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ADVANCING AUSTRALIAN ‘SHARED SECURITY’: SECULAR-RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING NETWORKS

Anna Halafoff

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia  Anna.Halafoff@arts.monash.edu.au

ABSTRACT
The role of religious leaders in promoting social cohesion and ‘shared security’ is increasingly being examined by scholars, as is the growing multifaith movement. The VIIIth World Assembly of Religions for Peace first proposed the notion of ‘shared security’ and the importance of religious leaders’ role in advancing such a concept in Kyoto 2006. A recent study, Managing the Impact of Global Crisis Events on Community Relations in Multicultural Australia (Bouma et al. 2007) has documented the impacts of international crisis events and discourses of exclusion on religiously diverse communities in Australia, in particular rising Islamophobia, migrantophobia and attacks on multiculturalism. Religious communities have been far from passive in their responses to the impact of these events initiating dialogue and educational activities to dispel negative stereotypes and attitudes. State actors, including police, have prioritized engagement with religious leaders resulting in a rise of state supported multifaith and secular-religious peacebuilding activities. This paper argues that, in response to global risks of terror and exclusion, secular-religious networks including religious leaders, state actors, educators and the media have the potential to advance ‘shared security’ in multifaith societies, by drawing on Australian experiences documented in the Global Crisis Events study.

1 INTRODUCTION
The role of religious leaders in promoting social cohesion and ‘shared security’ is increasingly being examined by scholars, as is the growing multifaith movement. The VIIIth World Assembly of Religions for Peace first proposed the notion of shared security and the importance of religious leaders’ role in advancing such a concept in Kyoto 2006. This paper argues that understanding religions’ ambivalent role in perpetuating both cultures of violence and cultures of peace (Appleby 2000; Juergensmeyer 2003; Conley-Tyler and Halafoff 2006a; 2006b) holds the key to countering religious extremism and enhancing social cohesion. In response to the negative impacts of global crisis events, such as September 11, 2001, in particular rising Islamophobia, migrantophobia and attacks on multiculturalism, religious communities in Australia have been far from passive. Communities have initiated a multitude of multifaith dialogue and educational activities to dispel negative stereotypes and attitudes, in many cases in cooperation with state actors, including police. This paper examines the role of multifaith and increasingly secular-religious networks in advancing ‘shared security’ in Australia.

2 DISCUSSION
2.1 RELIGION, CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING
Since the mid 1990s and particularly following the events of September 11 there has been a growing interest in the role of religion in conflict, conflict transformation and peacebuilding.
Religious peacebuilders argue that religion has an important contribution to make towards transforming cultures of violence into cultures of peace and draw on peace theory as a foundation for their practices. Critical to peace theory is the concept that peace is not merely an absence of war, an unstable/negative peace imposed by the state using military control fear and intimidation, but rather a stable/positive peace where war is not expected and causes of conflict, both direct and structural are addressed and ultimately transformed into conditions which create peaceful and sustainable societies. This process occurs through “good governance” that gives voice to grievances before they erupt into conflicts and seeks co-operative solutions to problems at the causal level (Thomas 2005:190-191). Peacebuilders are "agents of social change" who "seek nonviolent solutions to social problems, oppose all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion or ethnicity, and seek to end unjust economic, political and social practices" (Appleby 2003:237). Their goal is to build "social and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and non-violence" therefore a central element of peacebuilding is "structural reform" (Little & Appleby 2004:5-6).

Religious peacebuilding has also been described as including education, conflict resolution and reconciliation, and socio-political change through non-violent means (Sampson 1997:274). Religious actors who advocate non-violence and pluralism are present within all major religious traditions (Appleby 2003:251).

Religious traditions also provide detailed methodologies for personal and collective peace realization. Religions advocate the importance of virtues and ethics and of cultivating one’s good qualities. This aspect of religion is highly reflexive. Many religions also advocate the need of transforming a self-centered, adversarial individualism or group dynamics into cooperative and compassionate mutuality (Knitter 1995:71). It is this reflexive nature and the ability to take personal responsibility for transformation that lies at the foundation of religious peacebuilding and conflict transformation (Sampson 1997:276).

Alongside their peacebuilding qualities religious traditions paradoxically are often hierarchical, patriarchal, didactic and have texts that legitimize discrimination and practices that are violent (Appleby 2003:237). In 1986 Elise Boulding, declared the “holy war” and the “peaceable kingdom” as representing two distinct and contrasting cultures within most religious traditions. All of the major religions proclaim peace as a worthy pursuit and ultimate goal at both the individual and collective social level however between and within the major traditions are diverse and often contradictory theories of how this common goal is best achieved, as all concurrently justify violence and war when threatened (Schmidt-Leukel 2004: 3-4). In addition the claim of superiority inherent in all major religions and therefore the reality of “mutual superiority claims” render “mutual supersession” and therefore predisposition to conflict inevitable (Schmidt-Leukel 2004: 3-7). Juergensmeyer (2003:149-150) argues that what makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle and cosmic war in the service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious terrorism serve not only as tactics in a political strategy but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation.

