LET THE EGYPTIAN SPEAK FOR HIMSELF: AN AGITATION OF THE CULTURAL INTEGRITY OF WHITENESS IN AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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Abstract

The increase of racist incidents towards people of 'Middle Eastern appearances' since 2001 and the sense of discomfort that has been associated with them, problematises the ability of Arab Australians to participate as legitimate citizens in their sociopolitical environment. This paper departs from this epistemic angle explaining how 'patriarchal white sovereignty' (Moreton-Robinson) has created a flawed practice of multiculturalism which has not attempted to decentre this Eurocentric assumption. I argue that the Australian government's policies and practices since September 2001 have been underpinned by a broadly orientalist ideology that assumes an essential difference between Arab and Muslim Australians from other Australian citizens and frames such a difference as a distance from and a lack of Australian whiteness. I suggest that in order to expose and undercut this (re)inscription of otherness on this diverse yet silenced community, an 'agitation' of the intersections of the power asymmetries and cultural hierarchies between those who can and those who cannot 'speak' must be brought forth in this paper.

Introduction

The first part of the title of this paper is derived from Edward Said's description of Lord Balfour's political technique of silencing the Egyptian to ascertain control and mastery over him (2003: 31-38). The name, Balfour, is

> synonymous with the declaration that helped create the state of Israel and with it the untold agony and suffering of the Palestinian people who to this day have yet to recover from one of history's worst political and moral injustices (Rizk, 2000).

Said details how the wholeness of Balfour's colonial fantasy depended on this belligerent essentialist categorization in his speech to the British parliament about the success of the colonial experiment in Egypt. If an Egyptian, like me, seeks to unsettle this fantasy by speaking out, he or she is seen as "the agitator who wishes to raise difficulties than the good native who overlooks the 'difficulties of foreign domination'" (2003:33). As the distinction of minority and majority populations becomes increasingly blurred through transnational migration and technological advancement, scenarios of colonial domination are currently being replayed in the Australian bodypolitic and these will shape the epistemic tone of this essay.

In those terms, this paper will analyse how orientalist representations of the 'Arab' in the Australian government's policies and practices of state multiculturalism especially after the events of September 11th are determined by essentialist and quasi-biological notions that ideologically contain other non-white 'bodies' within the nation's white racial and cultural integrity (Pugliese,

2003). Hence, in this paper I will detail the experiences of those of 'Middle Eastern appearance' and how they came to be signified as the latest others along the continuum of cultural and racial demonisations that have been inherent in Australia's racial history[i] (Poynting et al., 2001). What this paper puts forward is how the discursive and political stratification of racialised others is not a new phenomenon and is certainly not unique in the Australian context of state multiculturalism.

It is precisely this role to 'agitate' the power asymmetries and cultural hierarchies between those who can and those who cannot 'speak' that I wish to bring forth in this paper. I cannot as a post-colonial intellectual in Western academia measure how this discursive intervention through 'speaking' here in the language that colonised my country of origin can effectively contribute towards achieving a sense of justice for my fellow colonised. I am weary that because of my privileges, I am complicit in some way in reproducing the same hegemonic structures of whiteness that I am seeking to dismantle. Yet, this irresolvable paradox borne out of existing power relations can be seen as strategically disabling or enabling. Through my privileged location in the West, I am able to embrace a theoretically self-assertive persona that allows me to become the 'agitator' without the threat of being physically or intellectually repressed (Perera 1999: 195-197). Although the new Australian sedition laws may be proving me wrong! (Williams 2006:11). What I am pointing to here in is not a liberal romanticisation of the processes of 'speech' as simply a subversive liberation of repressed voices from the throes of whiteness. Rather, I am attempting to de-hegemonise the naturalised status of whiteness into the foreground of critical inquiry about Australian multiculturalism. As Haggis et al. argue "those placed outside… 'whiteness' usually can describe whiteness, reflect on it, and recount experiences of it" (1999:169). In a sense, I am grappling with Frantz Fanon's aphorism that "colonialism forces people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly 'In reality, who am I?'"(1963: 203).

