and as a catholic officer that arrest some muslim [sic] boys ofr [sic] raping a girl i [sic] bet there would be uproar for that..Wake up Australia.

**Agree** (1 people agree)

**Disagree** (1 people disagree)

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<sup>38</sup> The young boy is only fed pork, a direct attack on his Muslim faith. The kidnapping occurs in retaliation for a car bomb explosion that kills an innocent (Anglo) courier, who we later discover was in fact an NSO agent. The boys falsely believe that the bomb was an act of terrorism undertaken by local Muslim groups that had become upset by a petition to prevent the construction of a new mosque; they kidnap the boy to enact upon him mild acts of torture, leaving the boy fearing for his life.

(Antonio, 10 October 2009, Season One, Episode Six, The Hand of Friendship 2007, East West 101, SBS)

This comment also discusses the aforementioned episode in Series Two. Antonio's main concern with the program appears to be the depiction of the blonde haired boys. While Antonio, like Michael, above, see the boys' negative portrayal as potentially preventing an Anglo audience from engaging with the series they fail to extend this same reasoning to other ethnic groups that have been portrayed throughout the series. Indeed each episode in series one dealt with deviant members from various cultural and ethnic groups. Through the reasoning applied by Antonio and Michael it could be said that each of these groups could have been 'alienated' by these representations. However, neither of them takes issue with these depictions.

On the same day, Antonio follows his first comment up with anecdotal evidence:

### **East West**

Racist TV especialy [sic] towards aussies [sic]..again i [sic] seen [sic] the preview of the latest show...None [sic] mosque area...Arrest the culprits OF COURSE THEY HAVE BLONDE HAIR AND ARE 100% Skippys [sic] it makes Aussies look racist [sic] and they are not I was born here both my parents are Italian and i [sic] feel very welcome and love this country and all my aussie [sic] mates are great 1 hindu 1 budist [sic] a greek [sic] othidox [sic] and to [sic] ango [sic] aussies [sic] we all get along fine..I am insulted by this preview i [sic] hope it does not go to air.

**Agree** (1 people agree)

**Disagree** (0 people disagree)

(Antonio, 10 October 2009, Season One, Episode Six, Hand of Friendship 2007, East West 101, SBS)

Antonio sees the content of *EW101* as divisive. While his underlying argument seems to be that there are decent and indecent members of all communities he

fails to see the benefit of such depictions to the broader community. More than this, Antonio is outraged at how the actions of these young boys who have 'BLONDE HAIR' and are '100% skippys [sic]' might extend to Australia being seen as a racist country. He points to the fact that his family is of Italian descent and he feels very welcome in Australia, in an attempt to negate the experiences of migrant groups as presented in *EW101*. He attests that since his experience is different and that the experience presented must be incorrect. This is a perspective that conflicts with those found in McClean's (2011) focus groups, which suggested that shows like *EW101* might be the beginning of a dialogue around issues of prejudice and marginalisation. Antonio instead shuts down future dialogue by calling the depiction 'racist'. Through his response he demonstrates how certain demographics may be alienated and therefore unsympathetic to the core message of *EW101*. Thus, referring to Knapman's statement that their audience was a 'converted' one, we can see the lack of effect on audiences who are not already inclined to think about race relations in this way. That is, in a way that demonstrates that the dominant group may play a part in the oppression of minorities. The end result contradicts the intentions of creators. Instead of bridging a gap between audiences it cements a growing divide.

While Antonio's responses may have been lacking context, since he admits he had not viewed the show, viewers of the program in McClean's (2011) study have offered similar insights. With one woman explaining that the tension between police and the young Lebanese males could be used as rationale for continued bad behaviour. She explains:

When our kids, the youngsters I'm talking about – sixteen, seventeen, eighteen – see this programme, what do they think? 'Oh they hate me! Oh, they're this and they're that! What am I studying for? What the hell. I'll take my degree and shove it against the wall. Why should I give this country more? Why should I give myself more?'

It shows real life, but we don't want this. We need some change.

