

“If anyone called me a wog, they wouldn’t be speaking to me alone”: protest masculinity and Lebanese youth in western Sydney

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the formation of what may be described as a kind of “protest masculinity” (Connell 1995, 109–119) among groups of male Arabic-speaking-background teenagers in Western Sydney, who are marginalised in the labour market and experience “hidden injuries” of racism across the gamut of everyday life: from teacher discrimination, to police harassment, to libellous media panics, to abuse on the street or public transport. Presented here are findings from a series of semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted at home with each of seven male sixteen-to-nineteen year-old Arabic-speaking-background youths, living and attending school in a south-western Sydney suburb with a sizeable and well-established Lebanese immigrant community.

In asserting the need to investigate how class, gender and ethnicity together shape the lived experiences of young people, Rob White has alluded to the comparative lack of research on ethnic minority youth in Australia (1997, 86; see also Guerra and White 1995, 1; Chan 1994, 176). This is especially true of Middle-Eastern background immigrant youth, despite the exacerbation of racism which they experienced in the wake of the Gulf War (Hage 1991). Probably in connection with intense recent public “debate” about “Asian immigration,” more studies focus on the lives of South-East Asian

immigrant youth, especially in relation to police (e.g. Cunneen 1995; Maher et al. 1997). In view of the recent moral panic about “ethnic gangs” turning press, police, political and public attention to Lebanese young men in Western Sydney (Poynting, Tabar and Noble 1998; Dixon 1998), it is timely to use this case to explore the masculinity/gender/ethnicity nexus.

Chris Cunneen (1985, 81) points out that the psychologistic, scientific-sounding “delinquency” theories of the 1950s were invariably blinkered from class relations, while describing typical male working-class attributes as indicative of this pattern.¹ He argues cogently the need to grasp theoretically the class–gender nexus in relation to the criminalisation of male working-class youth. It could be argued that much of the current discussion, both popular and academic, of “ethnic” youth breaches of law and order are equally blind towards class (in seeing the phenomenon solely as “ethnic”) as well as depoliticising racism in the way Cunneen argues that the cultural politics of class were conventionally overlooked. In the present context, there is a need for empirical studies which elaborate theory that can comprehend class and gender *and* ethnicity in the complexity of their everyday intersections.

The concept of “protest masculinity” has recently been advanced by R. W. Connell (1995, 15–17), who developed the term from Austrian psychoanalyst Alfred Adler’s notion of the “masculine protest,” a form of compensatory aggression associated with anxiety over childhood powerlessness. This form of masculinity, Connell emphasises in distinguishing his concept from Adler’s psychological one, is a *collective practice*; it is not “something inside the person.” It involves “exaggerated claims to potency” and “a pressured exaggeration ... of masculine conventions” (Connell 1995, 111). He observes the phenomenon among men in sectors of the working class at a “desperate disadvantage in the labour market.” It is characterised among the five interviewees in his life-history study (all of whom appear to be “Anglo”) by “violence, school resistance, minor crime, heavy drug/alcohol use, occasional manual labour, motorbikes or cars, short heterosexual liaisons” (Connell 1995, 110). In engaging in such collective practice, Connell asserts, the developing youth builds up “a tense, freaky facade, making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power” (1995, 111).

The term has since been extended to explore *regional* aspects of forms of young men’s culture among segments of the working class facing unemployment and poverty in de-industrialised Sheffield in the north of England (Taylor and Jamieson 1995). Máirtín Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) recent ethnography, *The Making of Men*, identifies an oppositional culture of working-class masculinity among the English “Macho Lads” group of male students at Parnell School, where the gendered rejection of the official school culture registers a protest against the very class-determined “world where we are going to end up in—no work, no money with the stupid, slave training schemes” (Mac an Ghaill 1994, 59). Two decades earlier, in different labour market circumstances, where nonetheless the State had identified the “school to work tran-

sition" as an official problem, Paul Willis's seminal *Learning to Labour* (1977) shows the ideological effect of the sexism and racism of the working-class, anti-school "Lads" in the British Midlands, as well as the paradox of their own cultural resistance leading to the reproduction of their subordination in the class structure.

With poststructuralist influences insisting on the multifaceted and constitutively "hybrid" nature of identities, Mike Donaldson (1993, 1997) offers a timely reminder that masculinities are definitively shaped by relations of class: it is these which establish the hegemony of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1983, 41; 1987). R.W. Connell (1995, 80) recognises, further, that "race relations" are also significant in the formation of masculinities. Together, these arguments suggest the need to consider the interplay between class structures and the social relations of racism in the making and re-making of forms of masculinity. The research project reported here focused, in this light, on the production and deployment of ethnicised "protest masculinities" among groups of young men subordinated by class relations and by racism: second-generation immigrant Lebanese youth in south-western Sydney.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for the local government area (LGA) in Sydney around which our interviewees live, indicate some 19.3 per cent of people come from families with annual incomes of over \$50,000, compared with over twice this figure, 42.9 per cent, for Sydney as a whole. The official unemployment rate here was 13.9 per cent, compared to the national rate of 9.2 per cent (March 1995). Some 7.5 per cent of the population in this LGA, were born in Lebanon (more than in any other of the 22 listed countries apart from Australia); 42.3 per cent were born in other than mainly English-speaking countries. Arabic is spoken as a first language by 23.5 per cent (ABS 1991 Census).