Arabophobia – The Tyranny of 'Non-White' Appearances

In his masterful work *Orientalism*, what Said exposes in the seemingly benign political thinking of Balfour of the 'Orient' and 'Orientals' is symptoms of prejudicial thinking. The very Western study of the East, in Said's view, was bound up in the systematic prejudices about the non-Western world that turned it into a set of tangibly felt political and geographical dominations. The ability to make a discourse suggests that the Orientalist, in this case Balfour, is driven by a need to construct an image of a norm that is able to speak for the silent other which is marked as racially and culturally aberrant. This has been a concern of Said and other post-colonial theorists (Spivak, 1988; Ang; 1994) where the 'Oriental' is not given the opportunity to make statements about his or her people, let alone the 'Occidental', and informs the tone of his writings post *Orientalism* especially about the Palestinian quest for self-determination (1992;1994). Said attributes the authority and the ability to 'speak' to the unacknowledged privileges of ascribing to 'whiteness' (2003:228).

The seamlessly acquired demonised status of the 'Arab' post September 11th echoes the same manner of objectifying the 'Oriental' subject during the eras of British and French colonialism. The September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States, and subsequent terrorist attacks including the Bali bombings, revealed degrees of how Western states

assumed the orientalist role of protecting the West from the perils of the East (Dutton et al. 2004: 5-6). In Australia, a primordial position of defending 'our way of life' has been formulated with a nationally defined cultural core in mind based on Western democratic values. This territorial self-assertion, couched in terms of security jargon, becomes particularly stressed in the political spaces that lie between the Australian nation-state and the indigenous and immigrant minorities in it. This means that the concept of national security, in this instance, becomes stretched to include some groups and exclude others from political processes almost at will (Poynting & Noble 2003: 41-43). The flexibility and inherent ambiguity of this concept enables the state to promote inherently exclusive mental spaces, that of the orientalist division that Said aptly describes, to control political arenas. By this I am following Said in arguing that before there could be a materialization of European colonialism there had to be an *idea* of the 'West' or the notion that there was a social and geographical space sanctimoniously guarded by the ontological boundaries of whiteness that was formulated in contrast to the 'East'.

In other words, this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word "arbitrary" here because *imaginative* geography of the "our land-barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge this distinction. It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours" (Said 2003:54; my emphasis).

This blend of cultural determinism breeds a tacit distinction between an Australian and Western world that is characterized by democratic beliefs and an Arab society that is hampered by undemocratic practices such as terrorism (Turner 2003: 414-417). The discourse of the Australian government in its multicultural policies and practices assumes implicitly that

> on the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are...rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things" (Said 2003: 49).

The fact that multiculturalism has been structured as a contest of mainstream and minority relations asserts its embedment in colonial presuppositions and Orientalist practices of othering (Ahmed 2000: 95-113). It has to be duly noted that this polarization is not egalitarian in any sense of the term. The bifurcation that multiculturalism posits is between two unequal cultural spheres – an Anglocentric white one and anything different from it. There is continuity in the assumption that minority groups are essentially static and authentically different from a dominant culture. This essentialist tactic privileges the dominant group, and its pervasive culture, in always treating the other as alien to divert away opposition to social and power inequalities (Ahmed 2000: 97-101). Larbalestier reiterates that in mainstream "representations of multiculturalism, whiteness itself is frequently an unexamined all-encompassing given"(1999:146). Thus, this ideology also serves a system of Orientalist domination that sets up ontological boundaries between different groups along the hierarchy of whiteness in society and divides their members along imaginary, but at the same time real, lines of binary opposition. In this institutional moment of multiculturalism post September 11, the dominant white

culture becomes the sole and overriding mode of 'national' interactions flanked by other minority groups. These racialised groups enter into a colonial game of competing for the colonial gaze of the dominant culture or resisting its imperialist asphyxia or an ambiguous combination of both as exhibited by the minority of Arab Australians.

