Anti-cosmopolitanism and ‘ethnic cleansing’ at Cronulla

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Introduction

Anti-cosmopolitanism was at the centre of Sydney’s Cronulla beach riots in December 2005, and in this chapter we argue that a logic of ‘ethnic cleansing’ is at work in these processes. Contemporary cosmopolitanism involves a sense of commonality with other peoples, despite their diversity – a sense heightened by globalising processes that make more immediate, extensive and inevitable the contact with strangers, and also create more shared and more universal human problems. Cosmopolitanism also involves an ethics of hospitality, or at least of accepting the stranger without hostility.\textsuperscript{1} We may define anti-cosmopolitanism as a reaction to these principles and practices. Anti-cosmopolitanism seeks to close off the openness to the other and to difference; it emphasises incompatibility, rejects a moral community with the other, and adopts hostility towards the other.

It has been widely remarked that some of the 5,000 crowd which rioted during anti-immigrant vigilante violence at
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Cronulla on that summer Sunday afternoon wore t-shirts with the slogan ‘ethnic cleansing unit’. If we do not dismiss this as mere hyperbole of bravado and misplaced humour, what might we learn by actually considering this declaration at its face value? By this we do not suggest that the rioters were engaged in genocide, any more than categorising the riot as a ‘pogrom’ means that people were killed (though it was largely good fortune, as well as valuable intervention by police and paramedics, that none were). The point is that, as with much hate crime, the motivation was to ‘purge’ a given area of certain categories of people, by driving numbers of them away and forcing the rest to make themselves as invisible as possible. This objective was in fact clearly and repeatedly stated in the racist hate utterances, or malediction, of the ‘white’ Cronulla rioters, and the purpose of this chapter it to analyse that theme as paradigmatically anti-cosmopolitan.

Anti-cosmopolitanism lies on a continuum of xenophobia; one extreme of which is the exterminism for those identified by Ghassan Hage as the ‘other of the will’. Hage distinguishes this other from the ‘other of the body’, the expropriated and exploited colonised:

…it was his or her supposed inferiority and lack of intelligence that made the lazy other of colonisation, the other that is all body, exploitable. The other of the mind, the cunning other, was by definition un-exploitable, for if anything, such an other had the potential to himself or herself exploit the European colonisers, manipulate them and use them against their will. By definition such an other could only be exterminated.

The ‘Arab Other’ is often such an other, argues Hage, making parallels with the exterminism of Nazism. Levey and Moses also compare contemporary anti-Arab or anti-Muslim racism, such as that which erupted at Cronulla, with European antisemitism, from the nineteenth century to the Nazi period. It
is important, therefore, to see contemporary anti-Middle Eastern or anti-Muslim hate crime as not a mere individual offence, but one entrenched in particular social relations and fulfilling a certain function, as is clearly shown in the Cronulla case.

Barbara Perry characterises hate crime as a violent assertion of othering that reinforces an existing power relation:

Hate crime involves acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed towards already stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order. It attempts to recreate simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrator’s group and the ‘appropriate’ subordinate identity of the victim’s group.7

Hate crime is thus produced by the power relations in which it is committed, and it operates to reproduce these power relations. As Levin and McDevitt observe, ‘hate crimes...target not only a primary victim, but everyone in the victim’s group’.8 Hate crime, therefore, is a ‘message’ crime: ‘it sends a message to the entire group to which the victim belongs that they are ‘different’ and that they ‘don’t belong’.9

There is always necessarily a spatial dimension to the belonging, and to the message. The perpetrators arrogate to themselves both their own belonging and the prerogative to judge who belongs or not. A crucial question is, ‘Belong where?’ The answer must be in spatial terms, be it a beach, a local government area, a nation, or all of the above.

Within the space of belonging (or not), we can distinguish for analytical purposes two fundamental groups: those on behalf of whom (whether they like it or not) the hate crime message is sent, and the intended recipients of the message; a category that goes well beyond the victims of the hate crime. This is an analytical distinction, since it is possible to belong to neither group, and some can ‘belong’ more than others. The recipients
of the hate crime message are not targeted for anything they might have done; they are targeted for being who they are, or, rather, being who they are, where they are – where they do not belong. They transgress by being there. From the point of view of hate criminals, they must be expelled from ‘our’ space, or forced to keep such a low profile that they are not identifiable in it.