Young people in the area face a labour market strongly segmented along ethnic lines: unemployment among Lebanese-background migrants has been four to five times the national average for the past decade (Collins, Morrissey and Grogan 1995). It is currently 40 per cent, whereas the national rate is 8.8 per cent. The Lebanese with small family businesses in the area—largely migrants of peasant background who immigrated in the 1970s—tend to be part of the most marginal fractions of the petite bourgeoisie, frequently earning less than award wages and involving high degrees of family exploitation, often having resorted to small business where the alternative was unemployment (Collins et al. 1995).

Four of our interviewees, here called Ghassan, Paul, George and Nabil, were members of a friendship group at a Catholic boys' high school. Three others, Mohammed, Ahmad and Hussein, were members of another friendship group at a comprehensive coeducational state secondary school with a high proportion of—mainly Muslim—Lebanese background students. Both groups dressed in similar style: baggy trousers, loose-fitting t-shirts with well-known multinational sportswear brand-name labels, sports shoes of similar

make, baseball caps, heavy chains around their wrists and necks. They liked to listen to rap music and watch North American action movies. They went to dance music and techno music parties in “tight clothes to show off our bodies.” Hotted up cars of particular models figured prominently in their interests and pursuits. Extended families—cousins and uncles especially—were an important part of their milieux.

The data from in-depth interviews with these young men were supplemented by observations of these groups and their interactions in the public spaces between home and school, and by similar interviews with three (one Suni Muslim, one ‘Alawite Muslim, one Orthodox Christian) members of an all-female friendship group from a neighbouring state coeducational secondary school. The interviews were conducted at home on a one-to-one basis. Though the interviewer and the young men were bilingual, the interviews were conducted in English, with the odd Arabic word or phrase interposed. There were generally about an hour in length, and some were followed up with repeat interviews. All were tape-recorded, with the interviewees’ permission, and transcribed for analysis. The interviews explored the young men’s senses of ethnicity and masculinity, dynamics within and between friendship groups, relations with their families, relations of ethnicity and gender in and around school, use of language, attitudes and practices in relation to tradition and cultural maintenance. The seven cases focused upon here form part of a larger study of identity and ethnicity among male youth of Lebanese, Vietnamese and anglophone Australian background, concerning identity formation, home and school.

STICKING UP FOR EACH OTHER

Despite continual media panics about aggressive “gangs” of “ethnic” youth (e.g. Howe and Wockner 1993; *Real Life* 1993; Poynting, Tabar and Noble 1998), our interviewees tended to define the common purpose of their groups as defensive. “It’s just that we always stick by each other. Be there when others like need you. Protect others. Just stick together as one group” (George). Virtually all reported racist offence in public, and saw their group as solidarity against this. “At school if anyone called me a wog, they wouldn’t be speaking to me alone” (Ghassan). They saw this as a Lebanese attribute, which they contrasted with Anglo culture: “Like, Aussies, they don’t stick up for each other” (Mohammed). Although Mohammed’s parents were born in Syria, he identifies as “Lebanese”: “Around here it’s more like you have to be Lebanese or something. Lebanese is sort of like slang for Arab.” This identification is strategic for him:

Interviewer:... they call you Lebanese?

Mohammed: Lebanese, yeah. And I find that even though I am Syrian ... that

sort of makes my life easier Like here, it's sort of made my life sort of better I find here because I'm Lebanese, they stick by you more.

The boundaries of the group of friends who “stay Lebanese together” could be even broader: the members’ estimates of numbers varied from ten or twenty to thirty, and several agreed that two or three youths of southern European—Greek and Italian—background were members. Asked what they have in common, Ghassan gave a one-word answer: “Wogs.”

Apart from being “Lebanese—well, most of us,” their friendship group’s commonality consisted, according to Ghassan, of: “We all like to have a good time. I don’t know. Like we go out and we muck around, but basically we’re good blokes.” Here the Lebaneseness is downplayed in Ghassan’s account: “It’s not a racial thing, most of the time it’s not a racial thing. Like we’ve got two Greek people and Italian.” He repeats this in a later interview: “That’s not really strict set up. Saying, ‘Oh, we’re all Lebanese.’ We all sort of hang together. It just happened because the majority was Lebanese.”