The Location of the White Self vis-à-vis the Arab Other

When analysing Australian politics most scholars who include 'race' in their study do so when the non-white 'other' is clearly visible in the political landscape (Gunaratnam 2003: 128-129). This form of race politics is rarely perceived as being shaped by the relationship between patriarchal white sovereignty and those who do not ascribe to its phenotypic characteristics (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b). This process, known as racialisation, is understood

> as the way in which complex social phenomena are refracted through and become explained primarily in terms of ethnic and racial categories of social perception (Poynting et al. 2004:14).

Its credibility is sustained through the normalized quiet of an unseen but embodied power of a whiteness

> that is conferred not as an individualistic act, but rather as a performative enabled by an entire discursive apparatus constituted by such institutional bodies as the Australian government, the Department of Immigration and so on (Pugliese 2002:165)

Thus, central to understanding the possessive logic of this racialised thinking is a recognition of the ambiguous positioning of the other in a society where race has been intrinsically used, as an all-purpose marker, in political practices. This entails a further self-reflexive aware-ness that sees how whiteness in its localised manifestations and global consequences is bound up in a series of vested political interests that bestow those within its contingent discursive and cultural domains (un)acknowledged privileges and power (Gabriel, 1998; Moreton Robinson, 1998; Perera, 1999; Pugliese, 2002).

Within the racial spectrum designed through a hierarchy of "white interests" (Gabriel 1998: 97), Arab bodies are marked with pre-configured meanings in Australia: suspected terrorists, presumed religious and misogynistic fanatics and oppressed women. Arabs exist outside of the ideological scope of 'belonging' within the Australia. Located within a racial paradox, Arab-Australians were once, in Australia's immigration history, simultaneously racialised as white and non-white. Being unable to fit into readily assigned racial and ethnic categories used by Australia, Arabs traditionally were and are still not legally 'raced' and therefore were presumably white before the gang rapes incidents and September 11 (Batrouney 2002: 28-42)[ii]. However, after these events Arab-Australians have become signified as oppositional to Australia's democratic civilization and thus have firmly become placed outside the boundaries of 'whiteness'. Orientalism, based on the othering of the Arab in the Australian context, has now become a sedimented language of everyday socio-political interactions that creates the backdrop for social and national exclusions to take place. Moreover, it can be seen how this discourse easily degenerates into an exercise of stereotypical thinking that involves making generalized and sweeping assumptions about an entire set of individuals and populations (Osuri, 2004). It follows, that these discourses have been integral in the circulation of a 'common' knowledge that is at once dominant as is popular within political circles, because

it inhibits the other from producing his/her own discourses that run counter to accepted discourses. This hegemonic knowledge prevents the other rupturing the ideological grip held by these widely held norms. So in this sense, benign or normal 'everyday' practices of the nation should not be assumed as free from being complicit in imperialist processes of ensuring a skewed normality toward a dominant group (Goldberg 1993: 83-84). Further, it must be noted that the imperialist ambitions of a nation are not simply forgotten with the conquest of territory. The desire to homogenously eliminate differences in the attempt to maintain a unified national identity, specifically adhering to a constructed norm, still informs the political and cultural agendas of many postcolonial states (Hardt & Negri 2000: 128-134).

Sticks and Stones:
Broken Arabs and Bones

In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States mainland, a whole wave of racist violence and discrimination was directed to Arab and Muslim diasporic communities throughout the West, including Australia (Mason 2004: 233). After September 11 hate crimes increased dramatically. Hate crimes including beatings, arson, attacks on mosques, vehicular assaults and verbal threats were reported. The Australian Arabic Council reported a twenty fold increase in reports of discrimination and vilification of Arab Australians in the ensuing period after September11th (HREOC, 2003). However, these are merely the racial incidents that have been reported through legislative means. Many other factors prevent such incidents from being acknowledged publicly as statistical figures, as already subjugated communities sense a heightening of persecution (Humphrey 2002: 206-223).