Reclaiming the sand

On the weekend prior to the Cronulla riot, three ‘white’ lifesavers, after finishing their shift on North Cronulla beach, entered into a verbal altercation with young men of Lebanese immigrant background. The verbal conflict between these two groups was not unusual on North Cronulla beach, where the privileged, cloistered white middle class of the ‘insular peninsula’ in the Shire of Sutherland came face-to-face with ethnic minorities of Sydney’s paradigmatically working-class western suburbs. Cronulla is the only beachside suburb of Sydney with a direct train line from the inland western suburbs. As such, this beach has long been frequented by diverse populations who travel from the western suburbs, and this has long been resented by the local residents who regard the space as their own. In recent decades, this once very apparently class-based conflict has been racialised, in the context of moral panic over the Arab or Muslim Other, and the quite commonplace clashes between groups of young men on weekends has been much represented as a problem of ‘Lebanese gangs’.

On that fateful day – a week before the riot – the white off-duty lifesavers were marking their territory, and making claims about who can use the beach and under what conditions. During the altercation, one lifesaver asserted the stereotype that ‘Lebs can’t swim’, implying that those not there for, nor dressed for, this proper use of the beach, did not belong there. This
taunt was followed with the challenge, ‘Piss off, you scum!’13
These Anglo young men of Cronulla had drawn a ‘line in the sand’14 and the young men from the western suburbs who would not have their right to be on the beach, nor their masculinity, so easily trashed, readily stepped over it. One of them swung the first punch, and a fight ensued, in which some of the lifesavers were severely injured.15

By Monday morning, when right-wing talkback radio host Alan Jones began his eponymous breakfast program, the story of the assaults had become headline news. Over the next five days the media and public commentators (‘led’, as he would later claim, by Alan Jones), made the assaults and the ‘cleaning up’ of Cronulla beach the hot topic. By Tuesday, a person or persons unknown had created and forwarded an SMS call to arms – one that was clear in its appeal to those who belong and its intention towards those who do not:

Aussies...this Sunday every fucking Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day...
Bring your mates and let’s show them that this is our beach and they are never welcome back.16

This now infamous text message was circulated widely in the lead-up to the Cronulla riots. On one single day (9 December), Alan Jones repeated the text message five times on his high-rating commercial radio program.17 Its text was reprinted in the high-circulation Sydney tabloid, the Daily Telegraph, as well as in the broadsheet Sydney Morning Herald. The combination of the mass distribution of this text message, and the media’s constant repetition of it led to the first anti-immigrant riot in Australia since 1934. On the Sunday of the riot, by 8 am crowds had begun to arrive at Cronulla, complete with Australian flags, and many bottles of alcohol.18

When the day was done, thirty-one people had been injured including six police officers and two ambulance officers
responsible for retrieving and aiding the relatively small number of non-Anglo beachgoers and bystanders – most presumably having been aware of what had been planned on that day from the media coverage. Once the sand had settled, eighty people had been detained with over 200 charges; none of which related to the racist call to arms and incitement to violence, nor the threats of anti-immigrant violence used throughout that day. The vigilante mob had been accorded by the media and a certain indulgence by the state what Barbara Perry terms ‘permission to hate’.