In a different context, Ghassan, who was critical of the way some of his confreres more chauvinistically policed the ethnic contours of their group, would himself emphasise Lebaneseness. Asked, “Would you feel happy if someone of an Anglo background wanted to belong [to your group]? Do you think it would be allowed?” he replied: “they are just not too bright. I don’t know. They are just not our type. They’re Australian way and, you know, we’re Lebanese, and we have a totally different thing. Like conditions and our language and stuff.”

On the one hand, this conception of the group’s flexibility regarding ethnicity may serve in the minds of its members to contrast with their perceptions of the cliquiness of those who subordinate them in class and ethnic relations: “Australians or Pommies ... sort of rich people ... sticking their nose up, thinking they were better than us.” On the other hand, it contrasts also—in a different way—with their views of the more recently settled and more marginalised immigrant groups, the “Asians,” who are seen to stick together in exclusive groups, speaking their own language—with this sort of sticking together seen in more or less negative terms and quite differently from the way that Ghassan and his friends “stay Lebanese together.”

While the borders of these friendship groups were somewhat flexible in terms of ethnicity, this was not the case for gender. These were all-male groups. Whereas a key stated purpose and a central activity of the groups was to watch, to meet, to chat to, and to attempt to impress their female contemporaries, there was no question of the girls actually belonging to the group. The significance of both ethnicity and masculinity in group membership was reflected in the Arabic name that one circle of boys gave their group: *shi be faz’i*, or SBF, meaning “something that terrifies.” This acronym was written in stylised Arabic on their schoolbags (and probably other places), even by the members who were not literate in this language.

It was not only young women—of any ethnicity—that could not belong to

these groups. Those young men displaying certain, deprecated, styles of masculinity were also excluded: "People who can't belong to the group are some people which we would call the 'nerds,' and they would just be inside, shy people, not talk to the girls" (Ghassan). Said Mohammed, of the other group, "It's got nothing to do with religion, or what country you're from. It comes back to who has got the nicest girl. Are you a stud? You can get girls or you can't get girls." Mohammed, asked what, if anything, he felt as positive about the Anglo students, replied, "The way they get girls sometimes."

IDEOLOGICAL INVERSIONS

In the interviews, ethnicity was presented as less important than masculinity in a particular context, then appeared as a strong determinant of the forms of masculinity in another context. What Connell et al. (1982, 182) wrote about class and gender relations applies just as well to masculinity and ethnicity: "They abrade, inflame, amplify, twist, negate, dampen and complicate each other." The youths' stories, of course, with their inconsistencies and contradictions, reflect the various situations in which these social actors find themselves. Contradictory consciousness is consciousness *of* and *in* contradictory social relations. Gramsci's theory of "common sense" is useful in accounting for this phenomenon. Common sense is defined by Gramsci (1971, 419) as:

the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single, unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.

Ghassan says Lebanese (meaning Lebanese males) "are strongly built" and that "Lebanese don't excel much in the academic areas" Yet he is, himself, physically slight and studious, while so strongly identifying as Lebanese, at times, that he tells of literally wrapping himself in the nation's flag on one occasion. The image of Lebanese deployed in Ghassan's statement is of working-class migrants of peasant background, whereas he is the son of a shop-owner. He can at the same time operate with this image of Lebaneseness, and think of himself as Lebanese.

Paul says, "The Lebanese see like the daughter is like precious, you know. The boy they don't care. They don't give a shit." Yet later in the same interview, he complains of his own conflict with his parents "about going out and that. Like they want me home at a certain time and that." His mother must be afraid of the dark, he jokes. Of his sisters, he says, "Well, one of my sisters is married now, but the other one, they give her freedom. She is a bit older ... She is nineteen." The attributes he ascribes to Lebanese families conflict with

his descriptions of his own family.

Most of our interviewees rejected and resented “stereotypes” about Lebanese—and deployed similar stereotypes themselves elsewhere in the interviews. This is Hussein: “Mostly what happens, what you hear about the Lebanese, they think everybody’s the same. Like the Lebanese bash everybody at Bankstown. They think they steal. One or two Lebanese do that and they think everybody’s the same.” This is also Hussein on fighting: “There was a lot of Samoans and black people in [an inner-west sports club]. ... Mostly the Lebanese just hate them; fights start from anger.”

The majority of our informants have been offended by racist harassment or insult from police, who, like teachers (as discussed below), often reify their culture and label them as deviant. Paul relates such a provocation, which ensued in a (possibly exaggerated) “fight”:

Paul: My friend was parking in a “No Standing.” He was dropping someone off. The police said to him, “Can you move your car”? He said, “Yeah I’m just dropping someone off.” He goes, “All you wogs are the same.” ... We started arguing and started to fight.

Interviewer: You started to fight with the police?

Paul: Yeah.

