THE ‘RACE’ FOR CAMDEN

THE CAMDEN ISLAMIC SCHOOL CONTROVERSY

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[Translation]
Where ever I go I see barriers
Imprisoning humanity
Why is it that there are children in the world who enjoy freedom
And I am not one of them?
(Palestinian folk song)

I dedicate this dissertation to my four beautiful young nieces,
Rochelle (aged 6), Alyssa (aged 5), Sienna (aged 4) and Raquel (aged 3).

When times got tough towards the end of my thesis journey, I would take my girls to the park, tutor them, read their books with them, watch cartoons, play hide and seek, angry birds, snakes and ladders, and even that painful tea party set.
I will always be grateful that I have them in my life.

The physical, psychological and social barriers that circulate us will not be around forever.
One day, we will be free!
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**Statement of Authentication**

The work presented in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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**Ryan Jamal Al-Natour, April 2013**

Some of the research data discussed throughout this thesis formed the basis for the following five journal articles and one chapter in an edited book:


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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the 2007-09 controversy surrounding the proposed development of an Islamic school in Camden, a small semi-rural town of Sydney, Australia. It critically examines the resistance that was mounted by local opponents of the proposed school in a xenophobic campaign that was vastly disproportionate to the fairly modest development application. A series of actions and events formed the hostile reception the proposal received. Thousands of residents protested and an Australian flag, a wooden crucifix and two pigs’ heads appeared on the site of the proposed school. Camden Council and the local newspaper received record numbers of letters protesting against the development. Two conservative anti-Muslim groups from outside the local area joined the cause, and several non-local politicians were involved in campaigning against the school.

The motivations behind these strong reactions of protest need to be uncovered, particularly in the post 9/11 world whereby the shapes and forms of Islamophobia are increasing and diversifying. Using a number of qualitative methodologies, this investigation into the school saga reveals that several entangled events and discourses were at play that supplied some opponents with ammunition to use against this development. With a proud local history of flourishing white agricultural settlement, a sense of local ownership was flaunted in the face of the proposal. This was tangled with a catalogue of recent moral panics concerning Islam and people of Arab backgrounds that fuelled local Islamophobia against Others. Further, the school was a reminder to locals of the encroaching multicultural suburbia of Sydney’s West, which locals interpreted as the loss of localized rural white Australian life.

Drawing on Stuart Hall’s (Jhally 1999) concept of ‘race’ as the floating signifier, this thesis argues that the insidious presence of ‘race’ influences the many diverse positions and narratives of protest against the school. These discourses are situated in two significant contexts. The first is the local Camden context as a semi-rural, largely ‘white town’ which borders many culturally diverse Sydney areas. The second is the broader contemporary Australian context, in which there are increasing levels of social apprehension towards Muslims and Arabs. Critics depicted the school as a catalyst for horrid change in the area, whether it was demographic change brought on by the Other (in the Camden context, the
Other refers to Arabs and Muslims), or general devastating change of the landscape (referring to the transformation of a rural and white ‘oasis’ into a culturally diverse suburban area). Through these fears, a number of constructions of ‘race’ are apparent. In analysing these discourses, we are exposed to the distinct relationship between ‘race’, racism and a type of local Islamophobia that is situated in the Camden controversy.
Introduction

On 10 October 2007, the Qur’anic Society, a Sydney-based Islamic charity organisation, applied to build an Islamic school near Camden — a semi-rural, outer south-western district of the greater Sydney area (Bowie 2007a:3). In May 2008, the Camden Council rejected the application (Bowie 2008h:1), and in June 2009, the New South Wales Land and Environment Court rejected the Qur’anic Society’s appeal against this decision (Bowie 2009f). There was fierce opposition towards the school. Rallies against the school attracted large turnouts of protesters against a handful of local supporters (Kinsella 2007b; Senescall & Bowie 2007). Over 5000 letters, mostly in protest, were sent to Camden Council (Bowie 2008i). In separate incidents, anonymous protesters placed two pigs’ heads on stakes, a wooden crucifix, and an Australian flag on the proposed site. These actions prompted a police investigation (Bowie 2007c:10). Local journalists published opinion pieces supportive of the school, and strongly against local racism (see Bowie 2008s:4; Senescall 2007a:4, 2008b:4, 2008d:6). These journalists encountered a strong backlash from protesters in the community. A local residents group formed against the school and two extreme right, anti-Muslim groups from outside the local area joined the cause. Several non-local politicians were involved in campaigning against the school. I refer to these disparate events collectively as ‘the Camden controversy’. Members of the Camden community were, as one Camdenite [local resident in Camden] described to me, ‘up in arms’ over the school because it was seen as an inappropriate development (Terri, interview, July 9 2009).

The residents of Camden had gained a certain reputation for organising resistance to large developments in their local area, as was illustrated by an eruption of local opposition to the building of a McDonalds restaurant in 2007, although this was dwarfed in comparison to the size and intensity of the protest against the school. Only 200 locals protested against the franchise, whereas thousands rallied against the school. Against this, it should be noted that authorities project Camden’s population will grow sixfold in the next two decades, compromising its longstanding semi-rural character (Stillitano 2010). Camden Council has processed several development applications and earmarked several sites for future residential districts and schools, which will operate in addition to the many religious schools which
already exist. The *Camden Advertiser*’s editor observed that never before had locals witnessed such hostility ‘against a development application being processed by Camden Council’ (Senescall 2007b:8).

The research for this thesis involved the interviewing of local residents in Camden. Almost every participant I interviewed recalled that the development application for the school became the ‘talk of the town’. In their minds, it was no ordinary development application – it was an *Islamic school*. The question that arises from this is why a development application for a school provokes such widespread hostility. What inspired such a strong reaction against this particular proposal? Why did thousands of local residents feel the need to assemble and rally? What was it about the Muslim character of the school that prompted such fear and how was that fear encoded?

The events concerning the proposed Islamic school that occurred between 2007 and 2009 can be characterised as a public controversy, due to the intense opposition that both locals and outsiders mounted against the proposal. It is difficult to frame the events in Camden as a small squabble between local supporters and opponents, it was more significant. Parties could not easily be divided in two separate and equal camps, and since unequivocally hostile opinions were held by the majority of participants, this dissertation will predominantly focus on the nature of the hostile opposition mounted against the school.

Many scholars have documented a history of antagonism towards Islamic development applications across Australia (see Dunn 1999, 2001, 2004; Humphrey 1987; Kabir 2005; Poynting *et al.*2004). Camden played out as just one among many cases. Some of these will be briefly outlined in Chapter Two in an effort to place the Camden controversy within a broader Australian context. What is intriguing about the episodes in Camden, and what differentiates them from most other cases, is that they involved large numbers of both local residents and outsiders, and extreme statements were made by some of the opponents in an attempt to halt the school. After the 2007 protests against the school, a number of scholarly publications discussed whether the controversy exhibited anti-Muslim intolerance (see Bouma 2011; Bugg & Gurran 2011; Gulson & Webb 2012; Gwyther 2008; Houston 2009; Lee 2008; Maddox 2011; McDonald 2010; Woodlock 2011). There was also a smaller number of non-academic responses observing the saga and arguing that it was an instance of contemporary racism (see Robson 2008; Donohue 2008). The hostilities towards the school were undoubtedly underpinned by a degree of local racism, which linked with many other
issues that this dissertation examines. The more I investigated the more multilayered the case study became.

‘Protest wasn’t just about racism’

In 2011, I was interviewed by journalist Kerrie Armstrong from the Camden Advertiser, who asked a number of questions about my research findings on the school saga, including whether it is warranted to characterise Camden as a racist area. I answered that, in my opinion, it was not, that while some opponents expressed views that could be considered ‘racist’, these were not representative of all opponents. I made the point that the sentiments expressed against the school would be shared by some people in every part of Australia, and thus there was nothing unique about the Camden area in this regard. The Camden Advertiser published an article about my research under the headline:

   Protest wasn’t just about racism (Armstrong 2011a)

It echoed the general anxieties among many local residents that they would be considered ‘racists’. The journalist did not misrepresent my answers, as I told her that there were many issues regarding heritage, place, and traffic that were germane to the controversy. These matters were mentioned very briefly within the article (only one sentence). It was as though local residents needed to be assured that my dissertation would not contribute to a general misperception about their levels of tolerance.

Images of some unruly mobs rallying with Australian flags against the school, and sound bites on radio reports of the violent threats from locals against ‘raggers’ (‘ragheads’ which is an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim slur) circulated in media outlets across Australia. Camden was represented as a ‘racist area’. One opponent of the school who spoke when the matter was taken to the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales (NSW)\(^1\) was alarmed at the extremism of others who shared her cause:

   We have all watched with alarm the hijacking of this debate of this development by a handful of vocal bigots and a media that has been all too willing to give them air time, and to inflame an ill-informed

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\(^1\) The Land and Environment Court of New South Wales, which operates under the Land and Environment Court Act 1979 (the Court Act), has exclusive jurisdiction to determine development, building, land, mining, environmental and planning disputes. It claims to be ‘the first specialist environmental superior court in the world’ (Land and Environment Court 2012)
There were fears among local residents that all would be tarred with the same racist brush, reflected in the headline ‘World thinks we are racist’ (Bowie 2008t, 2008u) which appeared in the Camden Advertiser newspaper at the height of the controversy 4 June 2008. The media are often held responsible for sensationalising events that are newsworthy and some newspapers or commentators are seen to have an overtly conservative political agenda. This was not, however, the case with the Advertiser’s reporting of the proposal. Throughout the school saga, the journalists at the Advertiser published opinion pieces that were strongly anti-racist and supportive of the school (see Bowie 2008s; Senescall 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008d). Armstrong’s interview with me encouraged her to further publish an opinion piece on the topic, titled:

**Loud minority can be silenced**

THIS week we spoke to a PHD student who has based his doctoral thesis on the public reaction to a proposal to building an Islamic school in Camden. The reaction of certain aspects of the community made national headlines and turned the country’s attention to this usually quiet, content part of the world [...] In speaking with the student, Ryan Al-Natour, it was plain to see that far from being the norm, these people were actually just a very loud minority [...] These people who put Camden in the headlines had the loudest voices, but were not the majority. These voices which have since been drowned out by other voices: of community, of unity and of greater tolerance as we welcome new people into our area and embrace them as our own (Armstrong 2011b:4)

In its descriptions of racism in Camden, the newspaper omitted discussion of the overwhelming evidence of problematic expression that I unearthed in my archival research of letters submitted to council and in interviews (and informal conversations) with local residents. These voices might form a ‘loud minority’, yet are significant. In other words, the story here is more complicated than a simple claim about country town racism. Indeed, as this thesis will show, the Camden controversy is a poignant demonstration of the complex ways people approach racism and ‘race’ in contemporary Australian society.

While the ‘protest wasn’t just about racism’, as straightforwardly put by the local paper, this thesis argues that the insidious presence of ‘race’ shapes the many diverse positions taken against the school. These positions are situated in two significant contexts. The first is the local Camden context as a semi-rural, largely ‘white town’ which is located on the fringes of a culturally diverse Sydney area. The second, is the broader contemporary Australian context,
in which there are increasing levels of social apprehension towards Muslims and Arabs, evident in several events, which some scholars have characterised as ‘moral panics’ (Cohen 2002; Poynting et al. 2004; Poynting & Morgan 2007; Collins et al. 2000). A general theme that resonates among the opponents is fear of change. In other words, critics depicted the school as a catalyst for horrid change in the area, whether it was demographic change brought on by the Other (in the Camden context, the Other refers to Sydney’s Arab and Muslim communities), or general devastating change of the landscape (referring to the transformation of a rural and white ‘oasis’ into a culturally diverse suburban area). Opponents of the school presented various narratives of Arabs, Muslims and themselves. In analysing these narratives we are able to gain insight into the distinct relationship between ‘race’, racism and a type of local Islamophobia that is situated in Camden.

**Aims and existing scholarly ‘gaps’ on the controversy**

This dissertation enquires into the ways in which considerations of ‘race’ influence the prominent discourses regarding the proposal for an Islamic school in Camden. In his classic 1997 lecture on ‘race’ as a floating signifier, cultural theorist Stuart Hall (see Jhally 1997) argues that we should unlock how and why ‘race’ matters in society. Hall argues that the popular definitions of ‘race’ function in the systems of classification that people use to divide populations and ascribe particular characteristics. By arguing that ‘race’ is the floating signifier, Hall grasps the various markers of ‘race’ which range from skin colour to religion (discussed in Chapter Two). By drawing on these ideas, this thesis aims to uncover the constructions of ‘race’ that specifically play out in the Camden controversy. However, I am not solely interested in marking out these various racial constructions that usually target Muslims and Arabs. This dissertation is also interested in how these perceptions foreground other discourses regarding heritage, place, racism and Islamophobia, and the significance of these discourses which should be included in the notion of ‘racial constructions’ in Camden.

This dissertation draws on a range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives (outlined in the next sections) in making sense of the Camden controversy. The existing scholarly analysis of the controversy lacks this multidisciplinary approach. Gwyther (2008:52) discusses the significance of Camden’s heritage and how locals framed their opposition as that of ‘cultural protectionism’. Yet her analysis omits the broader context of moral panics around Muslims in Australia and elsewhere, which is significant to mapping out the hostile opinions against the school. Lee (2008) firmly places the Camden controversy as an ‘echo’ of the Cronulla riots,
and argues it was a contemporary form of racism. The Cronulla riots of 2005 took place when 5000 mostly white males in the beachside suburb of Cronulla one summer Sunday took to the streets to protest against the presence of Arabs and Muslims in their suburb (see Noble 2009; Morgan 2007; Poynting 2006, 2007). There is some truth to this view, yet this dissertation analyses the Cronulla riots in relation to what has been referred to as the idea of the Arab folk devil (in Chapter Five) and examines the discourses of racism in the final chapter (an outline of the structure of this dissertation appears at the end of this chapter). The Cronulla riots and ideas of racism are linked. However, this thesis analyses them separately as there is a need to discuss the mobilisation of what I call Camden’s folk devil and its connections with previous moral panics (see Al-Natour 2010a, 2010b; Al-Natour & Morgan 2012; Collins et al. 2004; Poynting & Morgan 2007; Poynting et al. 2004). Setting the narrative of Camden’s folk devil alongside other themes from Chapter Two, Three and Four allows us to gain sharper insight into the distinct shape of the racism that is situated in the Camden context. Willis (2008) considers the relationship between Camden’s rural character and the opposition to the school, though only in passing, as the article’s main focus is on the 2008 election for Camden Council and it notes that the school issue did not arise during that election. As a result, Willis’ research findings on the controversy are limited and are mentioned only briefly here.

In addition to the paucity of academic literature directly on the subject, the relevant scholarly commentary presents a scope of analysis which is restricted to particular conceptual frameworks. Bouma (2011) discusses the Camden controversy in passing, arguing there is severe anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia. For Bouma, Camden is an example of the consistent vilification that Muslims experience in Australian society. For Gulson and Webb (2012:1), the controversy ‘highlights the ambiguity of equity, and the fragility of identity in racialised education policy environments’. Bugg and Gurran (2011) write of resistance to Islamic schools in two Sydney localities and compare the proposal in Camden with the 2007-8 controversy over a proposed Islamic school in Bankstown. These authors observe that in both cases the dominant rhetoric argued that Islamic schools are not compatible with Australian values, that the Muslim populations to be served by them were insufficient and that there was general apprehension of what is termed the ‘social impact’ of such a school. There are obvious strengths in these comparisons as they demonstrate that anti-Islamic sentiment is increasingly part of the local reactions against proposed Islamic schools. In parts of the present thesis, I compare this school saga to other controversies over proposed mosques, Islamic prayer centres and Islamic schools. These controversies are both recent and
historical. My research too has detected the attitudes uncovered by Bugg and Gurran (2011), but I give due weight to the need to situate these in the particular context of Camden as a white, country town with an extensive Anglo-centric past. Woodlock (2011: 396) argues the reactions to the proposed Islamic school demonstrated that ‘…there exists an Australian identity that is inaccessible to the vast majority of those who do not possess North-West European ancestry’. Yet Woodlock’s research focuses on the range of constructed identities among Australian-born Muslims, and the controversy is mentioned only briefly.

While these discussions are useful in mapping out the developments of educational policy in multicultural societies, this thesis is centred on Camden as there is a need for a study that analyses the controversy in its local contextual entirety while situating it within the wider scope of contemporary anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia. This dissertation aims to do this. Camden should be approached as one example of broader and significant issues regarding the ways people narrate ‘race’ today. The significance of this project lies in the fact that Camden is a pocket version of a larger problem of people holding onto extremely parochial and xenophobic ideas of ‘race’ in an era of rapid globalisation.