The targets of these post-September 11 incidents attest to how the cultural other has been excluded on the basis of a convoluted strategy. Thus, non-Arabs, such as Sikhs and Indians, as well as non-Muslims, including Arab Christians, have been adversely affected (HREOC, 2003). This violence is best understood not as racist incidents but as imperialist practices of white Anglo Saxon fragility that invoke a demarcatory philosophy of discriminating against the non-white other threatening the socio-economic, political and cultural privileges held by this un-raced group (Hage 1998: 28-32). The ironically multicultural target of these incidents is instantiated by identifying others through corporeal and cultural descriptors of the Middle East. Pugliese, in explaining how the power of orientalism touches other non-Middle Easterners, argues that

> everything in this descriptor is predicated on situating the interpellated subject within a geographical location: this descriptor assumes its animating essence precisely through its naming and invocation of a geopolitical place. Yet…this descriptor, when applied to individual bodies, obliterates the specificity of geography as such (2003).

Thus, the articulation of differences are embodied and embedded in encounters with others who fit this orientalist profile. Yet, this paradox is constructed through a distinct process of racialisation. While other ethnic groups are racialised according to phenotype, Arab-Australians have become simultaneously racialised according to religious and pseudo-cultural and biological symbols. Religious racialisation conflates Arabs and Islam, and consequently reduces all Arabs as Muslims. Moreover, it represents Islam as a monolithic religion erasing diversity among Arabs and Muslims; and marks Islam as inherently incompatible with Australian 'democratic' beliefs. This exceptional process of racialisation posi-

tions Arabs in a peculiar location within the Australian racial terrain in which they are not racially legible within the operating racial framework and has thus contributed to Arab-Australian demonic visibility post September 11 (Pugliese, 2003).

It must be noted that these recent incidents were not suddenly brought about in a bout of nationalist fervour following the events of September 11 and later terrorist attacks. The incidents must be situated in a larger trend of 'moral panic' that has linked crime with ethnicity and that has been characterised by the same racialising ideology that Arab-Australian communities are currently reeling from (Batrouney, 2002; Collins et al, 2000; Poynting et al, 2004). As Hage reiterates regarding previous racist acts

> what was more important than any ideology of essentialisation was the more general process whereby one group of 'White' Australians felt *empowered*, and were in a position, to subject another (Arab-Muslim) group of Australians to such harassment (1998:35).

It asserts that Orientalism as employed by Said maintains that an imaginative geography based on misconceptions of the other "puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relations with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (2003: 7). Such a description exemplifies how the Australian government since the time of Federation has managed to keep this status quo undisturbed. The cultural primacy accorded to the white Australian male of Anglo Celtic background has created a flawed practice of multiculturalism that has not attempted to decentre this Eurocentric assumption.

What is at issue is not that the Arab-Australian population has firmly personified this other, as the dialectics of orientalism are always present in nationalist

equations since the incorporation of race in the formation of the modern nation state(Said 2003: 332). But, that this marginalised population has not ostensibly been associated with being Australian. The first part of this hyphenated identity has become a cultural obstacle towards being nationally recognised as the second part of the hybrid identity. A precariously defined state citizenship that is available in naturalisation ceremonies as part of extending a multicultural good will to others does not capture the intricacies of cultural identity (Kampmark, 2003). Although, the state recognises through its multicultural policies that all those assuming citizenship are willing to commit to the Australian 'way of life', they are still marginalized through the hegemonic formations of white belonging. Citizenship should be understood as more than a document of national standing, it should include a sense of belonging to the nation (Hage 2002: 2-4). This means that democratic political values do not only affect the way the government and its people draw collective boundaries, but it is through the national imaginary that this idea takes place.

With this point in mind, it can be further argued that belonging is not only determined through institutional channels but through daily regimes of social knowledge that are (re)produced and practised daily. Thus, what these racially motivated incidents signify is a sense of national and cultural belonging intertwined with a feeling of securing this belonging. The conflicting sense of being both Arab and Australian is an oxymoron to the white bodypolitic that ensures tentative accommodation of a singular identity based on negating another with all of its complexities. This falls within Harris' argument of whiteness as property whereby the right to exclude the other is seen as normative if the other does not

possess any of the criteria of whiteness (1993:1721).