Driving ‘them’ out

In the *Daily Telegraph* article two days before the riot, beachside Maroubra local white hero and convicted criminal, the surfer Koby Atherton informed the Cronulla boys that Maroubra was not ‘swamped’ by ‘Middle Eastern gangs’ because ‘we drove them out’. The advice was taken and not only by the Cronulla boys – contrary to those who present the Cronulla riots as a ‘clash of masculinities’. At the riots, nineteen-year-old Kayla told the *Telegraph* (on hand to appraise its handiwork): ‘We are here to support the Shire and get these Lebs off our beaches. This is God’s country, and it’s time they left’. A Cronulla local, sixteen-year-old Samantha, articulated unequivocally the hatred and the purpose of the violence in its ethnic cleansing: ‘I hate the Lebs. Today I punched one fat girl in the face. We just want them off our beaches’. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the violence broke out on the Sunday afternoon ‘when a Lebanese youth and his girlfriend were walking along the North Cronulla beachfront. According to their account, two girls turned around and screamed, ‘Lebanese get off our f---ing beaches’. At that, related nineteen-year-old Mustafa, ‘the whole street turned on us’. He was chased by a posse of sixty-odd, trapped against a door, and bashed until he was bruised all over.’
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In order to be violently attacked that day, it was sufficient to be Lebanese, ‘Middle Eastern-looking’, Muslim or ‘wog’, or mistaken for one of these, and to be on or near one of the Cronulla beaches. A fifteen-year-old girl was chased down a sand dune by an angry mob, who tore the hijab from her head and waved it around as a trophy. A pair of Bangladeshi students was pursued to their car, which was pelted with bottles as they escaped.

Naming ‘them’

‘Hate speech’ or malediction has traditionally been constructed primarily as an act of name-calling. The primary objective of such name-calling is the ranking of people in a hierarchy of otherness and belonging that confers rights and privileges on those who are deemed to belong and marginalises those who are named as other.26 The ‘Aussies’ interpellated by the text message are in fact a particular category of Australian, valorised in contradistinction to ‘Lebs and wogs’ in the ‘fantasy of White Supremacy’.27 In this naming, the right to ‘our’ beach is asserted, and ‘they’ are presumed to be rejected as ‘never welcome’. It is intend to be hurtful, and the cruelty inflicted functions to force out the named others from a given territory, or to militate against their rights within it, or to bully them into minimising their profile or visibility. Other actors, apart from the rioters, also applied such labels of exclusion, both before and after the riot. For example, Alan Jones claimed that ‘this lot were Middle-Eastern grubs’28, and Peter Debnam (leader of the New South Wales parliamentary opposition) spoke of ‘Middle Eastern thugs’.29 The act of turning a name into an abusive term derives its potency not only from the words themselves. Rather, the social context of the utterance predisposes the act of exclusion and the creation of secondary consequences.30 When power speaks, the label takes on a certain reality; a social definition of those named.
A consistent linguistic partner to naming is pathologising.\(^\text{31}\) In societies that are vigilant in containing the other, the process of defining them as dirty, unclean or untouchable is not just a matter of irrational individual impulses, it is institutionally bound. Forty years ago, Mary Douglas outlined the processes at work in defining bodies and things as dirt.\(^\text{32}\) She suggested that eliminating dirt is an active process of organising the untidy nature of everyday life, and the process of ‘separating, demarcating and punishing transgressions’ assists individuals and societies in controlling the unsettling presence of things and people that disturb the sense of order.\(^\text{33}\) In contemporary Australia – where there has been for three decades an official policy of multiculturalism recognising and providing for cultural plurality – the strategy of labelling the ethnic other as dirty or impure harks back to the cultural politics of the White Australia Policy in place from the late nineteenth century to the late 1960s. It is a reassertion of the privilege of whiteness by those anti-cosmopolitans who have experienced marginalisation and insecurity in the process of globalisation, and who blame cosmopolitan elites for foisting multiculturalism upon them.

Notions of ‘matter out-of-place’ and ‘this place is a mess’ were central to the debates over the use of the beach at Cronulla. In particular, Muslim and Arab Australians were perceived to be in the wrong place because they wore too many clothes, and were held to be responsible for the garbage strewn across the beach.\(^\text{34}\) Throughout Alan Jones’s week of hatred he drew on allusions to dirt and infestation. For two days, he likened immigration to being invited into a family home, and he claimed that Lebanese Australians were trashing the home into which they were invited, stating, ‘...but you’re not going to sit down at the table and start spitting on my mother or putting your feet under the table, or bringing dog manure in with you.’\(^\text{35}\) Alan Jones also conflated Lebanese Australians with an infestation\(^\text{36}\), and the far right was claiming that ‘the gov needs to round up the leb vermin’.\(^\text{37}\) In the hate utterances of the Cronulla rioters,
the cultures and religious practices of Muslim and Lebanese Australians were constantly conflated with disease and infection, as well as with dirtiness and, as we shall see below, with crime, sexualised predatoriness and violence. These were all tropes applied to the Asian other (especially Chinese and South Asians) from the nineteenth century onwards during the period of the White Australia policy.  