That's why we need to act more positive. (McClean 2011, p. 186).

A young male in a different focus group echoes the views of the woman above stating that depicting such attitudes 'will increase the racism between them [namely, police and Arab Australian youth].' (McClellan 2011, p. 185). Thus, while some claim repeatedly that *EW101* is a realistic representation, others contest the realism as problematic and view television as a realm where solutions can be played out. This indicates that people do look to popular culture at times to see what other possibilities might be on offer.

In relation to the same episode Michelle from Perth and Waz from Melbourne share an interesting exchange based on the interaction of the characters above. Michelle pleads that the producers not be too politically correct in their attempt not to vilify Muslims.

### **Propaganda v Reality**

Please don't sacrifice realism for PC propaganda [sic]. This program was reversed [sic] racism, vilifying the victims, and victimising the villains [sic]-broadly speaking. Contrast this program [sic] with those news items that followed it, where the real face of Islamic terrorism is working out globally and you'd be getting closer to the truth. I appreciate you're trying to not vilify Muslims, but white washing the facts does no one a favour. Propoganda [sic] deceives - it's the truth that sets us free.

**Agree** (18 people agree)

**Disagree** (37 people disagree)

(Michelle, 14 October 2009, Season Two, Episode Seven, *The Lost Boy* 2009, *East West 101*, SBS)

Michelle interprets any depiction of discrimination enacted by white Australians to be racist toward Australians. Waz responds to Michelle by providing examples of Anglo Australians discriminating against and harassing those from minority cultures and religions.

What was incorrect about it? Young boys threatening Muslims and other minorities, it happened in Cronulla and West Melbourne where a Sudanese kid was killed. Mistreatment of muslim suspects in anti terror investigations, Mohammad Haniff [sic] is a pretty obvious example here. Please detail how this was inaccurate because it seems to reflect, in most cases, Australia and what has been happening since 2001.

**Agree** (17 people agree)

**Disagree** (9 people disagree)

(Waz, 14 October 2009, Season Two, Episode Seven, *The Lost Boy* 2009, *East West 101*, SBS).

The call of 'reverse racism', however, ultimately creates a deadlock where conversation about the issues can no longer be had, as it disallows any criticism of the mainstream society. Overall these findings show that, while some audiences are clearly craving popular culture that challenges the present social hierarchy, those whose political and ideological views do not align with such a perspective are unlikely to receive the texts in the way they were intended to be read.

### **Conclusion**

*EW101*, *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys* were all generally well received by online audiences. It was clear by the comments left by viewers that audiences were aware of the intention of producers in creating the content. While some audiences welcomed the challenge to the status quo, considering it a metaphoric breath of fresh air, others were strongly opposed. Those in opposition believed that the content of these texts simply encouraged a skewed understanding of who was at 'fault' in the tension between mainstream Australians and Arab and/or Muslim Australians, or that such texts encouraged the victims to maintain a victim mentality and therefore justify their antisocial behaviour or their feelings of

alienation. It was clear from the discussions found on the YouTube pages that the films certainly encouraged this mentality in those threads.

On the whole audience reactions to these texts illustrated the importance of ongoing representation of all minority groups in the mainstream arena. While it proved that at present audiences who were not ideologically inclined to seeing multiculturalism as an asset to Australian society were unlikely to respond positively to the texts, it also illustrated that there is an existing market for those who want to see a challenge to the status quo. This is important as those who commission Australian films and television programs often believe that audiences are unlikely to be interested in seeing films that speak to these themes.

It is also important to acknowledge how 'symbolic surplus value' functions with the protagonists in each of these texts. Audiences come to see Malik, Charlie and Tarek as being representative of Arab men more generally. Through each of these characters the audiences are able to see a version of how their anxieties may play out in the 'real world'. The continual reference to 'reality' by many commenters of all three texts indicates that viewers take the experiences of these three men and relate them to what they know of the situation of young Arab men more generally.