The Non-Performativity of State Multiculturalism[iii]

The government's immediate response to the racially motivated episodes in the aftermath of September 11 was of swift condemnation. The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs at the time, Philip Ruddock, was quick to rebuke all those who engaged in acts of racist conduct (MPS 158, 2001). But the general tenor of this 'anti-racist' rhetoric can be seen as an ideological cover for the strengthening of the hegemony of the government through 'colour-blind' policies that are aimed at ensuring the safety of the state and 'all' its citizens. hooks eloquently summarizes the Minister's view as

> The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality, is a response to the terror. It is has also become a way to perpetuate the terror, by providing a cover, a hiding place. (1992: 176).

The common undercurrent in anti-racist and multiculturalist discourses is the idea that the Western democratic socio-political model originating from the history of European Enlightenment is the most advanced of humanity (Goldberg 1993: 14-18). It constructs the West as a zone of uncontested morality. This thesis represents all that is pleasing about human beings, and in its defence those who dishonour its basic tenets are castigated as anti-democratic (Ahmed, 2004). Ruddock describes the attacks against Arab and Muslim communities in Australia as "un-Australian". He goes on to say that "such incidents merely play into the hands of those, like terrorists, who do not share *our* civilised democ-

ratic values" (MPS 158, 2001). The perception of cultural practices of others as inherent and innate to them collapses the myriad of differences between subject peoples. It situates subject communities, in this case Arab and Muslim communities, in a particular relation of inferiority within the discursive regime of whiteness. Moreover, it affirms that terrorism "is held to be a weapon of the weak because the strong also control the doctrinal systems and their terror doesn't count as terror" (Chomsky, 2001). Thus, it is interesting to note how the reach of the term 'un-Australian' goes well beyond certain targeted racialised groups to include racists who do not ascribe to an aestheticised progressive and middle class version of multiculturalism (Hage 1998:182). The targeting of such groups as well as those 'racists' identified by Ruddock, sheds light on the manner in which 'un-Australian' operates as a heterogenous catchword that semantically and politically excludes alternative discourses to that propagated by the government. It typifies a kind of discursive terror, which emanates from the Balfourian technique of silencing the Oriental that suppresses any avenues of critiquing governmental practices that can be interpreted as terrorising to some communities.

What I am pointing to is how the government, in maintaining its hegemony as the *only* legitimate political actor to use violence, creates in an orientalist manner an environment of "moral panic" for its citizens who are seen as un-Australian (Poynting *et al.* 2004: 1–3). In this key document, the moral upper hand resides with "innocent Australians" who "are being wrongfully blamed" or "are being threatened" (UDR 2003: 7). The 'threatening' of the 'Australian' social order has become irrationally linked in orientalist commonsense with "terrorists" who "claim religious sanction for their actions despite there being no religious

or cultural basis for terrorism" (UDR 2003: 7). This falls in line with one of Said's principal themes in *Orientalism*. Said insists on how orientalist language is powerful in its ability to be shrouded in an aura of moral superiority and invisibility that immunes it from any opposing discourses (2003: 227-228). Orientalist discourse embodies and articulates "a certain will or intention" emanating from the discourse producer (2003: 12). The dichotomy of the Australian people and the 'terrorists' is carefully used to relieve the Australian government of any association of terrorism that is not religiously or culturally based. It is also interesting to note how these characteristics have been synonymously assigned to terrorism without taking into account other political, geographical or economic factors. It is strategically not mentioned in this document the Australian Government's involvement in a 'Western' led campaign in the 'war of terror' may have contributed to the rise of terrorist incidents after September 11th (Osuri & Banerjee 2004: 168). Furthermore, the bipartisan support for an Israeli state occupying Palestinian lands is not included as another form of accepting state-sponsored terrorism, as against other political actors' terrorism (Jakubowicz, 2003). It might be argued that the context might not be the most appropriate to list the foreign political interests of the government in a policy document for multiculturalism. And this criticism is voiced by a leading multicultural theorist in Australia, Andrew Jakubowicz, where he recognizes that "the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has become conflated with the politics associated with the US/UK/Australia invasion of Iraq" (2003). Yet in the same spirit he equally argues that the invocation of international crisis, notably terrorism, causally creates a racialised domestic environment that identifies and racialises those who look like 'terrorists' in Australia (Jakubowicz, 2003).