**Transgression**

Both instigators and perpetrators of hate crime often rationalise their hatred and violence by supporting the notion that their victims (or their ilk) were deserving of punishment or, perhaps more correctly, banishment. In this ideology, their collective deviance leads to and justifies their targeting. We shall see that this ideological manoeuvre depends on the same categories of belonging, and the power to define them, that characterise the ‘ethnic cleansing’ function of hate crime. Teaching the transgressors a lesson through hate crime depends on the power to identify the deviance of those who do not belong, and to attribute it to the transgressive category. Those who have this power, those who belong, by definition, cannot be caught up in this type of collective punishment.

Let us consider for the moment the analogy of citizenship. When Prime Minister John Howard said, ‘We shall determine who comes to this country, and the circumstances under which they come’, he was not talking about the authors of this chapter, since we are citizens. Whether we like it or not, we are part of that ‘we’. We have a right to come to Australia; that belonging is uncontested. It is not conditional on our good behaviour within the national space – or our civility or incivility within that space. Australian citizens who behave badly, however, cannot be banished from the national space. So we have one group whose belonging is categorical and unconditional; who have, as
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it were, a licence to behave badly, within certain limits. Then we have a group whose entry to and occupation of the national space depends on their civility, their abiding by the rules, as judged by those who belong. They are ‘visitors’, who must be on their best behaviour. There are limits to which this metaphor of citizenship can be extended to belonging within the space of a shire or a beach, but it can elucidate a number of the postures towards ‘outsiders’ at Cronulla and how their deviance was labelled with the otherness.

The ‘outsiders’ in question were variously called ‘visitors’ to Cronulla beach or ‘invaders’ as against ‘locals’ who rightfully belonged. ‘We grew here, you flew here’, was one of the slogans borne on surfsiders’ bodies on the riot day. The supposed fly-ins were accused of a multitude of sins, all of them racialised, and many on face value not exceptionally unusual or unacceptable had they been committed by those who belonged. ‘They are aggressive, loud, swear and pick fights,’ was a common complaint, reported for example in the distant West Australian. As a number of commentators pointed out, such behaviour is neither foreign nor new to Cronulla. One remark sent in the name of ‘Deano’ to the Sydney Morning Herald’s online forum said, ‘There’s nothing more Australian than a good blue on a hot summers [sic] day’. However, ‘[t]hey trash the beach’, ‘[t]hey flick their cigarettes everywhere’. A year earlier, the mayor of Waverley had expressed concern that at any one time there were 700,000 cigarette butts on Bondi Beach, and there was no suggestion that most of them were smoked by Lebanese. Indeed, many would hold the equally absurd opinion that this behaviour was quintessentially Australian. When Manly’s council banned smoking on the beach in the same year because of cigarette butts, ABC reporter Emma Alberici observed, ‘How things have changed since the 70s when movies like Puberty Blues were reflecting an Australian culture of sun, sand, surf and a coggie’. Then there was the accusation that ‘they’ kick footballs or soccer balls at or near people on the beach. Ball games on beaches
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were held to be so traditionally Australian that it was acceptable to close off a section of the sand on the iconic Bondi Beach in 2000 for the Olympics beach volleyball stadium for which Australia was destined to win. Even more bizarrely, a Castle Hill resident, Bradley, came to throw in his lot with the Cronulla locals protecting their way of life, telling a *Telegraph* reporter he was ‘tired of the “unethical” approach to work and tax he had witnessed by men of Middle Eastern descent’.46 This accusation sits weirdly within a national popular culture holding up the ‘sickie’ as an iconic national institution or unabashedly joking about tax-dodging as a national sport. As Senator Bartlett wryly remarked in another context:

‘Some people suggest from time to time that tax dodging is an Australian tradition...If this is the case, one could argue that any migrants who engage in this are just adopting quickly to the Australian way of life, something opponents of multiculturalism usually call for’.47

We are not aiming here to highlight hypocrisy, though that would be easy enough if the point was polemic. The point here is rather to show that the characteristics labelled as deviant and other in targeting candidates for hate-crime ethnic cleansing can be ones which would otherwise be quite permissible, indulged or at least long-suffered in those who ‘belong’.