The limitations of moral panic theories and the significance of the Arab Other

The heightened reactions to the school exhibited many of the features that Cohen (2002) and Hall et al. (1978) refer to as a ‘moral panic’ (also see Critcher 2003; Jenkins 1998; McRobbie & Thornton 1995; McRobbie 1994). Cohen explains moral panics in the British context as arising when:

...a condition, episode, person or groups of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially-accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved (or more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Cohen 2002: 9)

It is readily apparent that aspects of the controversy surrounding the school resembled another ‘moral panic’. The group of persons defined as a threat to Australian values was a multilayered entity that I will call Camden’s Arab folk devil (see Chapter Five). Local and state politicians, political candidates, local church leaders, radio shock jocks, white supremacist groups, some individual residents and an established residents group erected the ‘moral barricades’ which defined Muslim people as a threat to both Camden and Australia
(Chapter One has specific details of these stakeholders and their actions). The interplay between ‘public opinion’ among local residents and rhetoric of political groups that became involved displays the classic qualities of amplification of social reaction against Arabs and Muslims which is situated in the broader Australian context. Letters to the local paper and the Camden Council suggested that the public discussions of the proposed Islamic school in Camden were shaped by previous events concerning Arabs and Muslims.

Stakeholders of the controversy often characterised Australian ethnic and religious minorities, specifically Arabs and Muslims, in ways that capture Cohen’s description of the role of folk devils in the course of a moral panic. Cohen (2002) argues that folk devils are a person or group of people that are portrayed as outsiders or deviants at times of moral panics. The literature on the ‘Arab Other’, as discussed by Poynting et al. (2004) and Collins et al. (2000), is relevant here. These authors discuss moral panics, anti-Arab racism and representations of Australian Arab and Muslim communities as folk devils leading up to 2004. Poynting et al. (2004:3) describe the Arab Other as ‘the pre-eminent folk devil of our time’, a multilayered figure that threatens Australian society. They argue:

> Just as unemployment and insecurity can become joined ideologically with non-White immigration in the incoherence of the racist imagination, so Middle Eastern can become conflated with Arab, Arab with Muslim, Muslim with rapist, rapist with gang, gang with terrorist, terrorist with ‘boat people’, ‘boat people’ with barbaric, and so on in interminable permutations. So the logics of racism are profoundly difficult to disentangle (Poynting et al. 2004:49).

My research revealed the evocation of the ‘folk devil’ by opponents of the school, a concept that (as stated above) emerged in Cohen’s (1972) work on moral panics, and is relevant in conceptualising the ways those opponents thought of Arabs and Muslims. However, this research differs from that of Poynting et al. (2004) in that it attempts to track the development of the Arab folk devil in the Camden context. It could be argued that the folk devil in Camden is an extension of the Arab Other as discussed by Poynting et al. (2004) and Collins et al. (2000). However, the Arab folk devil in Camden, as will be explored in Chapter Five, takes particular shapes that are specific to the controversy. A number of previous events have created a political and cultural legacy that have shaped positions on the school and form the basis of representations around the Arab folk devil. These events, discussed in detail in Chapter Five, include: the drive-by shooting of Lakemba police station in 1998; the Sydney gang rapes of 2000 and 2002; the September 11 2001 attacks; the Bali bombings of 2002; the 2005 Cronulla riot; the ‘uncovered meat' controversy of 2006; and the Durack controversy in
all of which were cited by opponents at some point in their crusades against the
school. While there was no link between these events and the Camden school, opponents
frequently referenced them. Thus, they formed part of the justification for the uproar over the
proposal.

Poynting et al. (2004) argue that some of the aforementioned moral panics (specifically
concerning the drive-by shooting, the Sydney gang rapes, the September 11 attacks and the
Bali bombings) contribute to the ways Australians think of Arabs and Muslims. As soon as
news of the proposed school spread across Camden, the area became a site where Australians
similarly expressed their thoughts of Arabs and Muslims by drawing on these events and
others. The concept of folk devils is useful in capturing the many imaginings that opponents
often used to characterise Muslims, Arabs, and rationalise their positions on the school. The
conceptualisation of folk devils provides a strong foundation for a multi-theoretical approach
for this project investigating the Camden controversy. However, the use of folk devils in this
thesis is interconnected with other separate themes from other disciplines outside of the study
of deviancy.

Cohen’s (2002) moral panic model has proven effective in understanding the backdrop of the
controversy and ways moral panics resonated in the minds of anti-Muslim peddlers (see
Chapter Five). However, there are obvious limitations of Cohen’s classic moral panic model
in understanding contemporary phenomena, as Jenkins (2009) identifies:

We spend far less time [today], though, on the non-construction of problems, of understanding why
issues fail to generate panics, when they appear to fulfil all the classic [moral panic model] criteria. Of
course, we can understand how problems might be prioritized: society cannot panic about everything at
once, and some issues must therefore take a subordinate role to others. But some issues just seem just
so naturally tempting that it is difficult to understand their absence from centre-stage. By understanding
why some issues do not generate panics, we are better able to predict which problems might or might
not achieve prominence. Throughout this process, too, we see some limitations of the original moral
panic model, which was so exceptionally useful in its day in sparking novel approaches to social issues
(Jenkins 2009:36).

The application of the classic moral panic model in understanding the Camden controversy, is
limited. The reactions against the school proposal did not achieve the status of a moral panic
as other events concerning the Arab Other. The Camden controversy did not receive the
media coverage or prompt the punitive legislative responses that were seen in the moral
panics discussed by Collins et al. (2000) and Poynting et al. (2004). Also, the event which
directly triggered the rise of the Arab folk devil in Camden further differentiates the school proposal controversy from these episodes. In the case of the moral panics in 1998 onwards regarding ‘Lebanese gangs’, it was the stabbing of high school student Edward Lee and the ‘drive-by’ shooting of Lakemba police station which motivated politicians, media actors and members of the general public to panic (Collins et al. 2000). In the moral panics over the Sydney gang rapes, it was three separate cases of gang rape (Dagistanli 2007; Grewal 2007; Baird 2009). The acts of terrorism that took place on 11 September 2001 in the United States and 12 October 2002 in Bali (Poynting et al. 2004) quickly gave rise to moral panics and fed into later ones. In the case of the Cronulla riot, it was alleged that a beachside fight had triggered the riot and sparked a moral panic– though Poynting (2006; 2007) rightly identifies that previous moral panics had influenced the riot. Yet unlike these other events and controversies, in Camden it was not a crime event – whether a stabbing, a shooting, gang rapes or terrorist attacks– that sparked local residents to protest against the establishment of an Islamic school. Rather it was a development application that triggered several rallies, petitions, letters and other outbursts that were hostile to the idea of an Islamic school in Camden. Yet opponents criminalised the people behind this development application (and their respective communities) to the point where a proposed school encompassed the images of stabbings, shootings, gang rapes and terrorist attacks. What was to be an educational institution – an otherwise ordinary and innocuous thing – engendered these images of deviance and terror. In this dissertation, I situate the constructions of Camden’s folk devil among other discourses against the school, including local constructions of heritage and place, which need to be investigated so all the dominant discourses regarding the development proposal are given full consideration.
Camden’s rurality and demographic changes

Camden Council is one of many local government areas in greater Sydney. Local government bodies are found all over Australia and operate as the lowest tier of public provision of services and regulation, operating below state and federal governments. Councils have a number of roles and responsibilities, including the planning and development approval of particular buildings, assessments of applications for schools and religious institutions, as well as infrastructure services including local roads and footpaths (Australian Local Government Association 2002). In Sydney inner and outer regions, there are many local government areas, demonstrating that Sydney is a city of many smaller cities, all of which are generally considered to form ‘Sydney’ The map below identifies all these different local government areas, showing Camden’s position as a town which straddles rural Australia and Sydney’s suburbia.

Figure 1 – Local government areas in the Sydney area. (Source: Sydney Councils [Image]. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sydney_councils.png)

Sydney itself is a place of class and cultural diversity (Collins 2000) which Collins and Poynting (2000) describe as a ‘gateway city of Australian immigration’; in other words, most
migrants reside in Sydney before moving to other parts of Australia. Parts of western and south-western Sydney are home to largely non-white migrant populations in ‘the poorer end of town’ (Collins & Poynting 2000:19-20). In travelling from Sydney City to Camden on the M5 motor-way, one passes through ‘the poorer end of town’ without even noticing it. Camden on Sydney’s far south-western fringe is very different from other parts of the city’s western suburbs.

Unlike other middle and outer local government areas such as Campbelltown, Bankstown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Auburn, Blacktown and Parramatta, Camden’s population is not as culturally diverse. Most immigrants who now live in Camden come from English-speaking and European countries. The largest immigrant groups have come from the United Kingdom, followed by New Zealand and Italy, then China, Malta and Germany. The Camden Council website explains:

Overall, 15.5% of the population was born overseas, and 8.0% were from a non-English speaking background, compared with 31.8% and 24.0% respectively for the Sydney Statistical Division (Camden Council Community Profile 2010c).

In comparison to other parts of Sydney, a smaller portion of people speak a language other than English at home in Camden. The Council’s website reveals that, in 2006, 773 local residents spoke Italian at home, 394 residents spoke Spanish, followed by 360 speaking Arabic, 332 speaking Cantonese, 236 speaking Croatian, and 226 speaking Maltese. Overall, only 9.2% spoke a non-English language compared with 29.3% in the Sydney Statistical Division (Camden Council Community Profile 2010b). Cultural diversity exists in Camden, but not to the same extent as other areas of Sydney.

Sydney’s character as a religiously diverse city, too, is less apparent in the Camden context. Catholicism is the dominant religion in Sydney, followed by the Anglican, Uniting Church and Presbyterian denominations of Christianity. Other popular Sydney religious affiliations include Greek Orthodox Christianity and the major sects of Sunni and Shi’a Islam. Other significant minority religions include Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism (see Collins & Castillo 1998:10-11). According to the 2006 Australian Census, 34.7% of Camdenites were Catholic (17,096 residents), and 29.2% were Anglican (14,360 residents. The third largest Christian denomination was the Uniting Church, at 4% of the local population, and 2.6% were Presbyterian and Reformed. Orthodox Christian, Pentecostal, Muslim and Buddhist affiliations collectively accounted for fewer than 2% in Camden. In 2006, 402 local people
had ‘Islam’ ticked as their religion in the census survey (Camden Council Community Profile 2010a). These statistics indicate that in a comparison with other parts of Sydney, Camden is not as religiously and culturally diverse. Hence ‘race’ becomes a signifier not only for demographic changes but also changes in place and changes in the very rural character and landscape of the town.

Those who drive from the city to Camden will notice the open fields and broad vistas which differ from the more suburbanised landscapes in the south-western Sydney area. Camden appears semi-rural, having resisted urbanisation due to its distance from Sydney’s centre. Opponents of the school argued that Camden did not have room to accommodate an increased Islamic population. This contrasted with my observations. There are extensive open spaces, in which several sites have been earmarked for future suburbs. Local fears of demographic change and urbanisation were dramatically amplified by the school proposal. A reading of the local history of the area makes it clear that a particular rural identity, anchored in the popular ‘Australian bush’ image, is central to the area’s self-concept and popular memory. Chapter Three details the narratives of local history.

Objections to the school were diverse; its opponents were not just hostile to a few classrooms and a canteen built on a particular site. It was the future community that would use the school which was of concern, and the way this projection of community clashed with their perceptions of Camden as an Anglo Australian country town. For these opponents, the applicants were not only Muslims but members of a community frequently vilified in the media, which some labelled as ‘Arab’ or ‘Middle Eastern’. Given the complexity of the case study, it was necessary to draw on different research methods to accumulate the kind of rich data that might produce alternative hypotheses capable of explaining the events. My data was gathered from a number of different sources that will be outlined in the next section. The methods and the issues I encountered are explored in the sections which follow.

Inventory of sources

I used a variety of primary and secondary sources for this dissertation. These included a transcript of the decision on the school in the NSW Land and Environment Court; the unpublished flyers that were advertising rallies against Muslims or encouraging residents to engage in activism against the school; letters to the editor in the local Camden Advertiser newspaper; the discussions and comments posted on social networking websites, specifically
against the school on the site facebook.com; video clips regarding the controversy on youtube.com; the thousands of letters submitted to the Camden Council for and against the school; relevant material from the Hansard record of proceedings in the New South Wales Parliament; as well as media archival research.

Media materials formed a significant resource in the data-collection process; these included print Australian newspapers and online articles, television reports, radio transcripts and podcasts. Commonly, the key words used to search in these online sources were: ‘Camden’, ‘Islamic school’, ‘Muslim school’, ‘Camden Council’, ‘protest’, and ‘rally’. The Camden Advertiser and the Macarthur Chronicle (both local papers in Camden) covered the controversy in more detail than the Australian mainstream print media, including The Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, The Daily Telegraph and The Sun Herald. In the mainstream press, the general focus was on key figurehead opponents, a white supremacist group and rallies featuring drunken protesters sporting the Australian flag (perhaps because of their newsworthiness). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio reports were reliable sources as they provided sound bites from different rallies and interviews with local residents. Television programs included an episode of the ABC Four Corners weekly current affairs program that featured interviews with rally participants, ABC’s weekday evening current affairs Lateline news reports on Camden, as well as coverage of the issue on the NSW editions of commercial weekday evening current affairs programs, Today Tonight and A Current Affair (broadcast on the Seven and Nine Network respectively).

I took field notes during observations relevant to the case study. These notes were gathered in several contexts: as I watched a DVD of local residents expressing their opposition towards the school (this was screened in the Land and Environment Court); when I reviewed the notes taken by the lawyers representing the Qur’anic Society in court; when I attended a public information forum on Islam organised by Muslim locals at the Camden Civic Centre; and while walking around public places in Camden (the business district and its outlying suburbs) in search of interview participants.

I conducted twenty-two interviews with different local residents, ranging from a ten-minute conversation to in-depth interviews that lasted for over two hours. Interview lengths varied, depending on the availability of the interviewee. Participants were recruited randomly, all

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2 This was obtained through the generosity of Storey and Gough Lawyers who even kindly offered a room with a computer to view these many documents.
over the age of eighteen, approached in public spaces in the Camden area. Finding participants was an arduous process. I approached hundreds of Camden people and only a handful were willing to participate, most feeling understandably suspicious about discussing their opinions with a stranger. Participants were asked a number of mostly open ended questions in a semi-structured interview. All participants were anonymous and I removed any contents of the interview that could identify the participant (such as indications of where the participant lived or worked in Camden). Most residents identified themselves as Anglo Saxon/European Catholics or Protestants. I did not look for participants of a particular gender or ethnicity. It was a matter of recruiting anyone willing to participate who resided in Camden. I gave participants pseudonyms for analysis and discussion purposes. The timing of these interviews is important, as they took place shortly after the Land and Environment Court proceedings in 2009, thus participants were able to reflect on and discuss the whole controversy (See appendix for details on these interviews).

The level of sampling at only twenty-two people is quite small in a population of over 50,000 residents in Camden. This small sample can raise concerns as to the extent to which the data drawn from these interviews holds any generalizability potential. In other words, critics might argue that the scope of findings from these interviews is limited to these twenty-two interviewees and cannot be generalised. Such criticisms are common in the ‘qualitative-quantitative debate’ where qualitative and quantitative researchers argue their methodologies are ‘superior’ to the other. This debate, as Walter (2010: 26) argues, is ‘somewhat vexed and pointless’. Bryman (2012) addresses the particular criticisms of small sampled open-ended interviews in qualitative research:

It is often suggested that the scope of the findings of qualitative investigations are restricted... when qualitative interviews are conducted with a small number of individuals in a certain organization or locality, they argue that it is impossible to know how the findings can be generalized to other settings. How can just one or two cases be representative of all cases?... can we treat interviewees who have not been selected through a probability procedure or even quota sampling as representative? Are A. Taylor’s (1993)³ female intravenous drug-users typical of all members of that category?... The answer in all these cases is, of course, emphatically ‘no’... the people who are interviewed in qualitative research are not meant to be representative of a population, and indeed, in some cases, like female intravenous drug-users, we may find it more or less impossible to enumerate the population in any precise manner (Bryman 2012:406)

³ Avril Taylor (1993) researched the lifestyles and accounts of a group of female intravenous drug users in Glasgow. Taylor’s methodologies included participant observation and in-depth interviews with these women.
Similarly, Sayer (1984: 226) argues that ‘we must avoid the absurd dogma that no study of individuals in the broad sense, is of interest except as representative of some larger entity’. The twenty-two interviewees in this project were not meant to be representative of the entire population of Camden. The purpose of conducting these interviews is to produce various forms of knowledge that move beyond the existing discourses created by scholars who look for ‘typicality’. My intention is to retrieve the subjective ways these residents position themselves in relation to existing public debates around ‘race’, place, community and locality. Without such deep and strong qualitative research, it is not possible to identify the hidden discourses and knowledge that are beyond the categories and correlations of positivist social science. Rather a different kind of knowledge is sought:

... life histories represent ‘instances’ of social processes and thereby illuminate the way such processes emerge from particular structural relations. Each case study stands on its own; an additional case study or two cannot confirm the ‘validity’ of patterns which emerge in the first case study. Instead, the value of additional case studies is their potential to reveal more of the complexity of social processes, to illustrate how those ‘socio-structural relations’ emerge under a different set of conditions (Watson 1994: 27)

The data obtained details their perspectives and opinions on the Camden controversy and reveals the complex positions that people hold on any given saga. As the body of this thesis demonstrates, the interview data exemplifies the complex ways that these participants understood their own reactions to the school and the reactions of others. In some cases, interviewees revealed conflicting accounts of the saga and their own positions.