The linguistic asymmetry in this policy document has been based entirely on orientalist bias. Through this language the government's hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated amongst its population, as conceptions of 'truth' and 'reality' become established as norms in political language. As Said succinctly sums up:

> For every Orientalist, quite literally, there is a support system of staggering power, considering the ephemerality of the myths that Orientalism propagates. *The system now culminates into the very institutions of the state*. To write about the Arab Oriental world, therefore, is to write with the *authority of a nation*, and not with the affirmation of a strident ideology but with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force. (2003: 307) [My emphasis]

Thus, political rhetoric here has followed in an orientalist trend of 'fixity' and racialised abstractions that are far from empty in their implications (Bhabha 1983: 18). To the Australian government, those who engage or sympathize with terrorist activity whatever the motivation or obligation is, are political outlaws. At the bottom of this view is a stereotype which connotes a semantic rigidity through a label that is emotionally laden in the context of national security (Noble 2005: 109). This colonial stereotype acts as a discursive strategy that 'fixes' the other, be they terrorists or non-Australians, in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the white rational Australian. Furthermore, this discourse is effectively a *national* self-narrative that demarcates the borders of Australia and its enemy terrorists or the West and East (Lee Koo, 2005). Said makes clear that

> in any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement... is a presence to the reader

by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as 'the Orient' (2003: 21).

The ideas of orientalist scholarship can be seen to have evolved as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by Australia and the West. To legitimise defence against vague enemies that are diametrically positioned as opposed to Australia, this policy uses an orientalist language that is normalised with its appeal to the maintenance of the security of the homeland (Hage 1993: 93-96). What these statements (re)present are simplified schemata of complex cultural and political realities that easily conflate and collapse ethnic categories with undemocratic practices of violence. By identifying with what is associated with Australia (e.g. freedom, human rights, democracy, and tolerance), the public is more willing to accept other policies of the government that might include invasion of other countries (Moreton Robinson 2004a: 78). This is because to voice dissent would mean to identify with the other's 'way of life which is supposedly far removed from an Australian one (Hage 2003: 122). This belief, that has become a cornerstone of governmental policies in the domestic and international fronts, reiterates how "psychologically, Orientalism is a form of paranoia" (Said 2003: 72).

(Un)Australian (In)Securities

In the same document, Minister Ruddock allays the fear of the Australian public in assuring them that

> these [Arabic and Muslim] communities have a demonstrated commitment to Australia and have stated their abhorrence of terrorism just as much as every other section of the Australian community (MPS 158, 2001).

From this standpoint, Ruddock assumes the role of the orientalist by mimetically representing the views of these 'uncivilised' communities to the 'civilised' and concerned Australian public (Said 2003: 39). It is as if the Arabic and Muslim communities are homogenously lumped as separate communities apart from the Australian one and that their presence is one of containment and judgement. This dichotomisation of us and them, firmly situates the 'Arab' in a space that is on "the locus of the non" to frame it in Pugliese's words (2003). What this existentialist term maintains is that in order for the Australian national self-image to be perpetuated as unified against competing discourses of otherness, the constitution of this self is based on the 'deconstitution' of the other through political and discursive measures (Ingram 2001: 163-168).

In this light, the practices of placing mostly Arab and Muslim asylum seekers in detention centres in 2001 is considered as morally and culturally acceptable as it protects the Australian 'way of life' from their otherness. This physical implementation of othering became a simplistic yet effective political strategy, which was used by the Howard government in a time of elections, to exclude others from 'our' Australian society (Perera, 2002). Juxtaposing the racial incidents perpetrated against the Arab and Muslim against communities, the violence committed by the terrorists on white diasporic territory as well as the government's own form of violence (i.e. mandatory detention) reveals a deeply flawed moral system that is only judged from a white perspective of knowledge (Moreton Robinson 2004a: 75-78). All three cases of violence are condemned, but the latter two escape the full scale of condemnation because they are seen as protecting the nation from the threatening others (Hoh, 2002). Thus, while the Australian government's

'anti-terrorist' protective policies can be seen as trying to preserve the sanctity of Australian life from terrorists, it can simultaneously be seen as a departure from the egalitarian rhetoric of multicultural policies through the political racialisation and exclusion of the other (Lee Koo, 2005).