Later, Paul, in discussing discrimination against the Lebanese and how it might affect his future, nevertheless takes for granted the essentialising and criminalising assumptions of his oppressors:

Like, if I wanted to be a police for example, it would be hard, because I am Lebanese. And I would be dealing mostly with Lebanese people, since they do most crimes and that. I probably wouldn’t be accepted in the police force.

Ahmad is also critical of the same stereotypes: “If a house gets stolen around the area, then the police will say it’s Lebanese. It’s in the paper, ‘Middle-Eastern appearance.’ And they mean Lebanese.” Yet later in the same interview, Ahmad assumes the very typification to which he has objected: “Say if a crime happened. It would be less [likely to be] a Greek; it would be more Lebanese or Asian. They’ve got a good reputation [the Greeks]; they don’t do nothing bad.”

There are two moments in this process. One is a moment of what Gramsci would call “good sense,” a counter-hegemonic impulse which criticises, or at least opposes, dominant, received folk wisdoms. Yet this transformatory potential is blocked through a sharing by the “subaltern strata” of the inherited “common sense” which appears to belong to all, but actually operates in the interests of the dominant.

We now focus, in turn, on two areas of social experience in connection with which these young men express such antinomies in relation to masculinity and ethnicity: conflict and fighting with other adolescent groups, and relations with young women.

“THIS IS OUR AREA”

Ghassan: Some people in my group ... think that Lebanese are the best and, you know, the strongest. They constantly speak of others behind their backs. Like they would say, “Look at that dumb nip,” or something Like they would say Lebs are the best, or “Lebs rule,” something like that Or “Lebanon is paradise” ... on the classroom blackboard, in actually Lebanese.

People only resort to such ideology precisely where they do not rule, but resent being ruled over. The moment of anti-racism can become subverted in a sort of diasporic chauvinism, or in racism directed at other, usually more recently arrived, immigrants (“dumb nips”), or at indigenous people (“the Aborigines go and get drunk and that ... they live on beer” [Paul]).

The “rule” of the “Lebs” is displayed in masculine confrontations with groups of other young men, invariably characterised by other ethnicities, and usually over domination of various public spaces, or over interactions with young women. For this purpose, the otherness of these ethnicities has to be emphasised, and this is done in very reified and one-dimensional terms. Thus, for Paul, their more settled immigrant Italian and Greek rivals are “showoffs The Europeans ... think they are a lot better, because they come from a big country. They think they are good or something.” Yet Paul regards several Greek friends as members of their mainly Lebanese circle.

A typical scenario for an altercation would be at the Italian sports club in the inner city, frequented by the youths. “One of my friends’ cousin’s girlfriend was there. And this bloke was talking with her and dancing with her I think he was Greek or Italian. He was a wog. My friend went to hit him. He pushed him” (Ahmad). Ahmad explained that the group supported his friend, but broke up the fight: they were not on home territory.

“Asians”—predominantly those of more recently arrived South-East Asian background—are seen conversely in this context, not as posturing with superior airs, but as criminalised, dangerous. They “do drugs and eat noodles” (Paul). For their outlandish eating habits, they are named *riz*—“rice,” delivered in Arabic. Paul tells of a fight that occurred at the railway station, “Lebanese versus the Vietnamese.” The issue was “to say I am stronger than you are. Like, this is our area. Nobody can be here except for us.”

Walker (1988, 47) recounts the argument that working-class (male, youth) territoriality “is a basically *apolitical* response to the problems working-class communities face in an environment over which they have limited power.” A similar argument can be made for such ideological processes serving to assuage the injuries of racism² experienced by the young men we interviewed. This is an operation of ideology in the sense of an apparent resolution, at the ideational level, of real social contradictions. There is a sort of “inversion” at work, in which “men and their relations appear upside-down, as in a *camera obscura*” (Marx and Engels 1976, 36). In this case, the subordinated appear as the “rulers”³—at least in one moment of their “common sense.” This “inversion of consciousness” reflects the “inversion of objectified social prac-

tice" (Larrain 1983, 125)—in this case, of class exploitation compounded and obscured by racism.

Here there are multidimensional "intersections" of different types of social structure having effect at the same time. An alienation overdetermined by class contradictions is experienced primarily as ethnicity and is "resolved" in relations of masculinity.

"THEY DON'T GIVE YOU A FACE"

Several of the young men interviewed related being called "dumb wogs" by [Anglo] "Australians." This insult was taken up by other immigrant groups, too. Ghassan says that, at school, "some Vietnamese would call us, 'You dumb Lebs'." Paul complains, "Teachers hate the Lebanese," and feels that teachers treat them with harsher discipline than the "Aussies." He says, of a workplace during school Work Experience, "They think that Lebanese aren't intelligent. They were shocked to see a Lebanese in Engineering." George observes that the teachers treat "the smart people" with kindness and respect, "but us, they don't give you a face or anything." The other boys, as well as the girls interviewed, reported similar experiences.