Criminalisation

In contrast to *pathologising* (which focuses on the bio-medical ordering of dirt or disease), *criminalising* the other is informed by the socio-legal ordering of deviance.48 Central to the hate speech used by rioters, the media (in particular, Alan Jones) and politicians in the days leading up to, during, and after the Cronulla riot, was the labelling of Muslim and Lebanese
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Australians as criminals. According to Alan Jones: ‘This is gang stuff mate…it’s a gang problem’49, and, ‘All across Sydney there is a universal concern that there are gangs, the gangs are of one ethnic composition’.50 Or, from others:

…the locals do not use the picnic areas…because of the Middle Eastern visitors to the Shire, they are dangerous.51

…every night we witness gang violence, including stabbing, ram raids, drive-by shootings…let’s identify who these people are…they’re Lebanese gangs.52

Constructing young Muslim and/or Lebanese Australian men as criminals gains its efficacy from the preliminary pathologisation and demonisation of not only ‘ethnic’ bodies, but just as importantly, ‘ethnic’ cultures. Incrementally, the named other shifts from being just different, to being diseased, immoral, criminal and, as such, requiring physical containment.53 With each layer of malediction, the perpetrator is given more reason, more justification for ‘getting tough’. While these may be ‘mere words’, they are also tied to institutional actions. Naming, pathologising and demonising the other leads to institutional surveillance and control of the other. While health professionals and moral leaders play central roles in the containment of pathology and ‘folk devils’, criminalising the other can lead to authorised and unauthorised policing of the other.54 Both responses were strongly advocated by Jones and his callers in the week prior to the riot:

…now the police can’t do the job, even though we’ve put faith in them and we want them to do the job, that means to me the next step is vigilantes and personal protection by ourselves.55

J: if the police can’t do the job the next tier is us.
AJ: Yeah, good on you.56
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...now, these people have got to know that we’re not going to cop this stuff anymore.57

Misogyny and the sexualised other

The major purported deviance of Lebanese/Middle Easterners/Muslims at Cronulla – that which was held to justify the attacks on them – was their lack of respect for ‘our’ women. ‘They look down on our women...They don’t really assimilate to our way of life’.58 A Cronulla beachgoer, exculpating the vigilantism there, told an ABC radio reporter during the 2005 riots: ‘We come here, we just get run over by Lebanese and wogs and shit. It’s not cool. They come here, they disrespect the women, they disrespect the beach.’59 A group of friends from Cronulla who turned up for the ‘Leb and wog bashing day’ recounted a similar story to journalist Liz Jackson:

MICK: Um...I think it’s got to do a lot with respect for women.

SARAH: I can’t go to the beach, normally, and wear what I’d usually wear. Because when I do, I feel as though I’m getting targeted. Like, people saying to me, like, just names and stuff, that I’m being called for wearing a bikini in my own shire. Like, I’ve grown up here. And I’m a local at the beach.60

These comments underline the point that it was respect only for ‘our’ women that was the issue, given that the self-appointed avengers against ‘Leb’ misogyny at Cronulla had chased a frightened fifteen-year old girl down a sand dune, ripped the hijab from her head, and waved it triumphantly as a souvenir.61 ‘Our girls can’t get from the water to their towels without being threatened by these maggots,’ explained one local to tabloid reporters: the ‘maggots’ had it coming to them. ‘Two girls of Middle Eastern descent were also pushed to the ground and
pelted with beer bottles, as police tried to rescue them."62 Another young Muslim girl, also wearing hijab, was chased along with a terrified policeman by a mob of youths. Isolated from his command post, the police officer tried to fend off the youths as he pushed the young woman into a kiosk for safety, while the youths shouted, ‘There’s a Leb in there!’ and ‘Kill the Leb!’63