In setting out to contribute a counter-narrative to the present discourse of Arab Australian men, the producers, writers and directors of each text have proven that there is an audience ready to listen. However, this audience may easily be alienated through the exploration of themes that challenge the status quo. The calls of 'reverse racism' close down extended discussion that ought to be explored through the frames or themes in the texts. Instead, it becomes apparent that audiences who are not already inclined to view these community groups in a positive light are not likely to begin doing so simply because they've viewed these texts. This shows that, if governments are serious about fostering harmony between various communities, it is very important to continue to fund and encourage texts that challenge the status quo in myriad ways. Without the ongoing contribution of texts that emerge from minority communities for a mainstream

audience, the conversation will remain mostly static and an Orientalist discourse, in place for hundreds of years, is unlikely to be challenged in any meaningful way.



## CONCLUSION

### THERE ARE NO HEROES

This study set out to understand the fictional representations of Arab and Muslim Australians in Australian film and television, between 2007 and 2011. Specifically, this research has sought to answer the following question:

*To what extent do cultural productions such as EW101, The Combination and Cedar Boys open up a space for new understandings of the place of Arab and Muslim Australians in contemporary Australia?*

The thesis noted that research in the area of fictional Australian representation is limited, although existing articles suggest that the underlying representations of Arab Australians are Orientalist. The research presented in the previous chapters has established that, while their inclusion in popular culture has increased over this period, these depictions are consistent with historical Orientalist portrayals of Arab and Muslim communities. However, despite the fact that they conform to Orientalist stereotypes, I have argued that the texts are still able to contribute positively to broadening Australians' perceptions of their Arab and Muslim fellow citizens.

This research has helped to emphasise the significance of the diversity of Arab and Muslim male voices in Australian popular culture through a comprehensive analysis of three texts that have yet to be explored in such detail elsewhere. While there have been a number of comprehensive studies of the representation of Arab males and lack of self-representation in news media (Collins et al. 2000; Poynting 2004; Manning 2004), an analysis similar to those undertaken by Sheehan (2008; 2009) in the USA and Hussain (2010) in Canada was lacking in Australia. These studies sought to look at the representation of Arab and Muslim North Americans

across Hollywood films and recent television series, such as *Sleeper Cell* (2005-2006) and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007-2012). This thesis therefore addresses the gap, making this research both new and imperative, given the growing popularity of Muslim and Arab Australians in fictional narratives and their over-representation in news media.

The understanding of popular culture as a reflection of the climate in which it is produced, points to the hope that through the increased inclusion of minority groups in national cinema, television and the like, these groups can begin to assert their positions (even if still marginal) within a national space, altering common perceptions of national identity, both locally and abroad. As outlined in Chapters Three, Four and Six, in a small way all three of these texts point to a shift in this direction. They push the confines of what it means to be 'Australian' in a post-September 11 climate, where Arab and Muslim voices demand a legitimate position, not as outsiders or enemies from whom we are to be protected, but as rightful citizens of a nation state.

As outlined in Chapter Three, the depiction of multicultural Australia in *EW101* demonstrates that difference is a normal and significant part of the everyday Australian experience. Through a heavy focus on Malik as the character with whom we are most concerned, we are allowed entry into a space where a gentle exploration of cultural hybridity can take place. Ultimately, however, Malik functions as a marker of Arabness and Muslimness, positioned as a normal part of this national space. By acquainting audiences with the nuances of his public and private life this text allows viewers to understand how, despite the tensions of East and West, Australians who identify with the hybrid experience are an important part of the national perspective.

Chapter Three discussed the depiction of the police force as a 'contact zone' (Wise 2004), where Australians from a number of cultural and religious backgrounds are required to negotiate their differences daily. Audiences are given a sense of the normality of cultural difference, stating it as the rule rather than the exception. In

this respect *EW101* positions its audience as sympathetic to Malik's struggle and by extension the everyday struggle of Australian Muslims like Malik. It is this positioning of Malik as a middle-class Australian that makes him both accessible and problematic, as is discussed below.