The often maligned formulation of Marx and Engels that, in any epoch, the ideas of the ruling class become ruling ideas (1976, 59; 1968, 51) can be usefully extended to domains of ethnic and gender domination, the ideas of the dominant become the dominant ideas. This simple formulation can encapsulate complex cultural processes not only of "external processes and pressures of exploitation," as Stuart Hall puts it, "but the way that internally one comes to collude with an objectification of oneself which is a profound misrecognition of one's own identity" (1995, 8). We have elsewhere analysed these types of ideological shift by introducing the concept of "self-othering" (Noble, Poynting and Tabar 1996). In these conceptions, the subordinated, while perhaps sometimes criticising and seeing through or beyond elements of the dominant ideology, will at other times take for granted those same aspects of "common sense." In Paul Willis's (1977, 119–84) terms, the "penetration" through these ideological elements in the white, British, working-class male youth culture which he studies, is rendered "partial" by "limitations," ideological manoeuvres in which patriarchy and racism play key roles. It is not often recognised that this formulation of Willis's is compatible with Gramsci's notion of a kernel of insightful "good sense," potentially critical and radical, being held back by an incoherent folklore of "common sense."⁶

Thus, for our interviewees, their criticism of the racism in being labelled "dumb Lebs" was only partial. In certain contexts, they operated with this very concept themselves. Thus Ghassan:

Lebanese doesn't excel as much in the academic areas as much as the Asian community does Physics ... is an Asian subject It's not the sort of thing

that goes for a Lebanese person. See, if someone thinks of a Lebanese person, they would think of a person who is strong physically, who run their own businesses [Ghassan's father did own a small business].

Willis's (1977) "Lads" deal with the putdown, the insult in the school's casting them as stupid, by rejecting school itself as stupid, and by inverting its value system. Those appearing to teachers as "bright" and diligent, in this manoeuvre of the Lads become "Ear'oles"—sycophantic and effeminate. Physical strength and manual labour are celebrated; deskwork and mental labour are denigrated as unmanly. Mike Donaldson (1991, 9–10) cites several examples of the same phenomenon in North America.

For the Lebanese male youths in our study, these attributes were ethnicised. Asians could be studious "nerds," but it was unthinkable for Lebanese to be so. For Ghassan, who was himself studious, this involved some strategic construction of identity. He literally draped himself in the Lebanese flag, after a fight at school between one of his group and an Asian. A flag-carrying member of SBF could not, by definition, be a "nerd."

BEING "ON TOP"

Most of our Lebanese informants saw Asian gangs as "toughest." Asians are also "smart" and the Lebanese resent that, said our interviewee, Mohammed. The anomaly of macho toughness and bookish smartness belonging to the one essentialised racial nature is discussed below. Here we note the ideological move by which the position of those immigrants historically subjected to the longest and most virulent Australian racism,⁷ the "Asians" (Curthoys and Markus 1978; Castles et al. 1988, 18, 128–35), appear "on top":

Oh, I respect like—they're smart. You know what I mean? They're very smart in Physics and Chemistry. Like I've got nothing anything against them, but I find that my society has, in other words, Lebanese. I find that they have something against them. I find the reason, I think, that is because in reality if you come to see who's got the toughest gangs, it would be the Asians. They are on top when it comes to reality. In all areas, Asians are on top ... and I find that Lebanese are jealous of that. They want to be on top. (Mohammed)

In another context, in the very act of exchanging racist insults, the Asians are seen by the Lebanese boys to "have something in common" with them:

Like offensive words for ourselves and for them. You know what I mean? For an Australian, they don't get offended, but they can always offend us, but we can't offend them. But with Chinese or something, they can offend us and we can offend them. So we have like an equal sort of thing. (Mohammed)

Here the (Anglo) "Australians" are seen to be "on top":

They can just say one word, and it—just—you know, it will just click. They want to have a fight. But because, like, Asian, they have got heaps of words that offend them. They have heaps of words that offend us. Australian have not got a lot of words that you can offend them. So they are not really being offended at

all. When it comes to violence, that's how they are offended—by violence, because they can't fight for themselves. (Mohammed)

Yet this is again inverted, while the young men of the dominant culture are seen to be “on top” in the relations of power represented in language, this insight is only partial. In the Lebanese male youths' hierarchy of masculinities, the Anglo boys appear to be “below” both themselves and the Asians, they cannot stick together, they cannot fight. Violence compensates for the words that are not available; it ameliorates the humiliation of racism. The meaning that the youths attach to this violence, “resolves,” in ideology, really unresolved contradictions occurring at the “intersection” of masculinity and ethnicity, as well as class relations.