One of the Cronulla ‘combatants’, Brad, told a journalist from The Age that, as the reporter put it: ‘the Lebanese frequenting the beach are ogling and mistreating local women, making them feel unsafe’. Brad and his three mates had just ‘ogled’ two passing girls wearing bikinis as he told the reporter that the Lebanese youths have ‘got no respect, they hate women and they are gutless’64. This same accusation has been levelled since the nineteenth century against less ‘respectable’ millieux of working-class male youth. Decent young female flâneurs could not promenade by the seaside without filthy invective insulting their womanhood issuing from idly lounging larrikins looking for trouble.65 What is actually an attribute of working-class masculinity among certain youth subcultures becomes represented in racist ideology as foreign, and as if the foreignness were the cause of the deviance.66

**Terrorising**

Terrorising through threats of bodily harm is the final theme of malediction considered here. When a reference to bodily harm is made, speakers do more than voice a desire, they act; they create an instantaneous threat and a set of consequences tied up in the threat (such as physical or emotional dysfunction).67 The threat or reminder of death is the perpetrator’s most effective tool in silencing the other. Further, when a threat has an historical precedent of real violence, it becomes more than just a threat: it becomes an embodied experience. It is, as Iganski suggests, *in terrorem*.68
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Before and during the Cronulla riots, both the media and rioters drew upon threats of elimination as a central technique for determining who can use public spaces such as the beach. In particular, in the days leading up to the riots, Alan Jones repeated the SMS call to arms on many occasions. Interspersed with these repetitions were calls for protestors to leave it up to the police. However, he also clearly stated, or supported the statements of callers, that if the police were unable to act, then it was ‘our’ duty to defend ‘our’ land. On one occasion, he recommended that Australia’s biker gangs should be invited to defend the beach against the ‘Lebanese thugs’, and that ‘it would be worth the price of admission to watch these cowards scurry back onto the train for the return trip to their lairs’. In other circumstances, Alan Jones and others stated:

...you gotta scare, there’s got to be an element of fear in this.

...shoot one, the rest will run.

... we will destroy the mosques and any Leb that gets in our way.

...in this point in time [sic], 1 enemy at a time: Lebs first, Jews second.

Terrorising is the ultimate weapon in maledictive hate. Speech acts that threaten elimination seek to terrorise an individual into not being (in a place), or not being visible there, or to be somewhere else. There are few active responses available that do not exacerbate the chance of the threat becoming a reality. Terrorising is a dual process: a warning of what may come, but equally, a justification for acting on the threat when the threat is ignored or challenged.
‘Lebs out’

What are the consequences for those othered in this anti-cosmopolitan offensive, and for intercommunal relations? Australian-born Josh Massoud comments in the Telegraph about the effects of seeing a picture in the previous day’s paper of ‘an innocent couple clutching a bag of fish and chips [being] pelted with bottles and hatred’. The man and woman, ‘of Middle Eastern descent’, were escorted from the beach by police for their safety, as shown in the photograph by Craig Greenhill. Writes Massoud: ‘It will probably be their last alfresco dining experience Sutherland-Shire style for some time. Suffice to say, I’ll be joining them in Mediterranean exile...Isn’t that what Sunday was all about? Ridding their Eden of hooked noses, beady eyes and monobrows. I’m just one last Arabic blight on the pristine landscape.’ One Lebanese-born reader who contacted the Australian had a similar response: ‘OK, fine, we’ll stay away. If they are going to talk about me and my friends like that, I’ll go somewhere else for my milkshake’. Even before the riot, after the preceding week of vilification, Islamic youth leader Fadi Rahman said ‘Cronulla had been popular with Muslim families for many years, but many of them were too frightened to visit the beach now because of the threat of abuse.’