Religion according to scholars has always played an ambivalent role in perpetuating cultures of violence and cultures of peace (Appleby 2000; Juergensmeyer 2003; Conley-Tyler and Halaffo 2006a;2006b). Understanding this ambivalence holds the key to countering religious extremism and enhancing social cohesion for, as religion is “part of the problem” it is critical that it play a significant part in “the solution” (Sacks 2003:9).

2.2 THE RISE OF MULTIFAITH PEACEBUILDING NETWORKS FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

There has been a long established global history of interfaith peacebuilding initiatives, since the formation of The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1893,
involving religious community leaders in dialogue, celebrations and conflict resolution. Indeed a dramatic rise in multi-faith engagement preceded September 11 following the end of the Cold War (Gopin 2000). Diane Eck (2005:21-26) described the initial fears of Sharifa Alkateeb of the North American Council of Muslim Women that the events of September 11 would provide a “cataclysmic setback” to interfaith relations however it has had the opposite effect becoming a stimulus for local and global multi-faith engagement.

Before September 11, in the 1990’s, multi-faith peacebuilding initiatives arose mainly out of ecumenical Christian organisations with a focus on East/West dialogue and Indigenous spirituality. Following the events of September 11, the focus has shifted to dialogue between the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There has also been a significant shift in who is initiating the dialogue, to Muslim communities, academic and state actors thereby increasingly incorporating a social cohesion and security agenda. Indeed following September 11 issues of national security have been imposed on multi-cultural, multi-faith and ethnic organizations (Lopez 2005:35) and to promote harmony through commitment to social cohesion by challenging cultures of violence and promoting cultures of peace in their stead.

2.3 SECULAR-RELIGIOUS NETWORKS FOR SHARED SECURITY: AN AUSTRALIA CASE STUDY

In 2004 the Isma e-Listen report documented a rise of discrimination toward Arab and Muslim Australian's (HREOC 2004 in Bouma et al.2007:7). In response to these concerns, Monash University and the Australian Multicultural Foundation conducted a study on Managing the Impact of Global Crisis Events on Community Relations in Multicultural Australia for the Queensland and Victorian Governments in 2005/2006. The findings of this study were published in 2007.

The study employed a critical action research method, which was defined as incorporating three principle components of: “shared ownership of research projects; community-based analyses of social problems; and an orientation towards community action” (Kemmis & McTaggart 2003 in Bouma et al 2007:9). 20 semi-structured interviews with individuals and 18 focus groups were conducted with a non-random purposive sample of Culturally, Religiously and Linguistically Diverse (CRALD) communities in Victoria and Queensland. 75 females and 108 males, including 21 youths, totaling 183 participants were interviewed. Half of the participants were from regional areas. "African, Albanian, Arabic, American, Anglo-Australian, Chinese, Fijian, El Salvadorian, Greek, Indonesian, Indian, Italian, Iraqi, Pacific Islander, Papua New Guinean, Filipino, Polish, Sri Lankan, Thai, Turkish, British and Vietnamese groups; and Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim communities” participated in the study (Bouma et al 2007:9).

Respondents identified the following as Key Global Crisis Events that had affected their communities: “US attacks on 11 September, 2001; Bali bombings on 12 October, 2002; Boxing Day tsunami on 24 December, 2004; London bombings on 7 July, 2005; Cronulla riots on 12 December, 2005; Danish cartoons controversy in January 2006; on-going Iraq war and the "war on terror”” (Bouma et al 2007: 39).

Secondary Global Crisis Events included: Terrorist attacks in Madrid, Mumbai and Egypt and arrests in Melbourne and Sydney; Conflict in East Timor, Africa, Palestine-Israel, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, First Gulf War, wars in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Chechnya, and the invasion of Tibet; the hijab ban in France; the Dutch filmmaker's murder; French and Danish riots and attacks on multiculturalism; Van Ngugen's execution in Singapore; the Panchen Lama's kidnapping; the Karmapa’s escape; Schapelle Corby's arrest and imprisonment and drug trafficking in general; Tampa and responses to asylum seekers; terror laws; interest rates; unemployment and workplace relations (Bouma et al 2007: 41-42).
Significantly the study documented a rise of: Islamophobia against Muslim communities; misplaced Islamophobia affecting "non-Muslim Arab, Lebanese, Indian, Sikh, Pacific Islander, and African communities"; migrantophobia, xenophobia, racism and religious vilification (Bouma et al. 2007:5).