In yet another context, a violent clash between male youths of two subordinated “ethnicities,” was reported as leading to a settlement, a detente, based on mutual respect of each group for the other's toughness and solidarity. Ghassan relates how a member of the “Lebanese” group at school was stabbed by an Asian in a playground fight over a cigarette:

The Lebs they think—they wish—they rule the place, own the place, because they've got the majority. And the Asians don't want to take any bull from them [After the stabbing] If anything, they're more friendly towards each other because there's more of an equilibrium between the two because now the Lebs know that they are capable of doing more than what they thought they could do ... 'cause of the incident, 'cause of the stabbing. Before there wasn't such thing, so the Lebs have sort of learnt from it so there's more of an equilibrium.

By such processes, these groups carved out their own territory in the school grounds, and in the local shopping centre. At school, “There's the basketballer groups. They have the basketball courts. You get the Asians. A lot of the Asians are next to the basketballers. Smart people, they hide away somehow. You can't really see them you know. And the Lebs are a big group. They stand out” (Nabil). The centre of a nearby suburb is similarly divided up, “In the square, Lebanese, but around the train station and bus stops, out of the square, Asians. Fully Asian” (Ahmad). Most of the time, there is mutual respect between the groups over this masculine possession of respective territories, and a workable reciprocity of border crossings. The defining boundaries, after all, are fairly fluid—the “Leb” who was stabbed was in fact of Greek ethnic background.

“RESPECT” AND “A SHIT LIFE”

A key term in the discourse of the young men was “respect.” Respect governed language, it called for the use of their parents' mother tongue in conversation with family elders and friends. Respect called for adherence to such parental restrictions as curfews, experienced as onerous by the adolescents. Respect for their religion—Catholic or Islamic—disciplined sexual relations. Invariably when the word was used by the interviewees, it was bound up

with ethnicity. Filial respect is thus not *just* respect of son for father or mother, but embraces a respect for the culture and ethnic traditions to which they feel an allegiance, an ethnic solidarity, even when they are experienced as burdensome constraints. This solidarity can be seen as defensive in the midst of a racist society (as with the youths' peer groups), and tied to *self*-respect insofar as it is experienced by the young men as part of their identity:

But here [this suburb], because of our religion, and close to a mosque, and heaps of Muslim friends There is always something that they will respect. For example, religion; they respect their parents. Like respect for what you are. Like for what you do, not what you are. You know what I mean? Like over there [more "Anglo" suburb] it's completely different. (Mohammed)

As fellow "wogs," Greek and Italian background immigrants are seen to accord, and are accorded, a substantial (though lesser) measure of respect, in the hierarchies reported by the young men. "Asians," while not fellow "wogs," are at least fellow immigrants, facing discriminations and difficulties which they hold in common, and are therefore granted a significant (though still lesser) degree of respect:

They're Australian way, and you know we're Lebanese, and we have a totally different thing. Like conditions and our language and stuff. Even to people with an Asian background, we would still like to respect them a bit more, because—yeah. (Ghassan)

"Aussies" were said by the interviewees to be held in little respect at all—and this was repeatedly stated in connection with the observation that this dominant ethnic group did not treat them and those of their own ethnicity with respect. Teachers who respect the "smart" kids but "don't give you a face," police who say "All you wogs are the same"—all are responded to with a withholding of respect which preserves dignity in the face of racist humiliation:

Ahmad: If we are all together in one class, the teacher will ask us nothing. She won't care.

Interviewer: Would she care more about Australian students? Why, do you think?

Ahmad: Yeah. Because it's their own race. Like she won't care if we fail, but if an Australian passes an HSC, it's more better for them

Interviewer: Would that be the same feeling of all the members of your group? That you feel the same about the teacher, that they care more about the Anglos than they care about you?

Ahmad: If they think that way, we will treat them worse or bad with no respect.

Interviewer: How do you get on with adults in the places you hang out? Like shop keepers, bus drivers?

Mohammed: Oh bus drivers. Like there is no respect.

Interviewer: As a group you don't respect them?

Mohammed: No. If you're walking past and you see a copper, someone call out "pig" or something. There is always someone doing something stupid. It's like a car, when you're in a car by yourself, who are you going to impress? No-one. But if you have got friends outside the car watching, you've got to do something.

Interviewer: Are there any problems generally between adults and young people where you live?

Mohammed: Oh yeah, there's no respect.

Interviewer: In the area that you live?

Mohammed: I find there is no respect. They respect Lebanese people, the younger kids, but Aussies and that, no respect.

Lebanese and Italians. Like they would say to the Australians, "It's your fault my father was persecuted when he first came here." Like he was called a wog or whatever. There is that reverse racism thing. Like now the Lebanese have grown and they would say let's get them back or whatever. (Ghassan)

It is important to stress that this is a gendered, a *masculine*, reassertion of dignity in the face of racist affront (the *father*, not the mother, figures in the example) and it is performed in schoolboys' ways. "Sometimes I was with my father, like someone would persecute him, but he wouldn't sort of react. He would just say it doesn't matter or whatever. I would retaliate. I wouldn't sort of take anything" (Ghassan). It is as if, in experiencing diminution as *humans*, through racism, these young men are experiencing diminution as *men*; offence to their humanity is an affront to their manhood.