*EW101* illustrates a rebuttal to a repeated point of contention, namely that East and West cannot and do not coexist and that points of similarity and 'sameness' are non-existent. It demonstrates that this was possible for people who had immigrated from the East to Australia. Their lives are portrayed as a fusion of East and West and as an ongoing negotiation between the two. In positing Malik as a 'transversal enabler' (Wise 2009, p. 24) and someone with 'bridging capital' (Noble 2009a, p. 55), writers challenge an element of Orientalist storytelling where the white male is always the hero. As outlined in Chapter Five, *EW101* instead establishes the value of 'other' kinds of cultural capital in a successfully thriving multicultural community, ultimately explaining that the approach of the coloniser is not always the most effective.

On a narrative level, *EW101* gave the hope of a peaceful existence through the relationship between Koa and Malik in particular. Their continual demonstration of brotherhood and appreciation for the rich culture of the other offered a promising outlook for the future of multicultural engagement in a country as diverse as Australia. As McClean (2011) has argued, and so too have I in Chapter Seven, people often look for solutions to their daily quandaries on screen. The example of Malik and Koa therefore present audiences with a representation of successful multicultural relationships.

However, the successful relationship between Malik and Koa could be extended to be a metaphor for a strengthened bond that is limited to people from 'other' marginalised cultural backgrounds. We see Malik's relationships with Crowley and Skerritt in continuous turmoil and recognise that relationships between cultural and religious minorities and the Anglo majority seem less likely to thrive. In the instance of *EW101* the limitations to these thriving relationships centre around a

desire to maintain the status quo. This idea is further explored in *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, where East and West seem to lie in clear opposition.

The recognition of multiple Australian narratives, in particular those that are often excluded from popular representations of the nation, lead to broader understandings of national identity. However, as all the lead characters in these productions are male, the narrative also assists in representing the Australian story as a masculine one. Chapter Four demonstrates how these texts reveal the expanding and multiple definitions of Australian masculinity. These expansions are necessary in enabling a stronger sense of belonging for these young men.

Charlie Morkos, Tarek Ayoub and their friends could almost be considered the antithesis of Malik. Instead of an eternal optimism and a consistent looking to the future to understand their place in society, the two young boys and their friends are looking for instant gratification, continuously lamenting their subordinate positions in a social hierarchy. Their ongoing expressions of 'protest masculinity' and desire for respect reflect the lived experiences of many young working-class Lebanese men in Western Sydney. Relaying these stories in the form of a feature film conveys to audiences the significance of their voices as an inherent part of Australian masculine voices and begins to change the common images we project as Australians to both national and international audiences.

While this thesis acknowledges the importance of expanding definitions of Australian identity and masculinity, it must also recognise that this desire to broaden these ideas still places Arab and Muslim Australians beneath white Australia. Arab and Muslim Australians' struggle for acceptance as equals on their own terms is an ongoing one. In their own way each of the three texts demonstrate a desire for broader social acceptance. In the case of Malik for example, this desire to alter the perceptions that white Australians hold with regard to Arab and Muslim Australians does not place him on an equal footing with his white male colleagues. Rather, he is always in a position where he must justify his actions and beliefs, going to great lengths to explain that they do not conflict with the values

held dear to Australians. Malik is ultimately successful in these endeavours because, as Chapter Five explained, he is able to acquire the requisite national capital associated with whiteness.