It is important to take account of the overall timing of the Camden controversy. The fact that it took place recently accounts both for the relative paucity of scholarly attention so far and for the availability of a variety of media and public opinion sources on line as well as in print. In a context where communications are increasingly facilitated through the internet, stakeholders in the Camden controversy used these newer ways of networking to express their views. These different sources enabled me to capture the diversity of the reactions to the proposed school. Through these different media sources, I was able to compare and map out how individual journalists would either report or sensationalise the reactions to the school.

I also documented field notes as I researched the Camden controversy. Scholars interested in qualitative methodologies argue that field notes document the environment and happenings of people during their research journey (Coffey 1999:119), and can be quoted from in certain public studies (Alasuutari 1995:178-9; also see Vidich & Lyman 1994). I took field notes that
enabled me to chart certain events that were not reported in the media. The interviews with local residents both supplemented and complemented my field notes, allowing me to gain first-hand exposure to the different opinions that were either for, against or ‘apathetic’ towards the school. Evidently, I used a number of qualitative methodologies in this dissertation.

**Self-reflection, partiality and the experiences of racism**

Scholars have frequently questioned whether researchers can be objective in the ways they make sense of their data (Becker 1967), whether it is obtained via interviews or through other means (see Creswell 2003; Edwards 1998; Marshall & Rossman 2006). Self-reflection on our research is a common method in dealing with such dilemmas. Gillian Rose (1997) argues that self-reflective practice among feminist scholars is increasingly diversifying, occurring in different forms with different effects. The relationships between researchers and their data are based on impartiality, given that different conclusions are drawn from research itself. On this topic, Rosaldo states:

> How social descriptions are read depends not only on their formal linguistic properties but also on their content and their context. Who is speaking to whom, about what, for what purposes, and under what circumstances? The differences between distinct forms of objectification reside in the analyst’s position within a field of social interaction rather than in the text regarded as a document with intrinsic meaning (Rosaldo 1993:54)

Rosaldo encourages researchers to think about how they reach their interpretations and think about the context in which they grasp their data.

Research findings can be ‘artful and political’, holding ‘no single interpretive truth’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:15). The positionality of the researcher, as Clifford (1986) observes, is crucial to mapping out the impartial aspects of research. Clifford argues that, due to the positions of the researcher, academics are more commonly endorsing the idea that research is an exercise in partiality:

> Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial – committed and incomplete. This point is now widely asserted – and resisted at strategic points by those who fear the collapse of clear standards of verification. But once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact (Clifford 1986:7)
In self-reflecting, I argue it is important to acknowledge the increasingly complicated positions, influences, and relationships between the researchers and their data. We (as researchers) are never truly outsiders, nor ever wholly insiders, but we are always partial. It is here that I argue that the researcher is also embedded into the researched.

Due to these issues of partiality, the researcher is central to the data, particularly in the case of Camden where I cannot tell the story of the controversy without outlining my position as an Arab Australian researcher and how this positionality is both influenced by, and influences the research. In my role as a researcher interviewing Camdenites, my cultural background as an Arab Australian male researcher, my appearance and other personal characteristics significantly impacted the data I was able to accumulate for this dissertation. In most social situations, people tended to assume that I was Lebanese and/or Muslim (particularly from my middle name and surname) as I have dark skin, black hair and hazel-brown eyes. I resemble the popular media and police-procedural description of someone ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’ (See Abdel-Fattah 2007; Ho 2007; Poynting & Mason 2007; Poynting 2006; Poynting et al. 2001; Pugliese 2003). I was born into a Palestinian Greek-Orthodox Christian family and even though I have a culturally Islamic background, I am not Muslim. Palestinian society is largely Muslim, yet within it Palestinian Christians are considered mainstream (unlike in other societies where minorities are on the periphery), and they often identify with Muslims and consider themselves to be culturally Islamic. While this may appear unusual or confusing to people outside of Palestinian society, Palestinians themselves can identify numerous expressions, colloquialisms, cultural norms, traditions and materials (shared by both Muslims and Christians and arguably, atheists) that are Islamic in their origins. For example, the famous late Palestinian scholar, Edward Said, who was of the Protestant faith, once described himself as ‘a Christian wrapped in a Muslim culture’ (cited in Bynum 2007).

As a child growing up in Australia, I was baptised as a Greek-Orthodox and went to Anglican and Baptist churches; I even attended a strict and conservative Baptist school for two years. Yet this is over-shadowed by my appearance that reads as ‘Muslim’ and ‘Lebanese’ to strangers in this country. When I started interviewing people in Camden, I found myself in circumstances where some participants thought I was a ‘Muslim’ on a proselytising mission, or would react to me as a ‘Muslim’ when they discussed their position against the school.
This was also the experience for an Australian Broadcasting Corporation journalist, Paula Kruger, who researched the controversy in its early stages. On a radio report, she explained her experiences of being mistaken for a ‘Muslim’. Additionally, Kruger had to self-reflect in order to make sense of these experiences:

I’m used to making quick pit stops in towns like these, just grabbing a pie at the local bakery to break up a long drive to somewhere else. And on this day I wish I had just grabbed a pie. Instead, I had a very different small town experience at a fast food franchise on the edge of Camden.

To explain why this happened, I find myself in the unusual situation as an ABC radio journalist of having to describe the way I look, because my appearance affected my experience.

My father is a white Australian of German-Irish heritage, but my mother is an Australian who is originally from Fiji. She has a mixed Fijian, Tongan and Indian heritage.

I’ve ended up looking Anglo-Indian, despite my hair, which is very unruly and Polynesian.

So while I’m devouring a bacon burger with greasy fries at the fast food outlet, a young man passing behind me muttered “bloody mussie”.

Thinking I may have heard wrong I turned around and he mumbled it again, “bloody mussie”.

You would think the fact that I had a mouthful of bacon burger, and was therefore eating a pork product, would’ve be [sic] a bit of a giveaway to my not being a Muslim.

I often get mistaken for a range of ethnicities, and being taken for someone of the Islamic faith doesn’t bother me. What is upsetting is that a person of that faith is sneered at as a “bloody mussie”.

I couldn’t get the rest of my bacon burger past the knot that was tightening in my stomach, so I decided to leave and I headed home to Sydney (Kruger 2007).

Kruger’s ‘unusual situation’ took place when she took a break from researching and had lunch. By making sense of why she was called a ‘bloody Mussie’, she reflects on her own mixed heritage, describes her physical appearance, and the ways strangers might think of her background. Her ‘unusual situation’ as a radio journalist is based on how a young man mistakes her as a ‘Muslim’ and uses it against her through a racial slur, and this influences the way she experiences the controversy.

In my own experiences in Camden, there were instances where I experienced similar racism. It is important to reflect on them so I can address issues of partiality upfront in this dissertation. Understandably, many people were apprehensive in talking to a stranger about the school issue, particularly in light of the recent tarnishing of Camden’s reputation in the media as a racist town. Often, interviewees began by explaining that their opposition to the school was based on their fears of traffic increases, or on the desire to preserve Camden as a ‘rural area’. Yet some interviews slipped from discussions of the school into generalised
diatribes about what was ‘wrong’ with Lebanese people and Muslims. A range of Orientalist anti-Arab stereotypes came up in interactions with some participants. Edward Said’s work on Orientalism exposed how the West, through literature, information, art and poetry, would convey certain representations of Islam and the non-West in a way that associated the non-West with barbarity, backwardness, misogyny and other inferior qualities (Said 1978). Such representations were particularly apparent when I approached people and asked them to participate:

Anonymous Male Resident 1: Look, I don’t wanna do the interview, it’s not that I am racist, I just can’t stand the rag heads, they aren’t normal!... in fact if it were up to me, I would probably exterminate them all (laughs) (Field notes 9 October 2009)

Anonymous Male Resident 2: I saw your people on TV last night... the ones that sound like turkeys, Gobble Gobble (Field notes 31 July 2009).

These instances were brief. In a lengthier situation, a woman asked for some time (a whole week) to think about participating. When I met with her the week after, she explained that she did not want to discuss the ‘dangerous issue’ with a ‘person like you’ because she felt that I would not agree with her. She went on to explain that I saw her as an infidel and that women in Camden could speak unlike my own ‘wife’. She also argued that I forced ‘black blankets’ on my ‘wife’ (Field notes 5 August 2009). Another woman declined and said she did not have time for the interview, yet she spoke to me for approximately 45 minutes afterwards – the time it would have taken to interview her – about Christianity and suggested that I convert and become ‘born-again’. This woman also suggested that I did not have to bomb myself to go to heaven, that there were other avenues. Interestingly, this resident did not appear scared of me (perhaps because we were in a public place).

In these interactions, there are obvious Orientalist stereotypes that surface. Stereotypes operate to rationalise ‘bigotry, hostility, and aggression’ (Pickering 2001:48) of particular groups and individuals (Stangor 2000:1) while characterising positive attributes to the Self (Fein & Spencer 2000:173). The stereotypes communicated by these residents confirm the researcher’s status as an outsider. Their refusals to participate show us how some locals felt towards the researcher, and how these ‘feelings’ impacted the project. In my case, this meant it was difficult (at times) to find participants. This is not to say that only those clearly opposed to the school for personal, religious, or prejudiced reasons were more likely to reject an offer to participate in the project. In one case, a resident who was supportive of the school
refused to participate given the amount of attention the controversy received. In the cases above, dealing with hostile prospective interviewees and other residents was difficult and I needed to address issues of partiality. I did not challenge these views that I consider on a personal level to be ‘racist’ or ‘abhorrent’, but rather documented them.\footnote{In these circumstances, there were obvious associations of me with Islam, terrorism and misogyny. These were among many other associations relevant to appearing Muslim/Lebanese/Middle Eastern which was significant to the Camden controversy and largely influenced some of the opposition to the school. These various constructions are examined at length in later chapters.}

In dealing with issues of ‘race’, Duneier (2004:100) suggests that the researcher should hold a ‘humble commitment’ to being open in the field and aware of their own social position. Becker asks how a researcher should react to the challenges of racism. It becomes a practice of balancing two opposing ideals: one rejects racist views, and the other seeks to understand a particular expression/view of racism, which ultimately benefits knowledge. Thus, the researcher is faced with remembering the purpose of the research project as a pursuit of knowledge rather than an exercise centred on debates with participants (Becker 2000:247-9). Similarly, Ezzy argues that the task of qualitative researchers is ‘not to attempt to solve political and moral issues, nor to avoid them, but to be aware of and engage with the potential political and moral implications of their writings’ (Ezzy 2002:157). In dealing with the various challenges of the project, I had to transform myself into the ‘researcher’. My role was not to react to or challenge those I engaged with.

Similarly, Arendell discusses experiences similar to my own in her research on divorced fathers. In her presence, a number of participants expressed patriarchal views and Arendell was in a position where she could not challenge them. Arendell describes how participants would usually devalue and denigrate women in the presence of a female researcher, where some of the profanities commonly expressed were ‘bitch’, ‘whore’, ‘cunt’, and ‘slut’ (also see Best 2003). Arendell writes:

...I set out to study divorced fathers, wanting to hear about their experiences and perceptions, and so needed to allow them to tell their stories in their own fashion, whatever the content, style, or tone. Thus, I mostly circumvented sexist innuendoes and comments and continued conversing without confronting men’s expressions of sexism or misogyny or inappropriate attentions... My task was to obtain fathers’ accounts of and perspectives on divorce; it was not, among other things, to try to educate them to my way of seeing things, raise their consciousness on matters of gender (or parenting),
or attempt to dispel inaccurate assertions about divorce in the contemporary United States (Arendell 359, 364).

In my own research, I faced similar challenges. My role as a qualitative researcher was to investigate the issue of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. It was as though I needed to disregard other parts of my identity and focus simply on extracting information. This is not to say that I forgot who I was, as I also gave thought to how particulars of my identity – gender, ethnicity, religion, skin colour, appearance, age, and so on – impacted upon the data collection process and the content.

The insider vs. outsider: Positions of the researcher

The examples of racism discussed above highlight the ways people position a researcher as the ‘insider’, ‘outsider’, or both. Social theorists have long debated how researchers can impact their projects and encouraged reflection on various encounters with research participants on the positionalities of researchers and whether researchers operate as ‘insiders’ or outsiders’ (Coloma 2008:15; McKinley Brayboy & Deyhle 2000; Naples 1996:84; Smith 1999; Stinson 1994; Strauss 1987). A key question is how distance and closeness affect the richness and quality of their data. The researcher’s gender, ‘race’ and class can affect the research and data. Traditionally in the literature on research, observers concluded that researchers who do not share these categories with their participants work harder in gaining their trust (Young 2004:187). From this perspective, women interviewing men hold outsider positions as women, ‘non-whites’ interviewing ‘whites’ hold outsider positions as ‘non-whites’, and so on.

In locating the researcher’s impact on their research, scholars now argue that at various points, they can experience placements both as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. These placements are not fixed positions. Further, various signifiers mark the insider and outsider (Young 2004:191; Sin 2007:479) beyond the classic ‘race’, ‘sex’ and ‘class’ categories. Other factors now include sexuality, education, gender, ethnicity, language and class (Coloma 2008:14) to name the most common. Further, these markers are dependent upon the demographic socio-political context of the time of research (Naples 1996:83). Thus, researchers hold fluid insider and outsider positions. As this dissertation will reveal, some interviewees referred to my
identity as a non-local in Camden, as an Arab, and to my appearance when expressing their opinions on the school and Muslims in Australia.

Becker (2000:253) argues ‘...doing research is always risky, personally, emotionally, ideologically, and politically, just because we never know for sure just what results our work will have’. Becker highlights how research results are so fickle that researchers have unpredictable experiences with their participants. Conceptually, we need to think about impact as a complicated process when we reflect upon our projects and make sense of the researcher/researched relationships. I was not expecting to find myself writing into this Introduction a section focused on my experiences as a researcher. It is about my role as the researcher and how my personal attributes foreshadow my interactions with the participants of this project. While recent scholarship has argued that researchers can be both insiders and outsiders in their projects, I have outlined that some researchers are as much a part of their data as their participants.

Chapter structure

In Chapter One of this thesis, I present a chronology of the events that occurred between 2007 and 2009 which form the Camden controversy. This chapter uses data drawn from fieldwork, media, interviews with local residents, protest flyers, letters by local residents to Camden Council and newspapers, and transcripts of the NSW Land and Environment Court’s decision to reject the application. My intention here is to demonstrate that the Camden controversy consisted of numerous events that were often not reported by the mainstream and international media. The narrative of events which form the Camden controversy, as set out in this chapter, differs from the dominant narratives in the media which focused on the ‘loud minority’ seen at rallies.

In Chapter Two, the contextual and conceptual foundations of the empirical study are explored. I look at the constructions of Arabs and Muslims as a ‘race’ in the rhetorical strategies of the opponents of the school. The historical and recent narratives of opposition to Australian Muslim groups seeking to build mosques and Islamic schools (see Dunn 1999, 5

5 I published an article discussing these methodological challenges in a special issue for post-graduate students in M/C Journal. See Al-Natour (2011) for strategies suggested to grapple with these challenges. There is no scope for such detail in this introduction.
2001; Kabir 2005; Humphrey 1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1990) exemplify what we might term an Australian Islamophobia. In Camden, the construct of ‘race’ – with its layers of complexity and contradiction – plays a unique role, and this chapter examines the many constructions of what is a hybrid ‘Muslim’ and ‘Arab’ ‘race’ that surface during the controversy. The conceptual foundations of this study largely draw on the ideas of Stuart Hall. I argue for multilayered conceptions of Islamophobia, among which ‘race’ foregrounds the several constructions of Muslim people explicit in anti-Muslim sentiment and actions. The conceptual framework and these contextualisations enable us to better differentiate between fact and fiction in relation to Muslim presence in Australia, as well as understand how constructs of Islam as a ‘race’ function with respect to the opposition towards the school.