A young Lebanese restaurant worker told the Australian that she had been racially taunted all day at her Cronulla beach workplace on the day of the riots and that the grille of her car had been kicked in: ‘I work here and I don’t even want to be here’. A week after the riots, the Age could report, ‘There’s been no sign of any Lebanese beach-goers.’ A first-generation Lebanese immigrant in his fifties told one of the authors in the days following the riots that he would not feel comfortable about going there, not necessarily because of danger but because of the sense of hostility. A Lebanese-background young woman of the second generation reported (in an email interview in 2007) that, ‘after the incident occurred, I was uneasy about visiting
the area of Cronulla only because I didn’t know what to expect after the publications and media coverage of the disgraceful and humiliating confrontation.’ She said, ‘I felt I was being personally attacked without physically being there.’ She added, ‘My friends’ parents were also quite hesitant in allowing their children to “hang out” in Cronulla...the memories are engraved and will always have an effect on us.’ Younger generation Muslim community leader, Kuranda Seyit reflected, ‘I’ve just been thrown totally out of whack in terms of where I am here in Australian history’.

Lebanese youth leader Fadi Rahman had a historical reference point: ‘This is early Nazi Germany’.

From the other side, Cronulla dweller Amy Taylor, who had come to the gathering at the beach out of ‘respect’ for the lifesavers injured in the fight with Lebanese-background youths the previous weekend, said ‘the Lebanese guys are going to think twice about coming to Cronulla now.’ If the violence was not a good thing, that clearly was. Erin who, for fear of the Lebanese, previously would not come to Cronulla beach unless her husband was with her, was there with her husband and four-year-old daughter metres from ‘where a Middle Eastern man was bashed by a mob’. She said she ‘felt “100 per cent” safe’.

As far as those who live there are concerned, they have found themselves living with fewer Muslims, non-English-speaking background immigrants and Arabic-speakers. Cronulla was already one of the ‘whitest’, Christian and most Anglo areas in multi-ethnic and multi-faith Sydney. In the year following the riots, it became even whiter.

The 2001 census results for Cronulla show that less than a third as many Cronulla residents were born in a non-English-speaking country than for the Sydney Statistical Division overall (7.4 per cent compared to 23.0 per cent). By the 2006 census, this was 7.3 per cent compared to 24.0 per cent. There were 2 per cent recording non-Christian religion compared to Sydney’s 9.5 per cent, with, for example, 0.5 per cent Muslims compared to 3.4 per cent for Sydney. By 2006, it was recorded that 1.9 per cent
of Cronulla’s population were affiliated with a non-Christian religion compared to Sydney’s 10.9 per cent, with 0.4 per cent Muslims compared to 3.9 per cent for Sydney. The proportion who speak a language other than English at home was 7.4 per cent for Cronulla; 26.5 per cent for Sydney in 2001. Five years later, and a year after the riots, the proportion was 6.8 per cent for Cronulla; 29.3 per cent for Sydney. Those who speak Arabic (the most spoken language in Sydney apart from English and the Chinese languages) at home comprised in 200; some 0.3 per cent of the population of Cronulla, contrasting notably with the twelve times that percentage, 3.6 per cent for the Sydney Statistical Division. By 2006, they were 0.2 per cent of the population of Cronulla, contrasting with 3.9 per cent, for the Sydney Statistical Division – 19.5 times the Cronulla percentage.

There is no proof that this further ethnic bleaching was a result of the Cronulla riots. Yet there is no doubt that ‘Lebs out’ was a key slogan and objective of many of the rioters. The cultural politics of the anti-cosmopolitanism had their day, and prevailed in the aftermath of Cronulla. Nevertheless,
there was widespread revulsion at the violence, and the racism. Liberal–National party coalition Prime Minister John Howard’s denial that racism was involved did not ring true for a growing number of people, sceptical of his government’s populism after the ‘children overboard’ scandal and shamed by the politics of xenophobia and narrow nationalism. The fact that a decidedly cosmopolitan Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd succeeded him may have little to do with the Cronulla riot, but such an event is less likely to occur without the political leaders exploiting Islamophobic moral panic in the way that led to it. The Haneef affair was the last such attempt in the dying days of the Howard government, and Australian popular sympathy was overwhelming with the wrongfully accused Indian doctor. However, at the same time the 2007 campaign against a proposed Muslim school in semi-rural Camden, in another ‘white’ enclave on Sydney’s outskirts, garnered several thousand supporters and much media attention, and attracted some dog-whistling sympathy from Labor Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd during the federal election campaign of that year. The eventual Rudd Labor government was cautious, circumspect and pragmatic over the Haneef issue after taking office in 2007. It was also calmer and slightly more humane over ‘boat people’ crises – in great contrast to the Howard regime. Though under Julia Gillard’s prime ministership, since 2010 the Labor government has regressed to strongarm populism over asylum seekers. It remains to be seen what future official multiculturalism will have in Australia, but the politics of militant anti-cosmopolitanism for the while appear muted.