This withdrawal of respect, or actively and deliberately behaving disrespectfully towards Anglo authorities, restores a *feeling* of power to a less powerful social group. It can be seen as an ideological inversion of the type discussed earlier, where the ability to grant or reserve respect is felt to be important by a group who, unlike teachers or police, are not in a position to demand the outward demonstration of respect.

An even less powerful group, of course, are the Lebanese female counterparts of the boys we interviewed. (Their side of the story needs also to be told, if a more complete account of masculinity is to be made. In-depth interviews with a cohort of Lebanese teenage girls are also under way as the next step of our research program.) A Year 12 Lebanese-background female student said, "I find that the Lebanese boys despise the Lebanese girls at our school."

Interviewer: What about non-Lebanese girls?

Answer: No, they don't. They seem to be always talking among them ... because they know the Lebanese girls are not like that.

One of our male interviewees, Mohammed, saw things differently, "Say if it

was a Lebanese girl, I respect her more than an Australian.”

Interviewer: Why?

Mohammed: Because I find that Lebanese girls because they have had a rough time with their parents and everything. And you never know she might get married to someone, who is worse than her parents. She would have a shit life you know. All her life she will have a shit life. With her parents and her husband Go to school and have a good time, but they go home and their dad says they are not allowed out, stay home. Eventually she will get a husband like that. So if I show them respect and, you know, you can understand it.

This is, of course, deeply contradictory. The adolescent sympathiser about Lebanese paternal discipline is likely to become a Lebanese-Australian husband. Ghassan contemplates, “If I marry someone and she’s not Lebanese or who is unable to prepare any meals”

Interviewer: Would you anticipate that you would one day get married to a non-Lebanese girl?

Ghassan: Not really no.

Interviewer: Why do you think you would prefer a Lebanese girl?

Ghassan: Um, because there’s always the advantage of culture.

The future beneficiary of the “advantage of culture” is already receiving a benefit, given the gendered division of labour, from the “shit life” of his mother and sisters. Exploitation is experienced as “respect.”

Respect appears in religious form, reported in much the same way by our Christian and Muslim informants: “Sort of like most of the commandments I respect. Like I don’t sin. In our religion it’s a big sin if you lose your virginity, and I respect that” (Mohammed).

I respect Lebanese culture more than I respect the Australian culture because there’s more morals in the Lebanese culture. You get married once, you don’t sleep around, there’s more of that strictness. It’s not like the western where you can do whatever you want, and stuff like that. (Ghassan)

Respect is denied the dominant “western” culture—particularly Anglo girls.

Interviewer: Did you have a chance to go out with an Australian [Anglo] girl? Do you find they discriminate against you?

Mohammed: Oh I found them very easy, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Hmm.

Mohammed: Like you can do anything with them. I like to have something inside that I hold back like. You know what I mean? I can’t do it, because religion into it. Some people don’t have their morals. They just do it. With me I can’t. I have morals.

There is a strong indication of compensation for racism, here. If sexual rela-

tions—up to a point, “... [I] flirt around, but when it comes to doing the sin, that’s when I stop” (Mohammed)—are seen as shameful, it is better that the shame is borne by girls of the dominant ethnicity, rather than one’s own. There is also a pragmatism in perpetrating this shame outside of the ethnic community, and thus preserving ethnic solidarity:

Ahmad: Maybe we know one of her brothers or one of her parents. And maybe someone else will see me talking to a Lebanese girl and the Lebanese girl will get in trouble.

Interviewer: Okay, her parents will be very strict on her?

Ahmad: Yeah. And say I got to know her. And people will find out. My reputation and the girl’s reputation would be put down. And parents will be really annoyed.

Interviewer: Will they be annoyed with both of you?

Ahmad: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that’s why you think it’s better to avoid Lebanese girls?

Ahmad: Yeah, rumours coming out of it.

It is possible that this pragmatism is actually a more potent force than the adherence to religious principle and traditional cultural values reported in the interviews; it is not unlikely that the informants exaggerated their “respectability” for the adult, Lebanese-Australian interviewer.

The Lebanese-background boys underlined an interesting point in this regard about the cultural trajectories of earlier settled groups of peasant background, when they observed that Italian and Greek background girls were easier to go out with than Lebanese girls, but that they had something in common, in that their parents were more “strict” than those of Anglo girls. It is probable that the traditional disciplining of the sexual activity of adolescents, brought with the culture of the homeland, cannot be sustained much beyond one generation of immigration—at least not without tensions and accommodations. This will, of course, produce changes in ethnic masculinity.