The first of four empirical chapters in this dissertation, Chapter Three traces the complicated relationships between heritage, local history and the ways people in Camden today represent the past. I provide a historical contextualisation of Camden’s settlement past as well as look at local constructions of self and heritage. This chapter argues that ideas of ‘race’ both ambiguously and overtly underlie the popular local narratives of Camden’s past and heritage which protesters use to represent Camden as an area of conserved and continued national significance. It is in the representation of the area as the ‘birthplace of the nation’s wealth’ (to quote the local town slogan) that opponents find a platform on which to legitimise their opposition to the school. The paradox of this narrative of pioneering, prosperous and peaceful European settlement lies in the lack of acknowledgement of the traditional owners. For critics of the school, ‘race’ enables the various ways they conceptualise Camden’s heritage as a conserved piece of white Australia’s past which these residents are determined to see continued in modern day Australia. This chapter demonstrates how there is a strong connection between the ways locals imagine Camden’s rural and white pioneering past, and their representations of Camden today as a rural and white town. The racial dimensions of Australia’s past intersect with contemporary forms of racialisation.

Chapter Four explores racialised constructions of the Camden identity in relation to the future. I argue that the imaginings of Camden’s dystopian ghetto future are situated in Camden’s local context where a number of interrelated themes flourish. These are obvious in the ways locals often refer to “cities” in Sydney's West, specifically those places that are populated with high numbers of Arabs and Muslims. In relation to their positions on the school, these locals would describe these territories as urbanised hubs full of ‘foreigners’ and
crime. This chapter highlights the popular link made by locals between ‘Arabs’ and ‘Muslims’, and the generic category of ‘foreigner’ and criminal activity.

Chapter Five considers the value of the concept of the ‘folk devil’ in charting the common representations of Arabs and Muslims that opponents use as ammunition against the school. A number of studies have shown that Arabs and Muslims in Australia are increasingly Othered, vilified and portrayed as a threat to Australia (Ata 2010; Bouma 2011; Cahill et al. 2004; Collins et al. 2000; Dunn 1999; Hage 2002; Kabir 2005, 2007b; Manning 2006; Mansouri 2002; Mansouri & Kamp 2007; Mansouri & Percival-Wood 2008; Noble 2009; Noble & Poynting 2008; Noble & Tabar 2002; Poynting & Noble 2004; Poynting & Morgan 2007; Poynting et al. 2004; Tabar 2007; White 2007, 2009). Here I explore how representations of Camden’s past and future are inextricably woven into the ways the opponents think of Muslims and Arabs as ‘enemies’. The concept of ‘folk devil’ – drawn from Stan Cohen’s seminal work on moral panics – is useful in charting some of the representations of Arab and Muslim peoples. Folk devils are outsiders during times of crisis or moral panic (Denham 2008; Downes 1977; Rock & Cohen 1970). The term ‘Arab folk devil’ captures the diverse representations of Arabs, Muslims and Middle Easterners that played out during the Camden saga. Chapter Five argues that the construct of the Arab folk devil is cumulative and adaptable to different contexts. In this case, the folk devil fuels antagonism against the school.

In these misrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims, opponents communicate certain ideas of ‘race’ and racism. These are explored at length in Chapter Six. The term ‘Islamophobia’ captures the intersections of nationalism, religion, culture and ethnicity with racial perceptions, often leading to a ‘new racism’ (Augoustinos & Quinn 2003; Balibar 1991; Barker 1981; Dunn et al. 2004; Hall 1992:256-8), where the focus is less on physical differences and more on culture. Building on these discussions, this chapter argues that there is a strong but malleable relationship between ‘race’, racism and a type of localised Islamophobia that is situated in the context of the school saga. Islamophobia, as it plays out in Camden, is not a single set of ideas that particularly target Muslims, but a space of contestation where various ideas are negotiated in the Camden and broader Australian contexts, and where Islam becomes at times a ‘race’ category, a culture or a geographical location.
In essence, this thesis undertakes a series of interrelated investigations which form the basis of the six chapters. I provide a detailed chronology of the controversy and analyse its implications. Ultimately, this thesis highlights the importance of Camden as a case study which illustrates how popular, contemporary discourses around Arabs and Muslims in Australia are used in local development politics. It is an important study in that it demonstrates the effects of everyday narrations of ‘race’, of self or Others. In this dissertation I uncover what others have only explored in a cursory way, drawing on field, archival and historical research, as well as engaging with relevant socio-cultural theories and concepts. In an era when the category of ‘race’ is scientifically disproven and yet people still talk of ‘races’ (see Lentin 2000; 2005; 2012) this project examines the vital importance that ‘race’ plays in contemporary Australia. So a disproven and flawed concept paradoxically maintains currency and shapes the ways people make sense of their world today.
Chapter One

What happened in Camden?

I first heard about the proposal for an Islamic school in Camden, a suburb on the south western outskirts of Sydney, then unknown to me, on ABC radio in November 2007. The report explained that local residents were rallying against the proposal by a charity organisation, the Qur'anic Society, ‘to build a 1,200 pupil Islamic School in the Camden area’ (Edwards 2007). The report continued:

The Mayor of [Camden] Council denies racial and religious motives are behind opposition to a proposed Islamic school in the area…. [A]t a rally last night about 1,000 people turned up, many to voice their opposition. Some of them said they were worried about the school destroying the local area…. (Edwards 2007)

This report, which was filed by the first non-local journalists to cover the story, narrated the school opposition saga as one informed by religion and racism. It featured extracts of the speeches of some protesters, who elaborated on the reasons for their hostility toward the planned school:

PROTESTER 2: I have seen what has happened at Bankstown! (cheering). Bankstown used to be a really nice town! People are terrified and in this audience alone, I know of approximately about 120 that used to live over there, and they've moved to this area, to a country area (Edwards 2007).

Bankstown, in Western Sydney (see map in the Introduction), is widely seen as an ethnic ghetto predominantly populated by Arabs and Muslims. In her narrative, Protester 2 indicates that Bankstown was once a home to people like her but such people had obviously been ‘forced’ to migrate out into the fringes of Sydney in order to escape the population explosion of Arabs and Muslims in the area. Similarly, this report cited another protester who employed similar rhetoric:

PROTESTER 3: Our town is a special place like every other town in New South Wales and throughout Australia. We have many people here tonight who are very, very upset at what is happening, and I do
believe that they will hoodwink us! We are a test case! They have bought land at Picton. They have bought land at Goulburn. Watch out Australia! (Edwards 2007).

Protester 3’s rhetoric is imbued with a sense of great urgency and imminent danger. Notably, the audience cheered these speakers, applauding their comments, which hyperbolically indicate that action must be taken to prevent an all out invasion and take-over of Australia.

The aforementioned radio report was the first to represent the racial and religious tensions prevalent among Camden locals in their opposition to the school. Prior to this rally, the local newspaper had painted quite a different picture of Camden’s relationship with racial and religious difference. For example, the front page of the May 27, 2007, issue of the Camden Advertiser, featured the image of a semi-scarfed local Muslim resident of Pakistani descent, a sculptor artist who had created a bronze face statue of the famous Elizabeth Macarthur (Seymour 2007:1, 5), a recognised historical figure embedded into the Camdenite local identity (I will discuss this further in later chapters). This artist appeared once again on the front page of the June 25, 2007, edition in which the Camden Advertiser reported she had donated three sculptures of prominent Camdenites to the local library. Two depicted the famous Elizabeth Macarthur, and the other was of the local Liberal member of Federal Parliament, Pat Farmer, who would later come to oppose the school proposal. At this point in time, there were no public slogans of ‘no Muslims in Camden’. Nor was there any dialogue that constructed Muslims as threatening to the Camden community, as exemplified in later expressions against the school. This was only three months before Camden Council received the application.

The controversy over the proposed school began in October 2007, when the Camden Advertiser broke the story of a new development application submitted to Camden Council. In the article, residents were officially informed of plans to build an Islamic school in Cawdor, a suburb of Camden, to cater for pupils from kindergarten through to grade 12, and that it would not contain a place of worship. The applicant was a Sydney-based charity called the Qur’anic Society (Bowie 2007a:3). Another local paper, The Macarthur Chronicle, cited the Qur’anic Society’s spokesperson, Jeremy Bingham, who was also a former Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney and a planning consultant (Emerson 2008). Bingham pointed out that the school would cater for the future growth and change of the Camden area (Correy 2007a:3), as the Council was expecting the population to grow from 50,000 to 300,000 in the
ensuing twenty years (Wilson 2008). Locals were able to view plans, models and architectural designs at the local library. In informal conversations I had with some residents during October 2009, I was told that the Camden library staff had to monitor local residents who viewed the school plans, as some visitors had vandalised or tried to steal them.

Local State Labor MP Geoff Corrigan (representing the Camden area at the time in the NSW Parliament) welcomed the plans for the new school, and was quoted in the *Camden Advertiser*:

> I’m sure the majority of Camden residents will welcome additional educational facilities in our area as they welcomed all other schools in rural areas... As I’m sure everyone knows, the establishment of schools in rural zones is allowable and that was shown by Macarthur Anglican School and Camden High School. I’m sure people won’t let issues of religion hinder their welcoming of young children (Bowie 2007a:3).

Corrigan would later be outnumbered by the local and other political figures opposed to the application. He was wrong to assume that young Muslim children would be welcomed in Camden.

Opposition to the proposed school grew rapidly, forcing the Qur’anic Society to defend their application. A week later, the *Camden Advertiser* reported that a handful of readers were hostile to the school. The Society’s spokesperson, Jeremy Bingham, explained that the school was open to all students regardless of their religion, and would not operate as a ‘Muslim only’ school (Bowie 2007b:3). The *Advertiser*’s editor attempted to defuse the hostility and wrote an open ‘Editor’s View’ article welcoming the school:

> I think diversity of opinion and cultures is a great thing – and I hope there are plenty of people, should this school go ahead, who will welcome its staff and students with love and goodwill. If instead we decide to pretend there’s a big fence around Camden and that it’s our job to sit at the gates and control who comes in or goes out, we’d be getting ourselves into dangerous territory. We might just find we’ve built ourselves a prison (Senescall 2007a:4).

The local editorials were usually ‘pro-school’ and would condemn local anti-Muslim sentiment. Yet this handful of opponents steadily became many more than a ‘handful’, and the public anxiety was not defused by the efforts of the local paper and the Society.
A text message circulating in Camden in late October read: ‘The council requires 600 written dated n [sic] signed letters objecting2the [sic] proposal of the Muslim school in Camden. DON’T MISS the opportunity2have [sic] your say before its 2late [sic]’, then urged local residents to forward the message to ‘EVERYONE YOU KNOW. EVEN IF IT MEANS U [sic] GET THIS MORE THAN ONCE’. The local mayor declared that the content of the text message was inaccurate (Kinsella 2007a:1), and that the council did not need 600 letters of objection to reject the proposed school. The alarming tone of the message worked with a democratic notion of ‘having your say’ against a proposed Muslim school. The editor of the local paper wrote in an opinion piece that: ‘Never before have we seen a text messaging campaign on this scale launched against a development application being processed by Camden Council’ (Senescall 2007b:8). Unlike other development applications, there was something about the proposed Islamic school that alarmed local residents.

Opponents formed cyber groups hostile to the proposal on a popular social networking site, *facebook.com* (Kinsella 2007a:11), and members of these groups expressed their views of the school on the main discussion wall. These groups attracted hundreds of members and were called ‘No Islamic school in Camden’ and ‘Protest [sic] the Muslim school in Camden’. Some opponents posted concerns over immigration and identity:

> We will loose [sic] our identity. This is about the Australian identity. White Europeans developed and built this country and I see no reason why Australia should not remain predominantly white (posted 9:49pm 29 October 2008).

Others posted concerns over Islamic integration:

> Have you even thought maybe the people of camden [sic] are scared wat [sic] the intergration [sic] of people that are islamic mite [sic] do to our town?that if they would even try to intergrate [sic]... (posted 4:29pm 30 November 2007).

Opponents even proposed that the school should be placed elsewhere:

> i hear there is alot [sic] of land in iraq [sic] and afganistan [sic] to build your lovely school on??? hint hint!!!!!!!!!!!! (posted 1:19am 31 December 2007)
A number of concerns are articulated here around immigration, nationalism and integration, which will be addressed at length later in this dissertation. In response to these groups, supporters and anti-racism activists formed ‘pro-school’ groups, including ‘Protest [sic] the Muslim school in Camden – what a croc! [sic - crock]’ and ‘Who gives a fuck if they build a Muslim school in Camden’. The posts on these walls were usually reactions to particular opponents who some group-members thought of as racist:

...thanks for creating this group, it seems the only people who have a voice in this matter are the racist small minded fools who oppose the school (posted 2:06pm 14 December 2007).

Yes of course muslim [sic] women will be hiding AK47s in their hijabs...stupid ignorant bogan [sic] bigots! I am ashamed to be from Camden!!’ (posted 11:03am 18 December 2007).

The first letter on the school published in the Camden Advertiser denounced MP Corrigan’s view and expressed outrage at the Islamic school (Poyntz 2007:2). Other letters followed expressing concerns over religious and ethnic differences (Bennett 2007:2, Stewart 2007:6), by contrast with the familiar concerns over traffic volume and environmental factors that are usually raised in the assessment of local development applications. The Camden Advertiser noted that: ‘News in the last fortnight of a proposed Islamic school in Camden has stirred an outpouring of letters from readers’ (for instance, in Camden Advertiser 14 November 2007 edition)

Local resident and Yugoslavian immigrant (Hack TV 2008), Emil Sremchevich, was one of these readers. Sremchevich organised the first anti-school rally (Kinsella 2007b:8) and became the president of a local residents' group against the school. In his first published letter in the Camden Advertiser, Sremchevich argued the school was useless in an area with few Muslims, and called for a local ‘referendum’ on the school. The title above his letter read ‘We need a referendum to rid us of this Muslim school’ (Sremchevich 2007a:6). The following week, Sremchevich was back to argue that the newspaper sensationalised his letter via the headline, and again called for Camdenites to make the decision on the school rather than councillors (Sremchevich 2007b:10).

There was some consensus among locals, but some businesses in Camden started displaying petitions against the school for customers to sign. On one occasion, police were called when an argument broke out between a customer and shop assistant over one petition in the main street of Camden (Kinsella 2007b:1). One interviewee, Matilda, told of how her boss placed a
petition against the school near the cash register where she worked, and that she was harangued by customers because she refused to sign it. Yet other customers argued that a ‘racist’ petition was placed near the register and condemned her for not objecting to it. Matilda personally thought the petition was ‘racist’, yet she needed to keep her job so she did not challenge her boss about it (Matilda, interview, 14 October 2009). Commonly, interviewees said that the Islamic school was the ‘talk of the town’ at this time. At the local coffee shop, pub, library, supermarket, car park, schools and other public and private spheres, residents would discuss their attitudes towards the school. The issue was heated.

The next step was a public rally in November 2007 organised by Emil Sremchevich. It was at this point that the national media took an interest in the Camden controversy. Over 2000 people attended a demonstration against the school that took place on Belgenny Oval in Camden, which some residents advertised through various leaflets and emails (Kinsella 2007b:1). Speaking to ABC TV, local resident Kate McCulloch, who later became an opposition figurehead, argued her views are not tainted by racism, rather a fear of a possible terrorist attack in the district:

Sure we are racist if you call it racist not accepting a community that also happens to bear [sic], they’ve got terrorists amongst them, Okay? We can’t say they haven’t, they have! If we let them in here, they want to be here because they can go and hide in all their country little farmhouses! (Neighbour 2008).