Conclusion

Might we still find some lessons about a ‘way forward’ for cosmopolitanism in Australia, from the events around Cronulla in 2005? Whether those victimised were targeted as Muslim,
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Middle Eastern, Lebanese or ‘wog’, it is clear that the racist wing of anti-cosmopolitanism in Australia believed that multiculturalism had allowed these others to ‘cross the line’ and not keep to ‘their place’. A key right-wing populist complaint since the ‘Blainey debate’ of the early 80s – but obtaining some hegemonic purchase after the advent of Hansonism and One Nation in 1996 and throughout the years of the Howard government – was that multiculturalism had been imposed undemocratically by ‘politically correct’ cosmopolitan elites upon those (unlike them) who most suffered from its ill effects. There is a strong class dimension to this ideology, and we should note that the presence of (white, Anglo) unemployed and petite bourgeoisie was disproportionate in the Cronulla riot and the incitement of racist violence that led to it.

By contrast, the ideal-typical cosmopolitan since the transition to capitalism has been bourgeois. What other social forces might be mobilised to counter narrow, parochial, nationalist agendas? The likely candidates are to be found in working-class movements and their allies, to the extent that sectors pursuing internationalist rather than nationalist interests can be mobilised. That would mean, crudely put, that a revival of working-class internationalism could extend the progressive aspects of the contemporary cosmopolitan project beyond its bourgeois origins and current limits. This could also help rehabilitate Australian multiculturalism by reviving the egalitarian moments of its origins, in place of the beholden ‘ethnic-leader’ and resource-competing ‘ethnic communities’ form of multiculturalism which right-wing anti-multiculturalists have, with some elements of good sense, so effectively excoriated. Whether the Australian labour movement is up to this, however, remains to be seen. Without them, there is little left but traditional intellectuals, and the cosmopolitanism of finance capital, transnational corporations and the intellectuals organic to them.
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———, Happy for an end to harassment – Beach riot: our disgrace, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 2005b, p. 5.


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Notes


4 ibid., p. 8

5 ibid.

6 Levey & Moses.


11 ‘Leb’ is a slang term used in Australia for someone of Lebanese background, or perceived to be such or identifying with such. It is not necessarily derogatory (sometimes being adopted by, especially young, Lebanese immigrants themselves), though it is often used as a disparaging label.
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15 Lawrence & Gee, p. 5.
20 ABC, ‘Riot and revenge’.
21 Perry, In The Name of Hate.
24 ibid.
31 ibid.
33 ibid., p. 4
35 ibid., p. 61.
36 ibid., p. 54.
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46 Carswell, ‘Dangerous cocktail of racism and hate’, p. 21.
50 ibid., p. 65.
51 ibid., p. 56.
52 ibid., p. 54.
53 Asquith, ‘Race riots on the beach’.
54 Asquith, ‘The harms of verbal and textual hatred’.
56 ibid., p. 46.
57 ibid., p. 62.
58 McMahon, ‘A lesson in beach etiquette’, p. 3.
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60 ABC, ‘Riot and revenge’.
64 D. Silkstone, ‘In the calm of day, a little contemplation on the beach’, The Age, 13 December 2005, p. 6.
70 ibid., p. 57.
71 ibid., p. 48.
72 ibid., p. 47.
76 McIlveen & Lawrence, p. 2.
77 Massoud, p. 19.
78 Overington & Warne-Smith, p. 20.
82 ABC, ‘Race riots erupt in Sydney’.
84 K. Lawrence, ‘Happy for an end to harassment – Beach riot: our disgrace’, Daily Telegraph, 12 December 2005b, p. 5.
85 ibid.
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