In this connection also, the authors suggest the need for future research about immigrant *fathers*. We conjecture that their senses of themselves as men—as providers, as heads of families—undergo critical changes in the processes of immigration and settlement, as the effects of the labour market and the commodity society drastically impinge on traditional familial relations, disrupting the family balance of forces and rearranging identities. Lack of honour and respect in the world of work is compounded with loss of honour and respect in the family. It is a fair bet that these crises of working-class, ethnic masculinity are visited in consequential ways on the manhood of the next generation.

CONCLUSION

The strategic practices of cultural maintenance and assimilation in a racist society are not a matter of either/or, they are often deployed, individually and collectively, at the same time, sometimes in contradiction and sometimes complementing each other, depending on context (Noble, Poynting and Tabar forthcoming). Culture is not left "at the front door" (Partington and McCudden 1992; Noble, Tabar and Poynting 1998), nor are "two worlds" inhabited (Elley and Inglis 1995, 193–202). Connell et al. (1982, 179–83) have emphasised that class and gender relations, as dynamic historical systems, and structuring processes, interact *all the time*; the point should also be stressed with respect to the intersection of ethnicity with these relations. Nor, as these authors argue of class and gender, does each operate "in its own sphere" (1982, 180); cultural maintenance is not confined to family and religion, with assimilation strategies relegated largely to school or work. These practices are enacted at home and at school, at work, at leisure, on the streets (in cars or on foot), in shopping centres, in public transport, at cinemas, nightclubs, places of worship, sporting events and a host of other social sites. Class and gender relations are always involved, sometimes constitutively, in these practices; neither can relations of gender and class be isolated in the experiences of social actors from attributes of ethnicity.

We seek, therefore, an analysis of masculinity, class and ethnicity which can comprehend this multiplicity and simultaneity of structure; not as a list of discrete and merely different identities, to be chosen from and changed like clothing or switched like television channels, but in their very interrelatedness and mutual determination. It is hoped that this article has gone some way towards demonstrating that such an approach is both needed and useful.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Stephen Tomsen for his suggestions on this paper, as well as to Mike Donaldson for his comments on an earlier draft. We also thank the anonymous reviewers of *jigs* for their suggested improvements.

¹ A summary of similar literature with respect to Black male youth in the United States, dating from the 1930s, but continuing through the 80s and 90s, can be found in Gibbs and Merighi 1994.

² This is not to *reduce* these social processes to this function, nor to claim that it exhausts their meaning.

³ Another stark example of this sort of inversion is in the discourse of the group of Anglo-Saxon-Celtic "footballers" recorded by Walker (1988, 47), wherein "coons" (their racist term of abuse for Aborigines) are represented as "invaders" of their inner-city neighbourhood.

⁴ It is perhaps worth underlining here, in this 150th anniversary year of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, that we are arguing for a critical realist theory of

ideology, in which appearances are the way reality is presented to us—not mere falsehood, but distorted through distorting social relations. Jorge Larrain (1986) traces thoroughly that unhelpful legacy of the *Manifesto* in some marxisms, which leads to ascribing particular worldviews to certain classes. He elaborates elegantly, and advocates, the “negative” (systematically distorting appearances) theory of ideology (1979, 1983, 1986, 1994), also found in the *Manifesto*, explicated early in *The German Ideology*, and found in more implicit though sophisticated form in *Capital*. Scott Poynting (1984, 1995) argues that this (“negative”) understanding of ideology is to be found in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and common sense. It is this theory of ideology which informs the ideology analysis of the current article. The positing of different levels of reality by no means reduces the ideological to the “economic,” as travestied in too many crude recipes to deal with here.

- 5 Note that in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels see this as arising from control of the “material forces of production,” including the means of intellectual production. “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are *on the whole* subject to it” (1976, 59; emphasis added). This is by no means reductionist. Earlier in this work, they discuss what has since been much debated as the base-superstructure relationship: “The whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)” (1979, 53). The conception is also quite compatible with Gramsci’s account of ruling-class hegemony securing intellectual and moral leadership through its (contested) control of the “Apparatuses of Philosophical Hegemony,” including schools and the media (Buci-Glucksmann 1980).
- 6 Willis (1977, 137n) only acknowledges this, with reservations, in a footnote to *Learning to Labour*.
- 7 That is, the longest and most virulent *anti-immigrant* racism. The first and worst (i.e. actually genocidal) acts of racism in Australia were perpetrated by the invaders vis-a-vis the indigenous people, and Aborigines remain the most discriminated against group in Australian society.
- 8 This is a similar ideological inversion to that in which Australian Aborigines, whose human needs are least met by any social indicators, appear to be specially privileged (Hanson 1996).
- 9 This process is also observed by a Melbourne youth and community worker, “L,” cited in White (1997, 96). Mary Kalantzis (1990) points out these are gender relations typical of *peasant* cultures, not of any particular ethnicity, and undergo inevitable transformations in the move to urban, industrial societies.

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