In the two films the fixation on whiteness and the importance of it as a requirement for belonging creates a distinct binary. This binary cements the divide between 'Lebs' and 'skips'. This divide is evident in both *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, reducing both sides to unsophisticated stereotypes, despite the writers' intentions to tell stories that challenge this binary. Both George Basha and Serhat Caradee wished to demonstrate the disastrous effect of this binary. However, the reactions of the audience expressed online suggest that the opposite was achieved, and in fact members of the audience only found reason to further dislike the 'other' group.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the two films emphasise that young Arab Australians have a strong desire to find acceptance in the mainstream and are aware that they are perceived as inferior. This very awareness leads them to adopt the dominant culture in ways that see them distancing themselves from their Arab culture, as in the case of Tarek, or emphasise it more heavily, as in the case of Charlie and Zeus. However, although determined to highlight their difference and still find acceptance amongst the mainstream, Charlie and Zeus are also depicted as thoughtless criminals. This depiction reinforces Orientalist understandings of the Arab Other as deviant and underhanded. Thus, regardless of how one perceives these texts, we understand that each of these characters speaks from a position of inferiority. While they are determined to be seen as equal to their white counterparts, they are always desperate to prove themselves. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, in both films they fail to do so. This failure to prove their equality only continues to emphasise the positioning of their masculinity outside the mainstream.

It may be argued that this was intentionally done by the writers so that audiences may be able to recognise the Arab and Muslim Other as a discursive construction. That is, Charlie and Zeus are placed outside of the mainstream in order to highlight

their marginalisation and their inferiority as Arab Australians. Such recognition might foster empathy and instigate change, as audiences are able to empathise with the onscreen characters and their struggles. Whether this was the intended approach or not does not seem to matter when it fails, as was argued in Chapter Seven.

One of the strengths of this research is that it considers cultural representation not only from the perspective of the white normative viewer, but also the reaction from within the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities, as found in online discussions. This thesis attempted to understand how different cultural and religious affiliations might have affected the expectations and reactions of viewers on issues that often see opinions divided.

In Chapters Three and Four this research established that producers intended to create products that challenged Orientalist understandings of Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities in Australia. Subsequent chapters asked whether or not they were successful in achieving this objective, one that for Basha in particular is more pertinent than providing entertainment. This thesis has shown that this objective has not always been achieved. In the case of *EW101* Malik is portrayed as an exceptional Arab, in contrast to the host of other criminal Arab characters in the series. In the films, while their tragic endings may have been intended as a warning for young Arab audiences, ultimately the depiction of Arab masculinity in terms of criminality and violence reinforces existing negative stereotypes.

Obviously three texts alone cannot be responsible for changing perceptions about communities that have been held for hundreds of years. While certain parts of the audience are certainly becoming more aware of the issues faced by marginalised groups through films such as *The Combination* and *Cedar Boys*, as evidenced in Chapter Seven, many others still see Arab and Muslim Australians – who adopt deviant lifestyles and fail to ‘integrate’ – as responsible for their own marginalisation. Unfortunately this understanding reinforces the Orientalist binary discussed at the beginning of this thesis.

Audience responses from Arab and Muslim Australians also reinforce this binary. As McLean (2011) showed, Arabic-speaking audiences place an intense burden of representation on characters from Arabic-speaking backgrounds and are determined to only see the positive elements of their culture and/or religion depicted on screen. The desire to paint an entirely positive image of the community is a response to the years of demonisation of their community. To even hint at any community dysfunction is to reinforce the inferior perception of this community. However the desire to *only* tell the positive narratives restricts the stories that can be told about the community, in favour of one-dimensional depictions, as addressed by Hall (1996).

Although this research recognises the very clear limits of these three texts, it has been argued that the voices put forth are voices that were previously missing from Australian storytelling. This alone makes these texts a necessary addition to the canon, despite their inability to successfully alter perceptions.

While this research recognises that these portrayals conform to the Orientalist ideals laid out by Said (1978) and further elaborated upon in great detail by Poynting, Noble and others (Noble 2005; Poynting & Noble 2004; Poynting & Mason 2006; Poynting & Mason 2007; Asmar 1999, Collins et al. 2000; Poynting 2004; Abood 2008), it continues to argue that these depictions are necessary. Although they are perhaps not as groundbreaking as their producers believe them to be, this research argues that they are the first films to tell the stories of young Arab men in the mainstream arena in Australia. These films therefore lay the foundation for other, potentially more nuanced and less Orientalist, depictions of the Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities to be told.