At this point I want to return to the term 'un-Australian' to explain how it can be seen to operate as a metonymic form of 'neo-racism' (to invoke Etienne Balibar's term). This means that the Darwinian form of biological racism that discriminated on the basis of a belief in biologically inferior or superior races along a hierarchy of white features is now being replaced by a belief that groups of people are 'unassimilable' because of particular cultural values and beliefs (Balibar 1990: 17-27). This is the discursive domain where religious antithesis is invoked in popular discourses of the nation to further polarise Arab Australians from white patriarchal sovereignty through an orientalist view of Islam. Through the oppositional construction of Islam to the Judeo-Christian tradition inherent in Australian and Western democracies, Arab Australians, specifically Muslim Arab Australians, are relegated to being anti-democratic and thus anti-Western. The interstitial political space of articulating experiences of discrimination and still being committed to an ethico-political position of justice is becoming increasingly inexistent for such communities (Kerbaj, 2006c). The political option afforded by the government is that once the Arab-Australian community strips itself of its own religious and cultural traits to join a Western condemnation of such acts, the effacement of the negatory prefix in front of 'Australian' is complete. This is exhibited in Ruddock's reassuring tone of the 'good white nationalist' (Hage 1998:78-104), who allows the Arabic and Muslim communities who publicly denounce

non-state terrorism to be part of a narrowly defined narrative of belonging (MPS 158, 2001). This means that the suffering of 'white diasporas' (Osuri & Banerjee 2004: 161- 169) must be valorised by 'non-white' diasporas in Australia to relieve themselves of the "associative logic of racism" (Hage 2002:242) by the government or its concerned citizens.

The formation of the Muslim reference group is a case in point as it illustrates the embrace of a rhetoric of grief and compassion, moderation in religious views and condemnation by Arab and Muslim communities as a politically recognised effort to reject the Arab marginality (Dowling, 2005; Kerbaj, 2006a). The advisory group was formed in late 2005 through a handpicking by the federal government of influential Muslim leaders within their communities that exhibited signs of religious conservatism and political support within their communities (Kerbaj, 2006b). These leaders with their varying views, motivations and their diverse social and political positioning within these racialised communities joined together in the political hope to be accepted as belonging and to be considered 'Australian' by the government and its other 'non-racialised' citizens (Kerbaj, 2006c; Noble & Tabar 2002: 140-144). In essence, this form of 'coercive mimeticism' entails a discursive apologetic by which an already subjugated people are driven to reproduce the characteristics and ideals of a dominant culture in a way that affirms the categorical thinking that locks those colonised in convenient roles of banalised exoticism (Chow 2002: 107). This leads to what Foucault calls the "objectivizing of the subject", where "the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from other. This process objectivizes him." (2003:126). Therefore, the Arab Other who is already subjugated and objectified from a history of orientalist

expansion in the 'Orient' (Said 2003:72), is re-subjugated, re-objectified and re-orientalised and is caught in a struggle of conflicting impulses that defies the egalitarian underpinnings of state multiculturalism. This is because supposedly all Australians, regardless of their race, culture, religion or gender, are entitled to the same equal treatment from the government (UDR 2003: 6-8).

Yet, in order to 'fit in' the Arab is forced to assimilate to an Australian 'way of life' that homogenizes his/her cultural differences (Noble 2005: 115-119). What these anti-terrorist practices post September 11th by the Australian government germinated out of was a legitimate need to protect 'our way of life' or , as I interpret it, a safeguarding of a privileged white position of political and cultural hegemony. This fear stems from the guilt associated with the foundational moment of colonial invasion and the subsequent glossing over that delicate balance of xenophobic whiteness through policies of exclusion and tentative inclusion of the 'other' (Perera, 2002). Thus, the racialisation of suspicious Arabs or implicitly identified un-Australian communities becomes a fundamental feature of preserving the nationalist and orientalist rhetoric of multiculturalism (Hage 2003: 38-43). It exemplifies "the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioner" (Said 2003: 307). Hence, there is an apparent contradiction in the modern liberal ethos of multiculturalism that espouses a shared humanity involving an idea of Australian citizenship and values. This ensures that no individual or group living in Australia seems to be excluded (UDR 2003:6).