The study also identified a strong sense of cultural and religious proximity among Australia’s CRALD communities illustrated by the following examples:

Indian communities suffered more during the Mumbai bombings, and Iraqi communities continue to suffer as a result of the Iraq War. Anglo-Australians also feel a sense of cultural and/or religious proximity to global crisis events: the collective grief following September 11, the London and Bali bombings are evidence of the same phenomenon (Bouma et al. 2007:5).

CRALD communities reported that "[b]oth media and governments have played a role in determining the nature and extent of the impact of these events”. The media's “misrepresentation of culture and religion” accounted for the largely negative opinion of media held by CRALD communities (Bouma et al. 2007:5). The "lack of support for multiculturalism at the Commonwealth government level” (Bouma et al. 2007:5) was also noted by communities as were concerns raised about "an emerging narrow nationalism in Australia, evident in the ‘Values Debate’”. Respondents expressed that "this rhetoric could be inflammatory and lead to acts of violence against CRALD communities, such as the Cronulla riots” (Bouma et al. 2007:5-6).

However, CRALD communities have been far from passive in their responses to the impact of these events. Despite national and international debates and critiques of multiculturalism, the "resilience of multiculturalism” reported by CRALD communities is worthy of mention (Bouma 2007:6). The study documented a significant rise in “activities that promote understanding of Muslim culture and of multifaith initiatives... to counter ignorance and prejudice in the community” following the events of September 11 (Bouma et al 2007:6).

The report also documents that CRALD communities have “sought to manage the negative impact of global crisis events... by establishing networks between governments, police, emergency services, faith communities, educators and media" informed by the principles of multiculturalism (Bouma et al 2007:6). In so doing “multiculturalism, and increasingly multifaith dialogue, are being used as strategies not only to build social cohesion but also to advance networks for shared security” in Australia (Bouma et al 2007:6).

These initiatives include: The Prime Minister’s Summit with Muslim community leaders on 23 August 2005; Australian Government funded Muslim youth summits and communication training for Muslim community leaders; Australian Government’s Living in Harmony grants and the National Action Plan to address threats to Australia’s social cohesion; The Queensland Government’s Multicultural Assistance Program (MAP) including the Local Area Multicultural Partnership (LAMP) program, Multicultural Festival and the Muslim Community Engagement Strategy; The Victorian Governments’ Community Accord, Celebrate our Cultural Diversity Week, Multi Faith Leaders Forum and Multi faith, Multicultural Youth Forum; The Australasian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau (APMAB) and Victoria Police’s Multicultural Advisory Unit and Multi faith Council (Bouma et al 2007:22-26).

Both the Queensland and Victorian governments and Premiers Bracks and Beattie have been vocal in their commitment to multiculturalism as a strategy to promote social cohesion in their respective states and in Victoria, to counter-terrorism (Bouma et al. 2007: 25; State Government Victoria 2005:3). It is significant that riots took place in
Cronulla, NSW and not in Brisbane or Melbourne, arguably in part as a result of such networks and strong commitment to multiculturalism in Queensland and Victoria.

The most detailed account of the efficacy of these networks is provided in the following description of post-conflict reconstruction following the publication of the Danish cartoons:

When the Danish Cartoons were published this created an international scandal and violent protests erupted in many cities around the world. In Brisbane, the *Courier-Mail* published one of the cartoons and Premier Beattie, despite his popularity with migrant communities and his support of multiculturalism, initially condoned the publication on the grounds of freedom of speech. Muslim communities were upset about these events and expressed these concerns to Queensland Police. Muslim leaders also approached the Premier and had a meeting with the editor of the *Courier-Mail*. During and following discussions Muslim leaders were quick to pacify the community and encourage them not to take action. These communication networks between religious community leaders, politicians, police and the media were crucial in averting a potentially dangerous situation (Bouma et al 2007: 58).

Further investigation into the efficacy of such networks is required.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

Recent events in Australia provide a pertinent illustration that despite the post 9/11 rise in discourses of exclusion and discrimination, particularly evident in the Australian Values Debate and the 2005 Cronulla riots in Sydney, religious communities have been far from passive in their responses to the impact of these events initiating dialogue and educational activities to dispel negative stereotypes and attitudes. Concurrently a multiplicity of initiatives aimed at building secular-religious networks between the state, state actors such as police, religious and ethnic community leaders have been undertaken in Victoria and Queensland, informed by the principles of multiculturalism. CRALD communities have reported the success of these initiatives in advancing social cohesion and ‘shared security’ in Australia. Alternately, assimilationist, exclusionist strategies can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and thereby security risks (Bouma et al. 2007; Halafoff 2006a; 2006b).

Despite the increase and success of these secular-religious networks in Australia there has been little research undertaken in this area. Preliminary research indicates that similar networks have been established in the UK and US in response to the global impact of crisis events and discourses of exclusion on multifaith communities. My current doctoral thesis examines multifaith and secular-religious peacebuilding networks in Western societies. I hope in future to be able to undertake a similar study in cross-cultural contexts.

### 4 REFERENCES


