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Simms, Marian 2007, From Sydney gang rapes to anti-Australian Muslim clerics : the evolution of public descriptors since 9/11, in APSA 2007 : Australasian Political Studies Association Conference Abstracts, Monash University, Melbourne, Vic..

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FROM SYDNEY GANG RAPES TO ANTI-AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM CLERICS: THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC DESCRIPTORS SINCE 9/11
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This paper examines the impact of 9/11 and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ on the public debate in Australia and internationally regarding the Australian Lebanese community. In the year prior to 9/11 a series of attacks by Lebanese ‘gangs’ upon non-Lebanese young women occurred in the western suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales. The trials and much community and political debate occurred after 9/11 and much of the language shifted palpably and dramatically away from racialized discourse to the use a Muslim versus non-Muslim frames. The Lebanese youth, depicted as lawless gangs before 9/11, were transformed into ‘Muslim’ youth, or young Lebanese attacking ‘non-Muslim’ girls. The war on terror promoted further shifts; Australian sheikhs were described by many as ‘Muslim clerics’ and violent demonstrations involving Lebanese, and non-Lebanese youth in Sydney were tagged as ‘culture clashes’. The ‘Islamization’ of the language intensified after the car bomb explosion in Bali Indonesia October 2002 that killed 202 people, including many Australians. The paper finds that just as in the United States where the political line of the White House determined the major frames used by the US media more generally, the political line of the Australian Government set the tone for national print and electronic media coverage of Lebanese issues. Given the globalization of the media, it was no surprise to discover the ‘Muslim’ frame applied by the US, UK and European media to the Australian events, however, discussion by NSW State politicians and NSW opinion leaders retained the original focus on ‘policing’ and ‘gang warfare’ ‘race.’