In the context of these exclusionary governmental practices, the actual embodied experiences of racial discrimination of Arab Australians post September 11 render multiculturalism as a political façade. What they also denote is a cultural particularism of institutionalising whiteness and its vehement implementation into definitions of Australian nationalist practices (Kampmark 2004: 287-298).

Conclusion: Beyond Saying and Doing

The post September 11th Arab Australian experience of multiculturalism crystallises the sense among those 'of Middle Eastern appearance', and I strategically include myself within this category afforded to me by the government, that they are the current ambivalent 'others' of Australian society (Green 2003: 7-13). The daily incidents of racism and the Australian government's responses towards Arab Australians exhibit several of the orientalist biases identified by Said. These include a belief in the superiority of the West through anti-terrorist rhetoric and legislation, an inability or unwillingness to allow these communities to represent themselves, and an exaggerated fear of defending the homeland that is fortified by a degree of discomforting these communities.

In the Australian context of state multiculturalism, the discursive economy of representations of 'culturally diverse' others and the hierarchy embodied in these constructions has had significant implications for the unequal distribution of power between the government and its internal 'others'. The most pervasive feature of the orientalist language employed in the multicultural policies and practices of the Australian government is the problematisation of minorities (Schech & Haggis 2001: 143-150). The 'problem' of the examples given in this essay is that cultural differences are being presented in a continuation of the same orientalism, which Said so critically

wrote about. The idea of a vibrant multiculturalism that celebrates difference is unfortunately still rhetorical rather than practical in its democratic manifestations (Ang 1996: 37-40). The danger of an orientalist multiculturalism is that it creates an illusion of equality where the other is visible and is given a voice to a certain extent. However, this visibility is built on orientalist stereotypes where the other's role easily becomes exhibitionist in performing exotic spectacles or being excluded on the basis of their otherness. The narratives of exoticness and celebrating cultural diversity are undoubtedly preferred to hostile attitudes or even fear of the other, but unfortunately these options are not mutually exclusive. In either case, the Western self is distanced from the other through a series of hierarchical obstructions predicated on exclusivist notions of whiteness and Australianness.

In analysing the internal political dynamics of Australian multiculturalism, in terms of state discourses and practices, I am not putting forward a view of the failure of this cosmopolitical project. What I want to affirm, in this provisional conclusion, is the fact the discursive and political space in which multiculturalism operates in is constricted by the scope of the white bodypolitic of the nation. In a sense, this paper can be seen as 'speaking' to the "undoing of states of racial being and forms of governmentality in their global profusion" (Goldberg 2002: 264). This concluding thought calls for an agonistic and self-reflexive commitment to the manner in which whiteness locates or produces the non-white subject (specifically the Arab Other). Through a reconfiguration and rewriting of cultural grammars and discourses in the Australian interpellation of the 'other' an ethico-political move predicated on a decolonising sense of justice, beyond a whiteness predicated

on orientalist dogmatism, can be realised.

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Endnotes

[i] The Australian Arabic Council in the wake of the increased usage of that derogatory term in popular discourses of the mass media and the government released a press release explaining the orientalist histories and racist underpinnings of such a term. Refer to Australian Arabic Council. (2003). 'Ethnicity & Crime in NSW: Politics, Rhetoric & Ethnic Descriptors'.
(http://www.aac.org.au/media.php?ArtID=24)

[ii] In October 1998, a young boy was stabbed to death in the western suburbs of Sydney. This incident and the subsequent backlash became a sensationalised event that dominated Australian mass media and the NSW government where a link between crime and Middle Eastern ethnicity was bluntly articulated. For an in-depth discussion about the politics of racialisation that elevated those 'of Middle Eastern appearance' to embody demonised others, refer to Collins et al. (2000). *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime: Youth, Ethnicity and Crime*. Sydney, NSW: Pluto Press.

[iii] I adopt this title from Sara Ahmed's paper on exploring the ineffectual politics of anti-racism within a framework of critical whiteness studies (Ahmed, 2004).