Though some speakers at this rally discussed environmental, town planning, traffic and agricultural issues, the mainstream media were less inclined to report extracts dealing with such concerns as they were with expressions of racist, (inter)national and religious concerns. Yet these more prosaic concerns did attract large cheers and applause from crowd members, thus indicating that they were also of importance to these protesters. Eileen O’Hara and her daughter Kate were the only two locals who raised their hands when a speaker asked if anyone was supportive of the school. They reported that some crowd members yelled ‘Go back to Bankstown’ at them. Eileen stopped Kate, a year 11 high school student, from speaking for the school on stage because she felt intimidated by the crowd (Tibbitts 2007). This rally at Belgenny Oval led to the formation of the ‘Camden/Macarthur Residents’ group’, which planned to use Australia Day celebrations as an opportunity to raise funds for their opposition to the school. Sremchevich was the president of this group and a local resident, Andrew Wannet, was listed as the media spokesperson (Bowie 2007d:11). Like
McCulloch, both Sremchevich and Wannet appeared from time to time in news items to speak against the school throughout the controversy.

Local politicians also attended the Belgenny Oval rally. Pat Farmer, the Liberal member for Macarthur in the federal parliament did not address the racism expressed by certain speakers, arguing instead that fear was well-founded ‘because people want to play a role in what goes on in their backyard’. The local mayor also denied that opposition to the school was racially motivated, although he distanced himself from the speakers (Edwards 2007). Seven out of the nine Camden councillors attended the meeting, and the mayor explained the council’s options to the crowd. He was booed when he explained that the council could approve the application, but received a loud cheer in explaining that it could also be rejected (Kinsella 2007b:8).

After the rally on Belgenny Oval, the ‘sleepy hamlet’ of Camden was pushed into the national spotlight (Vallejo 2007:1), and the town became a household name in Australia. One speaker at the rally even said that the school issue would ‘put Camden on the map’ (Kinsella 2007b:8), which was not far from the truth. Images of speakers at the rally expressing anti-Muslim comments were circulated in the media, and the town was instantly tarnished as ‘racist’. Immediately after the rally, the Camden Advertiser was flooded with letters about the school, and it featured an entire page of letters supporting the school or opposing the expression of anti-Muslim views.

After the rally, several political candidates and politicians from outside of Camden suddenly became interested in campaigning against the school. At this time the campaign for the 2007 federal election was underway, and a candidate from the small right-wing Christian Democratic Party, Godwin Goh, pledged that if he were elected, he would change the existing anti-discrimination and anti-vilification legislation to allow a ten year ban on any development applications concerning mosques or Islamic schools, and would further propose a moratorium on Islamic immigration to Australia (Kinsella 2007c:10). Then Federal Labor opposition leader, Kevin Rudd, was also vocal about the development proposal, opposing it on ‘planning grounds’ while campaigning in Camden (Kinsella 2007f:9).

Other political actors included two extreme right wing groups. The Australia First Party was one such group, which planned to run in the September 2008 Camden local elections in a bid
to reject the school. The party had distributed leaflets against the application in the weeks after the Belgenny Oval rally and had been active in Camden “in response to community debate over the impact of multiculturalism and immigration policy” (in the words of the party leader, Jim Saleam) (Bowie 2007d:11). The other group was the Australian Protectionist Party – though they did not campaign for any particular election, a key member of the group proposed on national television that local councils should be able to stop an ‘invasion by Muslims’ (Q&A 2008). Even former leader of the right wing One Nation Party, Pauline Hanson, came to Camden to aid the protest. The controversial former parliamentarian continued to be courted by in the media at this time (Tedmanson 2010), unlike Goh, who was at this stage an obscure figure. After the massive anti-Muslim school rally proved eventful in Camden, Hanson ‘whirled’ through the area eager to protest against a ‘mosque’ (Kinsella 2007b:9). A journalist corrected Hanson and reminded her that the application was for an Islamic school, not a mosque. Hanson’s first response was that every school in Australia was Christian with the exception of Islamic schools, and then went on to say ‘I have no understanding what they teach in the Islamic school, do you?’ After Hanson admitted her own ignorance of ‘the Islamic school’ teachings, she declared that Islamic schools would teach anti-Australian and anti-Christian values. The One Nation founder now representing her newly formed ‘Australia United’ party, urged the Camden local residents to fly the Australian flag to protest against the school. The proposed Islamic school also inspired Hanson to call for a moratorium on Muslim immigration, arguing that Muslims were incompatible with ‘our way of life’ (Kinsella 2007b:9). Even though Hanson was campaigning at the time for a Queensland state seat, she handed out voting cards in Camden (Kinsella 2007e:9). One interviewee, Lisa told me Hanson came into her workplace and handed out voting cards for the Queensland Parliament. Lisa had explained to Hanson that she was opposed to the school because she did not feel the proposed site was suitable for any development, yet felt Hanson was not interested in her views (Lisa, interview, 14 October 2009).

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6 It is worth noting that Hanson was living in Queensland at the time, yet came all the way to New South Wales to protest against the school. It is possible that Hanson may have been involved in such protests in Queensland, but the media there chose to omit reports of her involvement or statements. On the other hand, it is perhaps more likely that Hanson had not taken part in anti-mosque/school protests that were ‘closer to home’ at the time. It is also worth mentioning that the protests in Queensland did not attract the same level of media attention, and did not consist of thousands of protestors, as did the Camden controversy.

7 Hanson has not exclusively targeted Muslims. During her political career, she has made claims that Indigenous people had ‘more rights’ than white Australians (Kingston 1999:10-11).
In the same week, a wooden crucifix appeared on the proposed site, inscribed with biblical verses on the front and back of the cross. The front featured a verse from the New Testament book of Ephesians chapter 6:18 reading: ‘David and Goliath. The battle is won. This is the King of Kings’ Land. Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare’. The back was inscribed with an Old Testament verse from Isaiah chapter 59:19 which read ‘When the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will lift up a flag in victory’. In the same week, a white supremacist group linked to the Australian Protectionist Party, called the Anglo-Australian National Community Council (AANCC) (Media Watch 2007), handed out anti-school flyers in the main street of Camden. One local business woman observed that the group had used a child to distribute flyers that contained ‘extreme literature’ (Kinsella 2007d:19).

Rumours circulated that Muslims were coming to purchase homes and shops, further intensifying anti-Islamic sentiment and fears that Muslims were set to invade the area:

The Sun-Herald reported that a secret meeting took place among Camden real-estate agents to stop Muslim customers buying properties in the area (Cuming & Marcus 2007). These allegations were denied (Macarthur Chronicle 2007:6). The Daily Telegraph decided the school issue was worthy of a front page item, sensationalising it as a ‘holy war’, quoting a resident arguing that all Muslims were ‘anti-Christian’. This resident also argued that Muslims would not support her lighting up her Christmas tree at home (Vallejo 2007:1, 4).

Camden made international headlines in late November 2007, when two pigs’ heads on stakes were found on the proposed site with an Australian flag draped between them (Correy 2007b:1). The NSW Premier at the time described these actions as ‘bizarre and disgraceful’, and the local police detective inspector condemned the action, stating that: ‘this type of protest is abhorrent, disgusting and does nothing to assist the argument’. After passing-motorists saw the pigs’ heads, police were notified and proceeded to remove the flag, the pigs’ heads and the crucifix installed earlier. Police interviewed butchers and abattoir operators in Camden, and it was reported that a person using a CB radio band in the area
claimed responsibility and was continuing to broadcast anti-Islamic messages (Bowie 2007c:10). The local Crime Manager Inspector said:

The pig was a domestic pig that was less than 12 months old and approximately 40 kilos, and we believe the heads had been obtained from a butcher in the area.\(^8\) We have canvassed abattoirs and butchers in the region and we have received information from a member of the public nominating a person whom they allege is responsible.

A 47-year-old man was questioned then released without charge (Bowie 2007e). The reverberations of the pig heads incident prompted Australians living abroad to discuss the Camden controversy. One Australian, Vanessa Scott, living in the United Arab Emirates, wrote to the Advertiser:

As an Australian residing in the United Arab Emirates, I had the misfortune to see a BBC World television news item on the Quranic school. I am embarrassed to be an Australian receiving the hospitality of a Muslim country, after seeing this article. As a young, blonde woman I feel safer living, working and going out in this country than I ever would in Camden (Scott 2008:16)

In December 2007, a public information forum on Islam and the proposed school was organized in Camden, at which Christian Democratic Party leader Fred Nile spoke along with Liberal Parliamentarian (and local resident) Charlie Lynn. Although a front group called the ‘Public Education Affairs Committee’ purportedly organised the event (Senescall & Bowie 2007), in fact it was hosted by the Christian Democratic Party, as Lynn revealed when he explained that he was approached by Nile to speak on the proposed school (Frew 2007). No Muslim speakers were present to discuss Islam; rather Nile took the initiative. The rally participants sang Christmas carols and the national anthem. Only one news reporter was allowed entry and large crowds gathered outside as the Camden Civic Centre could only accommodate a limited number of people. A local member of the ‘Macarthur Greens’ political group, Leonie Kelly, wrote of her observations of the forum in a letter to the local paper, the Camden Advertiser. She observed that Nile discussed a case where a Muslim school in Western Australia was ‘deregistered’, and failed to mention that a Christian school in the area was also ‘deregistered’:

\(^8\) In this statement, the local Crime Manager Inspector is perhaps stating that one of the pigs was less than 12 months old.
Fred Nile talks a lot about Christian values. He needs to learn that hate is not one of these. Inciting hatred is always reprehensible and unlikely to convert people to his version of Christianity or voters to his party. Liberal MLC [Member of the NSW Legislative Council] Charlie Lynn first declared he was neither racist nor bigoted, then resolved to do all in his power to stop the infiltration of Muslims. The school, he said, would deliver ‘culture shock as a means of social engineering’. The final speaker presented a rather hysterical denunciation. When a questioner suggested all Muslims were not fanatics, he insisted Islamic teaching dictates that Muslims will never live in harmony with ‘us’. All in all, the forum turned out to be an indoctrination session designed to reinforce prejudices against Muslims, bizarrely interspersed with enthusiastic audience renditions of Christmas carols and our national anthem (Kelly 2008:16).

Lynn responded instantly in a reply published in the local paper. He attacked Kelly’s political views, arguing that she was a representative from the ‘radical left’ who, as a result, ‘listens with one ear’. Lynn also argued that a ‘culture shock’ would result in Camden if more Muslims moved into the area (Lynn 2008a:12).

As the Camden Civic Centre was unable to accommodate all the local residents wishing to attend the information forum, crowds gathered outside. According to police, fifty young people draped in ‘Australia gear’ attempted to enter by bashing on the windows, and 150 people were turned away due to the lack of space (Senescall & Bowie 2007). Members of these crowds were wearing Australian flags, chanting Australian slogans, and expressed racist comments towards ‘raggers’ [ragheads] and ‘wogs’. Furthermore, as reported at the time, the crowd ‘vented their anger yelling, “Let us in Mohammed, you're already dividing us up” at the hired security guards, who happened to be of Middle Eastern appearance’ (Vincent 2007).

Four of the interviewees attended the Camden Civic Centre on this day. These were Terri, Jackie, Kathy and Lisa. Terri and Kathy attended the forum, whereas Jackie and Lisa were part of the protests outside. I conducted interviews in 2009, and Kathy and Terri struggled to remember the exact events at the forum, both providing different accounts:

Terri: Fred Nile was there, he spoke on the Christian side of it, and there was a philosopher, some big guy, he spoke on what the Muslims stood for, he spoke on that book, what you call it?
[Researcher]: The Quran?
Terri: Yeah, he was reading passages from it so they weren’t making it up, and what the Muslims stood for, you know, and people don’t want that, it’s just one of those things... Fred wasn’t a bit off at all, he
was genuine. He read it from their Bible [sic –Quran], it was just bits out of the Quran about the Christians and the Muslims... Oh they [Qur’anic verses] did worry me, yes. There were a couple of things said and people were just horrified (Terri, interview, 9 July 2009)

Kathy did not remember anything particularly ‘religious’ at the forum:

Kathy: I did attend [the public information forum] and went inside.
[Researcher]: Did they let anyone in?
Kathy: No they shut the doors, tough if you didn’t get in on time, they didn’t want the wrong people going in. They had to shut the doors. The public information forum was fantastic, there was a solicitor, and he researched it, and got straight to the point, he said that ‘this is where we stand’. I can’t remember exactly but he just knew his stuff, basically he said that the people that had wanted to put the school in the area, they hadn’t lodged a tax return for four, five years, the last time they did, they said their income was 14 000 dollars. He said that they had never run a school before, these people had no idea how to run a school, so he actually done his research, probably more than other people at the rally, he actually did his stuff, he donated his time. And his effort, into the centre and into educating people about who these people were that were just gonna [sic] come to Camden and set up a school. Because it just doesn’t work that way, yeah he was pretty good.
[Researcher]: What about a ‘Muslim philosopher’ of some sort?
Kathy: I think he pulled out. I can’t remember it was a long time ago... I think he pulled out a few things from the Quran, it was more education, yeah, but that bit I can’t remember I just remember what the solicitor spoke about... I don’t even remember Fred Nile being there (Kathy, interview, 31 July 2009)

Kathy left with a lasting impression that the Qur’anic Society was very likely an illegitimate organisation, only posing as an educational or charity group, but perhaps harbouring ulterior motives which would adversely affect Australian society.

These accounts of the public information forum, though different, highlight how it played a significant role in encouraging local residents to continue their fierce stance against the school. Yet this was not the case for another resident who left the forum early, explaining:

MAN: Look, it was a propaganda exercise. It was a propaganda exercise to increase the, you know, the fear in the local community. And most people in there were very receptive to it (Vincent 2007).

Jackie and Lisa attended the protest held outside the forum but neither of them recalled anything of significance about the event. What was important in this instance was the motivation for the attendance of the two women. Lisa indicated that: ‘I went because I was
concerned about the … social impact. And I was concerned about the religious side of things, how the area would change’ (Lisa, interview, 14 October 2009). Meanwhile, Jackie recalled that ‘we wanted to go because we wanted to listen to the [Muslim] philosopher and find out what their views were and what they wanted, what they were proposing’ (Jackie, interview, 31 July 2009). Both Lisa and Jackie share a concern that a Muslim school in Camden may have adverse effects on their township and were seeking further information.

Within a few weeks of the public information forum held in December 2007, _The Daily Telegraph_, a tabloid newspaper, picked up on rumours of a possible anti-Muslim riot that was to occur in Camden on Australia Day (26 January). According to rumours, the Australia First Party planned to organise a riot, and its leader, Jim Saleam, argued that some form of community action would take place in Camden on Australia Day. As a result, an online newsletter was sent out to all party members requesting members willing to pass out leaflets to local residents to make their way to Camden on that day (Bowie 2008a:1). Based on these rumours, that predicted an event of public disorder that would mirror the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim Cronulla riot of 2005⁹ (Hildebrand 2008), Camden attracted a heavy media presence on 26 January 2008, although nothing occurred. Afterwards, the editor of the _Camden Advertiser_ wrote of her disappointment in the ‘Sydney media’: ‘the Sydney media is giving Camden the Campbelltown treatment: it only rates a mention if something has gone wrong’ (Senescall 2008a:4). At this time, numerous residents wrote to the _Camden Advertiser_ expressing their disappointment with the changing image of Camden as a ‘racist town’. Local youths decided to campaign against the racism expressed among some opponents (Bowie 2008b:3). A well-known Sydney Catholic priest, Father Riley, condemned other church leaders such as Fred Nile for using ‘the bible to divide anything’ (Bowie 2008c:3) and a Catholic Bishop visiting Camden spoke against local anti-Muslim racism (Bowie 2008r:5).

In January 2008, the Council publicly rejected the call from Sremchevich, the President of the local Camden/Macarthur residents’ group, for a public referendum of local residents on the school issue. The Council argued it would be a waste of money. Local MLA Geoff Corrigan said that the ‘cost of a referendum would be better spent on roads, hospitals and police’ (Bowie 2008d:11). A local member of the Macarthur Greens, Allan Powell, was asked by this group to inspect the proposed school site. According to Powell, the school plans would

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⁹ This riot is discussed at length in Chapter Five
enhance the environmental quality of the site and he was supportive of the application (Bowie 2008e:11). Yet, Sremchevich, whose letters almost became a regular protest column in the local paper, argued that the group had not asked for the assessment, rather that this was requested by one member of the group (Sremchevich 2008:10).

After months of anxiety, hostility and threats against Muslims in Camden, the Qur’anic Society’s vice president, Issam Obeid, decided to respond to dispel some myths about the school. He explained that contrary to rumours, all religions would be welcome at the school, girls would not be required to wear a headscarf and the school would not exceed the NSW Board of Studies regulations on teaching time of religion in schools (Stringa 2008: 1, 10). This did nothing to ease the hostility and tensions against Muslims.