### **Future Research**

This research raised a number of interesting questions that could not be answered in the space of the thesis. Many of these questions relate to the limited

opportunities afforded to voices from marginalised backgrounds. This thesis enquired into the positioning of Arab and Muslim male voices on Australian screens, pointing to the stark absence of female voices from similar backgrounds.

The position of writers proved to have a powerful influence on the way stories were told. While production for commercial purposes appears to limit the creative opportunities for artists from minority backgrounds, Community Cultural Development (CCD) opportunities appear to create space for artists from marginalised groups to engage with questions of identity on a deeper, less didactic level than the texts that were examined in this thesis. Historically disadvantaged areas such as Western Sydney are emerging as cultural hubs through engagement with CCD projects (Ho 2012), which often focus on using the cultural diversity of the region (Ho 2012, p. 47) to set it apart from the more 'homogenous east' (Butcher 2003 p. 187). The stories that emerge from and about this region tend to focus on 'diversity, identity, cultural conflict, racism, hybridity and other themes relating to life in multicultural Australia' (Ho 2012, p. 47) rather than a more general and one dimensional take on race relations. It would therefore be interesting to consider whether the audiences of CCD work were more 'niche' and thus 'in the know' than mainstream audiences and what effects this knowledge has on how artists tell their stories. For example, the work sponsored by Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE), which specialises in CCD through digital storytelling, urban music and film, gives artists the space to explore issues of identity and culture. Examples of successful artists who have previously worked with the organisation include DJ Pogo, Sarah Love and The Herd (Ho 2012). Future research could therefore investigate whether models of complex, non-Orientalist cultural production are being developed in the field of CCD, and whether any aspects of these models could be replicated in more mainstream cultural production.

Importantly, however, this research engaged with and placed these cultural productions under heavy scrutiny and expected them to stand up under such analysis in ways that arguably would not be expected of other products, and certainly not products depicting Anglo Australians. Thus, I posit that the 'problem'



of representation does not entirely rest with cultural producers themselves; rather, it is a systemic issue relating to the burden of representation placed on the few works that fall outside of the mainstream. In fact, as outlined in Chapters Three and Four, credit ought to be given to the cultural producers in question for expanding the horizons and possibilities in the representation of minority groups. What became evident in this study, but could not be further explored, were the obvious restraints placed on creative producers through financing. The position of the writer/director should be considered not only in the creative process but also in order to understand the financial restrictions that add to structural issues that continue to reinforce a burden of representation. The financial restrictions come from a perceived understanding of what audiences might want; unfortunately this understanding tends to exclude cultural diversity. Therefore a study into the preferences of audiences might also be a point for further analysis.

The Australian screen industry is dominated by an Anglo-centric worldview, limiting the ways in which stories might be told, and indeed if they are told at all. As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, the way that audiences are discussed by both David Field and Caterina De Nave reveals the limited understanding of non-Anglo audiences as 'different' and entirely separate to Anglo audiences. While it is true that non-Anglo audiences would like to see themselves on screen, the ways that their communities are represented in such a negative fashion leaves much to be desired. Thus, it would be interesting to study the demographic of people who are in the position to commission roles throughout the Australian screen industry and gain an understanding of how they perceive both their audience and people from minority cultures in order to better understand how these reductive images of such cultures are being continuously represented. It would also prove valuable to conduct further research into audience reception. It would be interesting to survey audiences of these films in order to understand more fully how, or indeed, if, they have been influenced by the content covered within these films.

**Final words**

The progressive element of these texts, though significant in their own right and valuable in their depiction of multicultural Australia, are mostly overshadowed by the Orientalist fascination with the lives of Arab and Muslim Australians as different to the point of being a spectacle.

In a final thread of hope, however, this thesis highlights the potential impact of texts that focus on 'difference'. Arab and Muslim Australians are being written into existence through their appearance in popular culture artifacts. This thesis reinforces the significance of representation in understanding the lives of those whose experiences we do not share. Hopefully increasing representation, no matter how limited, will slowly shift the narrative of Australian Arab and Muslim communities, leading to a more genuine acceptance of these groups as part of the broader Australian community.

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