In March 2008, ABC program Four Corners screened excerpts from across the different anti-school rallies of opponents expressing anti-Muslim sentiments (Neighbour 2008). The local newspaper editor criticised the report:

The camera panned across the crowd as a voice-over described the people of Camden as ‘God fearing’ folk who opposed the school. No chance of mentioning that only some people from Camden are against the school, not all. Or that not everyone from this area can be represented by a woman in a hat and Drizabone claiming the people behind the school ‘have terrorists amongst them’ (Senescall 2008b:4).

The ‘woman in a hat’ was Kate McCulloch. The abiding concern by the local newspaper editor was that a small group of local racists misrepresented the vast majority.

In April 2008, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group distributed flyers in letter boxes across Camden, requesting locals write to the local Council and to Geoff Corrigan, the only locally elected politician who supported the school at the time. The group requested donations from the public to fund pamphlets, environmental and planning reports, and another rally. The local police inspector declared that they did not receive an application for another public protest against the proposal (Bowie 2008f:16). As the Camden community was tarnished as ‘racist’, a local resident (who misunderstood the flyer contents and thought Corrigan produced the flyers) emailed Corrigan a death threat, accusing him of racism and expressing hope that Muslims would blow him up. Police immediately charged the local resident (Senescall 2008c:1).
Politicians and political candidates were back to comment on the school in April 2008. Former federal Labor leader, Mark Latham, published an article in the local paper, writing of a ‘racist streak’ in the area in light of the local hostility to the proposed school. Latham criticised both Labor and Liberal politicians for the extreme racist views in Camden and other ‘white’ suburbs (Latham 2008:16). Fred Nile also returned to the issue of the proposal, and called for a public inquiry into the school in the NSW Parliament (Bowie 2008g:6). Also, Nile’s fellow forum speaker, Liberal MLC Charlie Lynn, wrote an article responding to Latham, arguing that anti-Islamic hostility was the fault of the Bali Bombings, Sydney gang-rapes, 9/11 and ‘radical Islamic mullahs’ (Lynn 2008b:18)\(^\text{10}\).

Later a Palestinian couple screened a movie and organised their own ‘information forum on Islam’ at the Camden Civic Centre in an attempt to address local anti-Muslim sentiment in Camden. The forum featured a sheikh who took question and answers after the movie. In the intermission, the less than one hundred audience members were fed Arabic food and refreshments. A group of school opponents attended and asked questions, some about terrorism, others about the contents of the Quran, and one local resident argued the forum was used to convert local residents even though the sheikh announced that the purpose was to ease the local hostilities towards Muslims (Field notes January 2009).

The local police submitted a report regarding the school to the local council, warning of ‘anti-Islamic gangs, violence and vandalism’ considering the ‘high protest activities against school development’. Further, the police report discussed the prospects of ‘rival gangs’ with the existing school on the same road, and the probability of damage and vandalism to the Islamic school after hours (Bowie 2008i:2-3). On 27 May 2008, the Camden Council rejected the application on ‘planning grounds’ (Bowie 2008h:1, ABC News 2008). According to a report by the Council, the application was not consistent with a number of local and state environmental plans, and the ‘development is likely to impact of [sic] the natural, built and economic environment of the locality’ (Camden Council 2008:43). Only 200 people attended the meeting to hear the decision amidst a heavy media and policing presence. Locals interviewed by the media after the council meeting responded to the decision using the familiar rhetoric vilifying Arabs and Muslims (see Santow 2008). As a result, the federal

\(^{10}\) These various events are discussed at length in relation to the Camden controversy in Chapter Five.
government targeted Camden for funding to promote multicultural and harmony programs (Bowie 2008q:8).

At the council meeting where the matter was initially decided, Kate McCulloch became the self-appointed face of anti-Muslim opposition in Camden. She was dressed in green and gold (Australian sporting colours) and wore an Akubra hat with ‘Australian flag’ stickers. The media gave airtime to McCulloch, who was described as the ‘new Pauline Hanson’. The Sydney Morning Herald rang Pauline Hanson to ask ‘about her would-be successor. She hung up without offering a word’ (D. Murphy 2008). McCulloch’s infamy was short-lived. As a result of her efforts against the proposed school, she appeared on 60 Minutes, campaigning against further immigration to Australia, particularly Islamic immigration. She also ran for the Federal seat of Macarthur as a representative of a notoriously xenophobic political group called the One Nation Party, and was unexpectedly called a ‘poor choice’ candidate by a fellow One Nation candidate because of her anti-Muslim views and opposition towards the school (Ward 2009).

The June 2008 issue of the Camden Advertiser featured a number of articles about Camden’s increasing reputation as a ‘racist’ town. With a front page headline, the local paper ran the headline ‘Honour at stake’:

CAMDEN is no longer known only for its quiet country town atmosphere. International and domestic media attention has attracted accusations of racism and xenophobia. The debate over the Qur’anic Society’s application for a school on Cawdor Road could have long reaching implications for Camden’s reputation. But residents are not taking the name-calling lying down (Camden Advertiser 2008:1)

The Council’s decision to reject the school was global news:

FOLLOWING the council’s decision last week to reject the school application, the story has been picked up in countries such as Iran, Pakistan, France, Qatar, Israel, Croatia, Canada, Britain and the United States. The Advertiser’s website has been swamped with comments calling Camden residents ‘racists’ for not welcoming Muslims into the area. ‘Xenophobia is alive and well in Australia’s Bible Belt’ and ‘this is Muslim victimisation clearly’ were just some of the comments accusing Camden locals of being small-minded (Bowie 2008t:8)
Local journalist Alicia Bowie wrote of how local residents were saddened at Camden’s reputation as a ‘racist town’ and urged the local ‘silent majority’ to speak up against local racism:

IS THERE a silent majority in Camden that allows a few outspoken people to become the representative voice of a community? I have been asked that many times this week by residents, politicians and even a journalist from the New York Times. If that is the case, this is a time when silence is not the way to go. A Sri Lankan man contacted me this week, saying he felt obliged to defend Camden against accusations of racism. He decided not to go ahead with an interview because he was not sure how his opinion would be received and if it would affect his business. He’s not the only one who doesn’t want to speak up. We have contacted lots of residents – Muslims, Christians and atheists alike – over the past eight months to ask for their input in the debate. Some have feared recrimination and opted either not to speak or to remain anonymous... On our website this week, the media have copped a bagging from people who believe it is the media alone who make Camden appear racist or xenophobic. I am inclined to agree – sort of. I was appalled that the one person who was covered in Australian flags at last week’s council meeting was jumped on for comment by the media. The Advertiser refrained, because we knew that that woman was not representative of the 200-strong crowd at the civic centre. On the other hand, listen to or read some of the comments on talkback radio, television or websites. Surely those individuals should be held to account for fuelling mistrust and fear of religious groups. But no matter who is responsible for Camden’s present reputation, maybe it’s time the silent majority were silent no more (Bowie 2008:8-9).

Kate McCulloch was the ‘one person’ receiving disproportionate levels of media attention. Following McCulloch’s actions, the Camden Advertiser received letters challenging McCulloch’s position:

A sort of Camden Joan of Arc. The arguments put forward by Kate are just so good. The logic is inescapable, and if you look at it closely you will conclude that it is just as applicable to other groups that we should not tolerate in our community, either. For example, should we not use the same logic Kate (and others) are using to argue that anyone of Irish Catholic heritage (from which Kate surely comes) should be turfed [expelled] out of here because of the terrible actions of some of the extremists and terrorists in their culture who maimed so many innocent people in Northern Ireland and Britain? The logic is the same, Kate. Better start packing (Youdale 2008:13)

...Mr [Fred] Nile. What authority does he have? Did God send Mr Nile or is he asking for a miracle? But I forgot, this is not a religious matter. Then why is he interfering? And what about all those other residents that gave fuel to the unscrupulous media? I don’t want to be included with them. The vocal
lady with the funny hat, as if it was a carnival parade, and all the rest of it... are only assuming and in the meantime actively practising a form of discrimination (Marasco 2008:20)

After the Council rejected the application, the topic of the school came up on a television program called *Q&A* on the ABC network. *Q&A* is a current affairs panel program featuring celebrities, politicians, activists, bloggers, religious leaders, journalists, academics and other well known people to discuss and debate contentious topics in front of a live audience which contributes questions. One of the creators of a *facebook.com* group against the school, Ryan Bell, was in the audience for this edition of the program with other vocal opponents including Darrin Hodges, who is associated with the Anglo-Australian National Community Council and the Australian Protectionist Party. Bell asked the panel of public figures a question about Camden and argued that the ‘racist tag’ had been unfairly placed on the Camdenites who opposed the school:

...is it a particular race we oppose here, or is it something like the impact that this school will bring upon Camden and the possible influence it will have on the Camden culture? (*Q&A* 2008).

Hodges interjected when members of the panel discussed their positions on the matter. He proposed that local councils should have the right to stop an ‘invasion by Muslims’ and argued that ‘Islam is not a race, so it’s not racist to oppose Islam’. A different resident who supported the proposal argued that some of the opposition on ‘environmental grounds’ was ‘poorly hidden racism’ (*Q&A* 2008). Denials and accusations of racism were central to some positions on the school.

After the Council’s rejection of the school, the Catholic Education Office announced provisional plans to build another Catholic school in Camden (Stallitano & Bowie 2008). The local Camden/Macarthur Residents Group immediately supported the idea, although nothing came of it. Sremchevich welcomed a Catholic school even though no architectural plans were made public at that time for an assessment of whether it was ‘rural-friendly’ (*Camden Advertiser* 2008). In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sremchevich was asked if he favoured the Catholic school because he was ‘racist’, and he argued he was not racist or discriminatory, just as some people preferred ‘Fords’ to ‘Holdens’, or ‘blondes’ to ‘brunettes’ (Creagh 2008:1).
In the meantime, the Qur’anic Society appealed against the Council’s decision in the Land and Environment Court (Bowie 2008j:7; 2008m). Considering a large number of residents objected to the proposal, the Land and Environment Court Commissioner hearing the appeal sought an indication from the Council of how many residents would speak in Court (Bowie 2008n). The Qur’anic Society modified the proposal in the appeal: the proposed student numbers was reduced from 1200 to 900, one building was removed, another one was scaled down, and the bus parking spaces were changed (Bowie 2008o). The Council received approximately 1800 resident objections to the revised proposal in contrast with 5000 objections originally submitted against the first (Camden Advertiser 2009). Eighteen local residents expressing their opposition appeared on a DVD submitted to the hearing, including Wannet and McCulloch (Bowie 2009d). Also, the barristers for both the Qur’anic Society and the Council, along with the Commissioner and others, visited the proposed site of the school for an inspection (Bowie 2009e).

Local journalist Alicia Bowie noted that the Council’s position was that the school was incompatible with ‘rural’ Camden and not ‘environmentally sensitive’; would create unreasonable, ‘uneconomic’ demands for public services (interestingly, police resources were mentioned as though the school would increase crime); increase noise and traffic; and that ‘the world view of the Quranic Society, which wants to build an Islamic school in Camden, is “not compatible” with Australia's egalitarian culture’ (Bowie 2009a). Additionally, the Council argued that the Qur’anic Society had links with a terrorist organisation, which the Commissioner ruled out and deemed inadmissible in a Land and Environment Court (Bowie 2009c). In Court, Chris Gough, representing the Qur’anic Society, was put into a position where he had to argue that there was no ‘evidence that Muslim schools in Sydney require an increase in police presence’ to counteract local rumours and assertions (Bowie 2009b).

A group of local Christian leaders (the Camden Ministers’ Fraternity) met in February 2008 to decide whether they should submit a joint letter against the school (Bowie 2008l). They did so, and the Camden Advertiser provided a downloadable copy of this letter on their website. In making its case against the school to the Court, Camden Council tendered this letter from the Camden Ministers’ Fraternity which contained assertions that the Qur’anic Society was a terrorist group and Muslims were incompatible with ‘Australian egalitarianism’ (Bowie 2009e). In response to the Fraternity letter, Mr Gough argued; ‘In my respectful submission, it is disappointing church leaders have expressed those views’ (Bowie 2009b). Also the
Committee for Public Affairs Education, a front group of the Christian Democratic Party that organised the Public Information Forum on Islam in Camden, sought to appear before the court. The judge barred the Centre from taking part in the Court debate (Bowie 2008p), presumably because of the group’s fierce anti-Muslim stance.

On 2 June 2009, the Court rejected the Qur’anic Society’s appeal. Upon exiting the court room, the Council’s solicitor faced media questions on why the Council’s defence had drawn attention to issues of ‘race’ and religion. The solicitor argued the council was obliged to put forward all issues ‘the public felt were important... The court gave [concerns over ‘race’ and religion] zero weight, [as] it says in its judgment, and that was an appropriate assessment for the court to determine’ (Bowie 2009f). Since then, the Society has talked of selling the proposed site.

In this chapter, I have outlined the various components and episodes of the Camden controversy. Clearly, the media played a vital role in the representation of the events and the popular reactions to the proposed school. National and international media seemed intent on focusing on rhetorical strategies invested in opposing the school on the basis of cultural and religious considerations, paying less attention to opposition due to environmental concerns, or to voices supporting the school on multicultural grounds. In contrast to national and international coverage, the local Camden media was actually quite vocal against racist discourse, but this too received little attention. The Camden controversy also seemed unique in that it attracted support for opponents from external, non-local politicians, as well as extreme-right political groups, who were perhaps using the incident as a platform to promote their views and increase their exposure.

It is ironic that only weeks prior to the eruption of the controversy, the Camden Advertiser featured a veiled Muslim sculptor artist, who was also a Camden local, on their front page, proudly proclaiming her donations to the library. Members of the very community that had accepted the sculptures of Australian icons made by a Muslim resident would go on to voice largely Islamophobic opinions about the proposed school. This begs the question: ‘what was so frightening and provocative about the idea of an inclusive Islamic school in the area? It seems that considerations of racial otherness, particularly Islamic ‘racial’ otherness, are what drive oppositional positions against the school. After all, the fear is singularly based on the
notion of this school being *Islamic*. Significantly, no other application for development in Camden (including talk of a proposed Catholic school) attracted such vitriol.

In order to better understand the nature of this controversy, the international and national attention it gained, and how discourses of Othering operated in this context, I seek to place this incident within a larger Australian context of opposition to mosque and Islamic school development more broadly. Understanding the history of such conflicts, their progress, evolution and change, will allow us greater insight into what is perhaps the most prominent recent example of nationalist opposition to the so-called ‘Islamification’ of the Australian landscape.
Chapter Two

‘A new face of Islamophobia in Sydney’: Contextualising and conceptualising the ‘race’ for Camden

In recent times, a great number of both scholarly and general interest books on Islamophobia (see Allen 2010; Aslan 2009; Ata 2009; Esposito & Kalin 2011; Gottschalk & Greenberg 2008; Habib 2010; Morgan & Poynting 2012; Ramberg 2004; Runnymede Trust 1997; Sayyid & Vakil 2010; Sheehi 2011; van Driel 2004) have appeared, commonly describing how Islamophobia manifests itself in various ways across the world today. Many scholars and public commentators use the term Islamophobia in the broad and literal sense as ‘fear of Muslims’ or ‘fear of Islam’, and others reject the term or its narrow usage as merely a ‘fear’ (Sayyid 2010:1). Most scholars, however, opt for the literal interpretation of Islamophobia. Both the historical and more recent stories of opposition to Australian Muslim groups seeking to build mosques and Islamic schools (see Dunn 1999, 2001; Kabir 2005; Humphrey 1987) exemplify Islamophobia at various intensities. The episodes in Camden are not unique in the sense that Muslims have commonly faced obstacles when proposing mosques and Islamic schools across the country. However, in Camden, the construction of ‘race’ plays a role unique to the controversy, in that ‘race’ manages to manifest as a common denominator across the various motivations for opposing the school.

In his famous lecture, ‘Race: the Floating Signifier’ (see Jhally 1997), Stuart Hall argues that race is a multi-layered construct which includes in its purview many dimensions including ethnicity, culture, gender, religion and class. Hall’s view of ‘race’ as a floating, rather than a fixed, signifier, is particularly relevant to our understanding of the connections between Islamophobia and issues of ‘race’ which foreground the Camdenite misconstructions of Muslims and rhetorical oppositions to the school. In the latter part of this chapter, I will explore this phenomenon of constructing Muslim identity as Other and as a ‘race’ by critics of the school. However, prior to this undertaking, it is important to look at the Muslim demographic in Australia in its reality, in order to comprehend the fiction. Additionally, I situate the controversy within its larger historical context, in order to ascertain how ‘Islamophobia’ developed and evolved in the Australian context over time. These contextualisations will also allow us to better differentiate between fact and fiction in relation
to Muslim presence in Australia, as well as understand how constructs of Islam as a ‘race’ function with respect to the Camden controversy.

**Demographics and Australian Muslims**

In their crusades against the school, locals characterised Camden as a demographic ‘island’ of Australia. The discursive construction of this Australian haven leaves little room for Muslims to be anything other than the opposite – ‘un-Australian’. Rarely did opponents describe Muslims as ‘Muslim Australians’. Some opponents argued the school would cater for Islamic youth rather than ‘Australian’ youth, as though being young, Muslim and Australian are irreconcilable. To the contrary, studies have shown that Muslim youths themselves tend to identify as ‘Muslim Australians’, ‘thus indicating a willingness for a rapprochement with the host society’ (Kolig & Kabir 2008:278). Other studies have shown that some Muslim youth do not identify themselves as ‘Australian’ as a form of protest against their marginalisation (Kabir 2008; also see Markus & Dharmalingam 2007: xiii, 106), particularly in a context where anti-Muslim discrimination has increased (see HREOC 2004). Yet for these opponents, being Australian represented ideas of a white or Anglo-Saxon ‘race’/ethnicity, whereas being Muslim represented Middle Eastern, Arab and/or specifically Lebanese ‘race’/ethnicity. This speaks to the idea that Islam is seen as a ‘race’. The body of the Islamic other is racialised in the sense where ‘brown skin’ signifies Muslim people. Semati (2010:257) argues that ‘brown, once the signifier of an exoticism, has come to embody the menacing Other in the today’s geopolitical imagination, in a context where 9/11 provided the horizon within which to recast (global) socio-political antagonisms in “cultural” terms’. There is an obvious ‘mental association’ of the Arab ethnicity with Islam as a religion (Joshi 2006:218)

Australian Muslims are a minority, only making up approximately 1-2% of the total Australian population (total of 340, 942 people in 2006) (Kolig & Kabir 2008:270) and in the public eye, most views of Arabs and Muslims do not acknowledge the ‘dynamism, diversity and complexity of actual lived experience’ of Muslims and Arabs (Povey 2009:64). As Kolig and Kabir write:

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11 Further, Kolig and Kabir (2008:270) write that Muslims receive disproportionately more attention than any other religious group at the moment, particularly in the media and among politicians. The attention covers a range of issues, concerning ‘immigration, policing, national security, and integration’.

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Despite their wide ethnic and sectarian diversity present in [Australia and New Zealand]... there is a tendency to lump Muslims together as though they were one politically relevant monolithic group, which significantly, bears the stigma of potentially posing a threat to national security (Kolig & Kabir 2008:270).

Some opponents framed Muslims as a monolithic group with a distinct ‘Muslim national identity’ as though ‘Islam’ were a distinct country, or certain countries. Some interviewees framed Muslims as ‘migrants’ from the Middle East. Rarely did they cite European countries like Bosnia and Albania as places ‘where Muslims come from’ (though some discussed Turkey). Opponents usually cited Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. One participant even cited ‘Islamabad’ – a city in Pakistan as if it were a country from which Muslims originate. In observing the wall posts on an anti-school Facebook.com group, it was obvious that first, ‘race’ foreshadowed the ways people thought about Muslims, and second, these particular constructions of Muslims disregard the actual diversity among Australian Muslims. As one wall post read:

Well i would just like to say that i [sic] am not a racist person, i [sic] hate all races but this is our country, ppl r [sic] free to believe in whatever they like that why australia [sic] is known as a free country however they chose to live here to give there [sic] families a better life ... if we moved to thier [sic] country would they open an Aussie skool [sic] for us? No! Cheers! (12:05pm on 4/02/2008).

For this opponent, Muslims are peoples from ‘one country’. Evidently, their reference to Muslims as a particular ‘race’ of people is significant in the way they position a Muslim school as the antithesis of an ‘Aussie skool’. In marking ‘their country’ against ‘ours’, this opponent positions themselves with a sense of ownership over Australia, and paradoxically, argues that Australia is a free country yet limits the freedom of Muslims to build schools. Other Facebook.com posts also homogenised Muslims as an un-Australian group of people:

im [sic] with you on that one its australia [sic] and if you dont [sic] like it u [sic] have the free will to leave how about u [sic] inhabit our way of life in our country the same as we would have to if we went to yours (4:57pm on 29/12/2007)

Not only did some opponents position Muslims as ‘un-Australian’, placing them outside both the local and national landscape; they also imagined a distinct Muslim lifestyle further seen as ‘un-Australian’. These representations of peoples, cultures and their locations are all ways that opponents think about Muslims as a distinct ‘race’ of people. Before we examine these
many forms, a concise context of the historical and contemporary controversies regarding proposed mosques and Islamic schools is necessary to map out the racialisations of Islam in Camden.

The first mosque and Islamic School in Australia

Mosques are significant to Muslims and their ability to practise their faith. The building of a religious community is facilitated by the building of a mosque (Bouma 1997:76), and mosques can become central to the activities of any particular community (Humphrey 1987:236). For some Muslim Australians, mosques are linked to the support and friendships built around and within their communities. Mosques can also be places where traditions and community beliefs are maintained, and where children interact with other children of their own faith (Bouma & Brace-Govan 2000:165). Mosques are crucial spaces where Muslims in Australia establish a sense of community within a broader culturally diverse society.

Though Islamic contact with Australia predates the days in 1788 when the First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay, the first Australian mosques were structured temporarily in the years of early colonial Australia (Dunn 1999). Around the Australian countryside, ‘bush-mosques’ were established and professional Imams toured these mosques and settled disputes and performed religious services (Dunn 1999:228-9). In early colonial Australia, most Muslims were of Afghan origin and they were denied rights to build mosques or religious centres. The Afghans had raised funds within their own communities to build places of worship and, as they were travellers, they would build temporary mosques out of tin sheds or clay. The Afghans routinely experienced discrimination because of their non-white skin colour (Kabir 2005:68-9). Thus, anti-Muslim sentiment can be historicised within the Australian context as one largely based on ‘race’ and as a sentiment which can be traced to the earliest formations of the nation.

In 1904-05, a group of Afghans raised enough funds among their community to build a mosque in William Street, Perth. Through a similar process of local Muslim funding, the Adelaide Mosque was built in Little Gilbert Street in Adelaide in 1890. The Broken Hill Mosque in New South Wales was erected in 1891, while the Holland Park Mosque in Brisbane was initially built of wood in 1907 and was later rebuilt with bricks (Kabir 2005:70). The Adelaide Mosque still stands today and is the oldest Islamic structure, with
four minarets, to be found in Australia. Afghans, who were exempt from deportation despite the ‘White Australia’ policy which came into effect in 1901,\textsuperscript{12} used this mosque and funded its development (Jones & Kenny 2007:22-3). As many non-white Muslims were deported after the introduction of the ‘White Australia’ policy in 1901 (Kabir 2007a:148), white Muslims continued to use some of the established mosques in Australia.

The first Islamic school in Australia, the King Khalid Islamic College, was established in 1983 in Melbourne’s northern suburbs. This school has two campuses near the suburbs of Brunswick, Coburg, Fawkner and Broadmeadows, which have concentrated Muslim communities. The primary school is located in Coburg and the secondary school in Merlynston. Both are co-educational without segregation. The school describes Australia as a ‘multi-racial, multicultural and multi-faith’ society, and the school students and staff are culturally diverse, coming from European, Asian and African backgrounds and the majority of students are born in Australia (Saeed 2003:152).

There is a significant time difference between the first mosque and the first Islamic school in Australia – almost an entire century. This gap needs to be seen in the context of the ‘White Australia’ policy of 1901, and the discrimination directed towards Muslims since European contact with Australia.

‘We have seen this before’: Hostilities against Islamic development applications

If the Qur’anic Society had attempted to establish a Camden Islamic school prior to the introduction of multiculturalism in the 1970s, arguably it would have faced both local opposition and the constraints of the ‘White Australia’ policy (and arguably, the members of such a society would be fewer in this context). Muslims found it easier to build mosques and Islamic schools in Australia since then although challenges to these attempts were still widespread and unavoidable. This section will describe some of the popular examples in order of their occurrence. These examples of hostilities against Islamic development applications are based in the Australian context, as it is my purpose here to demonstrate the how the Camden Islamic school controversy fits into a broader Australian trend of local expressions of anxiety against proposed Islamic schools, mosques and prayer centres. It is

\textsuperscript{12} The Immigration Restriction Act, 1901, was unofficially known as the “White Australia” policy. It consisted of measures that aimed to restrict non-White immigration to Australia (see Kabir 2005: 56-57).
also my purpose to highlight the uniqueness of the controversy in terms of its contemporary nature and the distinct actions of protest. There is plenty of scholarship on the topic of hostility against Islamic development applications in parts of the Europe and North America (see Cere 2002; Cesari 2005; Dragoş 2005; Fetzer, & Soper 2003; Gottschalk & Greenberg 2008; Haddad & Smith 1995; Haddad & Smith 1996; Hödl 2010; Landman & Wessels 2005; Lewis 2007; Mayer 2011; McLoughlin 2005; Metcalf 1996; Reeves et al. 2009; Roy 2006; Roy 2007; Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di Friedberg 2005; Soper & Fetzer 2003; Takim 2011), however, this thesis focuses on Australian examples as they are most relevant in positioning the Camden controversy as an ‘Australian trend’.

In 1980 in Mackay (in North Queensland), a group of Javanese Muslims applied to build a mosque. At first, the local council declared that the site was ‘residential’ and the society would not be able to build their mosque, but then zoned it as ‘rural’ and the proposal was approved (Kabir 2005:193). A year later in South Western Sydney, the Campbelltown Suburban Islamic Association faced challenges in building a mosque. The Association represented over 30 different Muslim ethnic groups in the area that used a former doctor’s surgery for meetings and prayers between 1981 and 1985. The Campbelltown City Council objected to using the premises as a ‘place of worship’, so the Association submitted a proposal for a mosque (Kabir 2005:181-3). The council rejected the application. After several discriminatory and anti-Muslim comments by various non-Muslim community leaders in the area, elected Councillors, and local residents, the case entered the Land and Environment Court and the Council’s decision was overruled (Kabir 2005:188). Dunn suggests that an anti-Islamic cartoon, the publication of a letter by a former Lakemba13 resident in the local paper, and the criticisms from Council officers all contributed to the rejection of the development application (Dunn 1999:371).

Similarly, anti-Muslim views emerged in response to a proposal concerning the establishment of an Alawy mosque in Canterbury, an inner western suburb of Sydney. Between 1982 and 1986, the Alawy Muslim Society in Canterbury used a residential property as a meeting place. Canterbury Council rejected their application to transform this property into a mosque,

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13 As I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, Lakemba is a suburb with the highest concentration of Muslims in Australia. It is stereotyped by some conservative voices as a place of crime and a starting point of an Islamic invasion of Australia. For this reason, the former resident of Lakemba talked of ‘what would happen’ by referring to Lakemba as their proof of the impact of Muslims in any given locality. As this thesis shows in later chapters, many opponents of the school in Camden raised similar arguments.
arguing the property was ‘too small’. Later, the council demanded that the Society cease using it for religious purposes, took them to the Land and Environment Court to enforce their demands and lost their case (Kabir 2005:176). In 1984, Canterbury Council appealed to the New South Wales Supreme Court, which dismissed the appeal and ordered that council pay the Society’s legal fees. In 1985, Canterbury Council appealed to the Australian High Court and argued it was not a ‘public place of worship’ because it specifically catered for the Alawites. The court rejected this interpretation and their appeal in 1986 (Kabir 2005:177, Humphreys 1989b:15).

In 1983, also within the Bankstown area, another Islamic development application was the subject of controversy. The Bankstown Council rejected an application by the United Arab Muslim Association for a large mosque in Bass Hill, on the basis of concerns about traffic, parking, noise, the height of a proposed minaret, and ‘site overdevelopment’. The Association appealed this decision but the appeal was rejected in court (Kabir 2005:179). The Association then considered land in the nearby suburb of Greenacre for a mosque; Bankstown Council approved this site (Kabir 2005:180, Humphreys 1989b:15-6) and the mosque was built.

In 1982 in Victoria, the Turkish Islamic Society bought property in Thomastown, a suburb of Melbourne, to be used as a place of prayer, and later purchased another neighbouring property as a home for the local Imam. In 1983, the local council issued a planning permit allowing the Society to use the area as a community centre, yet there were heavy restrictions which came with this permit. Only fifteen people were allowed on the site at any time and the permit was initially only for twelve months (but was rolled over until 1986) (Kabir 2005:189). The society submitted a development application for a community centre and a place of worship which was refused by the Council because of concerns about parking, noise and the conducting of funerals. In 1989, the society appealed the decision to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which granted permission for the premises to be used as a place of worship (Kabir 2005:190).

In the past decade, several development applications for mosques, schools and prayer centres have attracted intense levels of protest and local opposition. This is explicit among many post-2001 development applications, including: the Annangrove Prayer Centre (NSW); the Cairns Mosque (Qld); the Bankstown Islamic school (NSW); the Carrara Islamic school (Qld); the Gold Coast Mosque (QLD); the Newcastle Mosque (NSW); Islamic schools in the
Liverpool district; and even an application concerning Islamic burial plots on the outskirts of Camden.

In 2002, a proposed Prayer Centre in Annangrove, near Baulkham Hills in north-western Sydney, caused outcry among local residents. Annangrove is in the ‘strongly middle class, Anglo-Celtic Hills district’ (Poynting et al. 2004:222), and was described by an ABC radio journalist as part of ‘the Bible Belt’ (O’Brien 2008) (a reference to the religious and conservative Christian nature of the area). The Annangrove proposal received up to 8000 letters of objection (more than Camden) and the site was frequently vandalized and severed pigs’ heads were placed around the property in an attempt to contaminate it (Krugar 2007). The residential population of Annangrove was only 2,000, yet the Council received complaints from across the wider Baulkham Hills shire (Geoghegan 2002). The Baulkham Hills Council rejected the application, arguing that since such a proposal was not compatible with the shared beliefs of the local community, the Prayer Centre could not be placed in the local area, and it did not serve the interests of the Annangrove community (The Age 2002). The applicants took their case to the Land and Environment Court where it was approved (Kerin 2008; O’Rourke 2003; Morris 2007).

At a similar time, a Muslim community in Cairns faced obstacles in building a mosque. The Cairns Council approved a proposal for a mosque, following which thirteen local residents hired lawyers and took both the Council and applicants to the Queensland Planning and Environment Court (P. Murphy 2008). In May 2008, the Court rejected the case put forward by the local residents (Davis 2010). During construction, the mosque was vandalised and the local Islamic elders received threatening hate mail with illustrations of Muslims as terrorists (Blomfield 2009). Nevertheless, the Mosque opened in 2010.

More recent controversy over a proposed Islamic school in Bankstown also exemplified anti-Muslim hostility – though not to the same extent as in Camden or Annangrove. Opponents of a proposed school in Bass Hill (a suburb in the Bankstown municipal area) argued the school would increase traffic and increase ‘sectarian and social tensions’ as there was a public school nearby (Gilmore & Price 2007, Vincent 2009). The Bankstown City Council rejected the application for the school (Neighbour 2008). The case then came before the Land and Environment Court which overturned the Council’s decision. The Commissioner referred to Islam as ‘the elephant in the courtroom’, questioning ‘whether the Council would have raised
quite as many contentions as it did if the application had been for an Anglican school’ (Murray 2009).

The protest actions that took place during 2008 and 2009 against the proposed Islamic school in Carrara (located on Queensland’s Gold Coast) resembled the Camden protests. In 2008, 200 local residents protested the school. Some residents feared the area would turn into a ‘terrorist-breeding ghetto’, others feared Muslims would not integrate (Gold Coast 2008). The Mayor nevertheless supported the proposal and the school was approved by the Gold Coast City Council (Butler 2008; Brisbane Times 2009; Chambers 2009).

A year later, a nearby site was the centre of controversy over a proposed mosque. In Worongary, a number of residents had protested the establishment of a second mosque on the Gold Coast on Akira Way. As approximately 5000 Muslims live in the Gold Coast region, the Imam of the existing Gold Coast Mosque pointed out that the Gold Coast Muslim community needed another place of worship (Simmons 2010). The Islamic Multicultural Association of the Gold Coast was the applicant behind the proposal (Gold Coast Bulletin 2010). Approximately 300 local residents rallied and signed petitions against the proposal (Pierce 2010, Kiloran 2010). To address the hostility among some residents, an inter-faith symposium took place at the established Islamic college (discussed previously) where Muslim and Christian leaders communicated in an attempt to ease hostility towards Islam and Muslims (Pierce 2010). The mosque proposal, however, was rejected by the Council. The applicants appealed this decision and won (Kiloran 2012).

The Newcastle Muslim Association planned to build a mosque in the city’s suburb of Elermore Vale (Page 2010). Their proposal included a mosque, a funeral building, a house, a two-storey car park to cater for 165 cars, and a community hall (Dinneen 2010). Over 400 local residents signed a petition against the proposal, citing traffic concerns and the likely impact on property prices. The petition also argued that the community was not consulted over the development (Davidson 2010). Anti-Muslim posters and leaflets circulated in the area (Page 2010), and an extreme right group, the Australian Protectionist Party, protested the mosque (Cottrill 2010). Newcastle Council rejected this development.

In some cases, Islamic development applications have been considered by local councils without attracting mass rallies and organised residents’ groups in opposition For example, the
opposition towards Islamic development applications occurred in Hoxton Park, a suburb within the Liverpool municipal area, was minimal in comparison to the attention drawn to the Islamic development applications in Camden, Bass Hill and Annangrove (Long 2009). In Hoxton Park, only 100 people turned up to protest against the school. The Liverpool Council approved the school for Hoxton Park in June 2009. Interestingly, the Council rejected a different development application for an Islamic school in Austral, another nearby suburb. The Austral application, which also inspired minimal local opposition and campaigns of protest, was rejected based on rural zoning issues (McLean 2009).

In December 2008, the Camden Council allocated seventy Islamic burial plots at the request of a local Muslim family in the Camden cemetery (across the road from the proposed Camden Islamic school site). This occurred against the backdrop of the school, yet there were no reported protests or even concerns expressed regarding the allocation of Islamic burial plots. However, after a Muslim group bought the St Thomas Anglican Cemetery in Narellan, a town adjacent to Camden, a group of residents called ‘The Friends of St Thomas’ attempted to ‘save’ the cemetery from a Muslim ‘take over’. A member of the group said he did not want members of his family to be buried next to Muslims, arguing:

I’m going in to see the local member, if not the Mayor of Camden. My heritage is up there: my grandfather and grandmother, my parents, my brother and uncles. Our family goes back 200 years in the district. They came to Camden Park and stayed there. I’ve got nothing against migrants but when they want to take over your cemetery... (Morris 2008).

Even a development application concerning Islamic spaces at a grave yard outside of Camden attracted protest. Dead or alive, Muslims have been deemed threatening to particular localities. There is obviously a sense of entitlement that the dominant white culture has over certain spaces across Australia, where basic applications for graveyards ignite fears of an Islamic invasion. The high levels of protest against the proposed Islamic school in Camden need to be contextualized in relation to the other controversies about Islamic development applications. The protests in Camden parallel these controversies to some degree and form a broader ripple of local anxieties against Muslims.
Placing the Camden protests in context

Historically, Muslims have suffered marginalisation within Australian society, in which they are frequently constructed as Other. In the days of the early European invasion, the colonies would characterize the Afghan communities as a threat to their lifestyles (Kabir 2005). Today, the Camden controversy has echoed a similar characterisation of Muslims. What is more, the Camden controversy has similarities with the episodes of opposition that emerged in the 1980s. Opponents in Camden express similar anti-Islamic sentiments and even draw on previously established stereotypes of the Lakemba area (a place with high numbers of Muslims within Sydney) to legitimise their opposition. The Campbelltown Mosque controversy is also another case in point, as a parallel to the Camden incident in that concerns were framed in relation to how Lakemba was changed demographically after the introduction of the mosque there.

What differs in the contemporary context from the incidents in the 1980s is largely due to the escalation of Islamophobia since the terrorist attacks in the US and elsewhere in 2001 and later, the rapid expansion of the internet in the last decade and the use of new media to disseminate political messages. The internet is now a widely accessible virtual space that these critics utilise to contact fellow critics, debate supporters, share information, organise rallies and obtain national support for their cause. Virtual space is not only used for the publication of online articles, but also for social networking, setting up websites, podcasts and youtube.com clips. The internet is a participatory forum where opponents can write their letters to the editor and local councils, share information instantly, and organise protests efficiently. Text messages have also been utilised in the contemporary context, allowing opponents to be instantly informed of protest actions.

Unlike the protests against proposed mosques and Islamic schools in earlier times, the application in Camden received a significant amount of national and international media attention and attracted many political actors from the extreme right who do not customarily intervene in (other) development applications. As the earlier description of the events articulates, it was only after the media focused on the protest activities that these political stakeholders decided to protest in Camden, in order to capitalise on media attention. For instance, the Australian Protectionist Party became involved in the development application
protest after national media attention began. The party has since sought to involve itself in another Islamic development controversy, regarding the application for building a mosque in Newcastle.

From an examination of the history of anti-Islamic opposition to development applications, it becomes clear that Camdenites forged a clearer oppositional discourse involving ideas of the ‘nation’ and Australian identity than their predecessors. In the Camden context, protesters chanted ‘Aussie’ slogans, wore stickers of the Australian flag and t-shirts with the Southern Cross (considered a national symbol as on the Australian flag), sang the national anthem and wore specifically green and yellow colours at protests – as seen at international sporting events. In this way, Camden set a precedent, or perhaps showed a paradigm shift in the ways discourses of Islamophobia evolve. Following the events in Camden, opposition to Islamic site development in Queensland has manifested the same visual, auditory and rhetorical paraphernalia centred around nationalism and Australian identity. Besides the use of white Australian iconography for protest, another differentiating factor that sets the Camden incident apart from its predecessors is the magnitude of attention, protestation and political involvement that the controversy attracted. The relative scale of the Camden controversy can be ascertained through observation and analysis of popular narratives as disseminated by journalists, politicians and political groups.

Figure 2 - Summary of ‘what happened’ in Camden Source: The Camden Advertiser, Wednesday 28 May 2008. Page 2.

Popular narratives of the controversy

‘WHAT HAPPENED’ is the title of a chronology that describes the Camden controversy, published on page 2 of the Camden Advertiser, on May 28, 2008. As Figure 2 shows, this table summarises the local hostilities against the school in layperson’s terms, offering the reader an overview of the
highlights of the controversy during 2007 and 2008 at a glance. This table informs the reader specifically of the protest actions undertaken by locals and the positions of some political actors against the school. In contrast, a website titled ‘Australian Islamist Monitor’ reported the controversy under the heading ‘Camden Campaign to Stop Islamic School’ (see Figure 3). This website, which stopped posting articles in June 2011, explains that it aims to protect Western Civilisation from Islamic terrorism. In the tone and content of this article, the author describes the controversy with an agenda to protest against the ‘expansion’ of ‘anti-democratic Islam’ and the presence of Muslims (Larkson 2007). Both these extracts narrate the Camden controversy through certain lenses for their respective audiences: in the first example, the narration is concise and objective, while the writing of the second betrays a clear political agenda which promotes opposition based on Islamophobic sentiment.  

Opponents of the school who were against the development proposal for purely environmental reasons, as well as supporters, preferred to describe and explain the frenzy as

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14 It might be worth noting that the description of the Camden controversy in this thesis differs from the mainstream and popular narratives offered by tabloid journalists, politicians and other stakeholders. It differs in that it is based on my data, and describes at length the episodes that form the case study central to this dissertation. Unlike the table in the local newspaper that I discuss in this section, Chapter One clearly describes the total register of events, including the court case in 2009. Also, unlike the website article that I also discuss in this section, Chapter One did not have a racist political agenda, but a balanced account that is informed by rigorous research in describing the protests in Camden.
'racist' or as being caused by 'racism', particularly in their narration of the hostile opinions and actions against the school. Only one media report framed the events as ‘Islamophobic’. The Age journalist Annabel Stafford described the controversy as Sydney’s ‘new face of Islamophobia’:

THERE is a new face of Islamophobia in Sydney. Gone are the images of angry young men draped in Australian flags and brandishing beer bottles as they rampage through Cronulla terrorising anyone who looks Middle Eastern. In their place is middle-aged, earnest-looking Kate McCulloch, wearing a large Akubra hat plastered with Australian flag stickers. She tells the TV cameras that she is not racist, but Muslims take our welfare, do not live by our rules and are not welcome in Camden... When Camden Council unanimously rejected the application for a 1200-student school last week, it insisted the decision was purely about planning control. But protests before the decision, which culminated in pigs' heads being left on the proposed school site, have left the impression that it has everything to do with religion. Whatever the truth, experts say the Camden affair is the latest sign of worsening Islamophobia in Sydney, and will only add to intolerance... Ms McCulloch, who runs a local business, says: ‘The school is just the thin edge of the wedge. You only have to look at those countries that have accepted Arabs and other Islamic people to see how they’ve come in and waged violent campaigns to try and displace locals.’ (Stafford 2008).

As mentioned, the term Islamophobia, taken literally, means ‘fear of Islam/Muslims’ (see Runnymede Trust 1997) and is used by many scholars, journalists and commentators to describe anti-Muslim opinions, actions and events. In post-9/11 Australia, ‘Islamophobia’ appears frequently in popular discourses regarding Muslims and Islam. A google.com search on ‘Islamophobia’ and ‘Australia’ in October 2012 showed about 1,300,000 results. The term Islamophobia clearly has currency in contemporary Australia. Yet in spite of its increasing uses, the term rarely came up in news reports, public opinion, interviews, or letters to Camden Council or newspapers.

Stafford’s coverage of Sydney’s new Islamophobic ‘face’ identifies a number of descriptors that are clearly beyond the literal ‘fear of Islam and Muslims’ meaning. For Stafford, Islamophobia is explicit in a number of ways: the racially motivated violence against people ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’ in Cronulla, McCulloch’s simultaneous denial of racism and argument that Arabs and Muslims are violent invaders who exploit welfare services, and; the hostile actions of leaving pigs heads on relevant sites, which ‘has everything to do with religion’ (particularly Islam). Each of the next chapters touch on how the opponents of the

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15 The Cronulla riot is discussed in later chapters
Islamic school have represented Muslims and Arabs in voicing their opposition: whether by arguing that Muslims will compromise local heritage; or by envisaging the emergence of ethnic 'ghettoes'; or by depicting Arabs and Muslims through the language of previous moral panics, scandals and general stereotypes.

The significance of Islamophobia in Camden

The term Islamophobia emerged in the 1970s (Rana 2007:148), and entered the mainstream vernacular in the past decade. Orientalism was (and still is) a popular alternative term in charting hostility to the Muslim world; however, Orientalism has a very different emphasis. Edward Said’s seminal work on the subject, Orientalism (1978), discusses both popular historical and contemporary discourses of the Arab world in the West. Said found that the ‘Orient’ was consistently portrayed by these as the inferior, threatening and exotic Other (Said 1978). While some authors have distinguished Islamophobia from Orientalism (see Tyrer 2010:104, Birt 2010:120, Sayyid 2010:2), the contemporary observations of anti-Muslim hostility have tended to abandon the term ‘Orientalism’ in favour of ‘Islamophobia’. Thus, in some cases, the ‘Orientalist’ is now declared an ‘Islamophobe’ by some anti-racism activists and Muslim groups.

Miles and Brown (2003) argue that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Western images of Islam and Muslims often portrayed them as both dangerous and inferior. They write:

…Islam was portrayed as founded on aggression and war, as spreading itself by the same means, and as permitting and encouraging polygamy, sodomy and general sexual laxity. It was argued that Islam reproduced the idea of the ‘holy war’ against all non-Muslims… (2003:27).

Evidently, fears are always historically contingent. Even though Islam has similar origins to Christianity and Judaism, some opponents of the school proposed for Camden portray it as deviant. So while Islamophobia itself has increasingly been used to understand globalised tensions in the post 9/11 context, the manifestations of ‘Islamophobic’ thinking are not so new.

Recent uses of the term ‘Islamophobia’, and discussions of its meaning, emerge from across the political spectrum, from people that identify as progressives to ultraconservatives. In 1997, columnist Polly Toynbee writing in the progressive Guardian newspaper argued that
Islamophobia needed to be ‘defended’ and was not ‘racism’ (Toynbee 1997:23). Written in pre-9/11 times, Toynbee’s criticisms were focused on theological perceptions of ‘Islam’ as a religion, as she takes a general position that such theological (though she does not use this term) critiques are unfairly branded as ‘racism’. Toynbee does not single out Islam and takes the position of criticising ‘all religions’, writing that ‘Religiophobia is highly rational’ (Toynbee 1997:23). Thus, she seeks to defend the term by defining it only in religious terms. I would argue that it is quite important that scholars differentiate the theological critique of religions, and the specific demonization and vilification of ‘Muslims’/’Islam’, Arabs, Asians and others.

Toynbee (1997) does not talk about the adherents of Islam and is seeking to bracket out questions of ‘race’ and forms of practising being Muslim. In Camden, few opponents would use passages from the Quran against the school, yet for most opponents ‘Muslims’ themselves were the target. What is more, only a few residents were against the school because it was religious, remarking in letters to Council and facebook.com group walls that they were against all religious schooling – whether Catholic, Muslim or any other persuasion. These were a small minority of atheist opponents. The fears over the presence of Muslims in Camden outweighed any specific critiques of the Quran or religion more broadly. This dissertation rejects the relevance of Toynbee’s position on Islamophobia here because in post-9/11 Australia the term has currency in reviewing the common representations of Arabs and Muslims that are played out in Camden.

The position on Islamophobia taken by Halliday captures how the common attacks are less about religion and more about Muslim people, arguing:

> There are no books coming out questioning the claims of Muhammad or the Koran [Quran]. The attack now is against not Islam as a faith but Muslims as a people, the latter grouping together all, especially immigrants, who might be covered by the term. Equally, the ‘Islamophobic’ attack is against states which may be among the most secular in the world, as Saddam Hussein’s is. If we take the study as one of negative stereotyping, of what in German is called the Feindbild, the enemy image, then the enemy is not a faith or a culture, but a people. Hence the more accurate term is not ‘Islamophobia’ but ‘anti-Muslimism’ (original emphasis) (Halliday 1999:898).

As a ‘progressive’ scholar (but one who supported the invasion of Iraq), Halliday’s definition of the term ‘Islamophobia’ links with his rejection of it. Contrary to Halliday’s position, my
empirical data shows that opponents were not only concerned with Muslims, but some showed concern over Arabs more generally, while others were more concerned with people ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’.

Conservative Australian columnist Paul Sheehan (2009) puts forward an internally contradictory position on Islamophobia, claiming that it does not exist yet then arguing it to be a view of Muslims that is well warranted. Sheehan defines Islamophobia as ‘fear of Islam’ and argues that it is ‘an ideological fabrication’ and ‘academic jargon’ that fits within the ‘prevailing orthodoxy’ among university academics, which he accuses of holding a ‘default position for Muslims in Australia as victim’. To disprove the existence of Islamophobia, Sheehan discusses several media reports of criminal behaviour regarding Muslims, specifically Arabs. These narratives display what he calls ‘cause and effect’, in other words, are ‘proof’ of what he understands as ‘warranted’ responses to Muslims doing bad things. Notably, Sheehan is referring to criminal activity committed by Arab Muslims and reported in the Australian media over a short period of time (I will discuss this in greater detail shortly). American conservative writer and political blogger, Daniel Pipes, applauds Sheehan’s argument. He argues ‘Islamophobia’ deceives people by confusing ‘fear of Islam’ with ‘fear of radical Islam’ (Pipes 2005). Sheehan and Pipes offer very simplistic definitions of Islamophobia and fail to consider the associated process of racialisation. According to Miles and Brown (2003:101), racialisation is a process through which differentiated ‘social collectivities’ are structured by the signification of human characteristics (‘biological’ and others). They go on to argue that such characteristics are significant historically and are based on both real and imagined features, arguing that racialisation is a ‘dialectical process of signification’, as it is about self and Other. In the contemporary world, the racialisation of Islam and Muslims is significantly based on context (Poynting & Mason 2007). Vakil (2010:276) argues that racialisation takes place in contemporary Islamophobia, particularly through the ‘racing [racialisation] of religion’:

While particular national territorialised regimes across Europe focus on ‘their’ predominant ethnically marked Muslims, such as ‘Asians’ in the UK context, Turks in Germany, Moroccans in Spain, Algerians and Moroccans in France, Lebanese in Australia, etc, similar processes of racialisation and criminalisation of Muslims are at work, here and globally, in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Russia, China, Southeast Asia, Australia and Africa (Vakil 2010:276)
The characterisation of Islamophobia as mere ‘fear’ conceals this process of racialisation. Both Sheehan and Pipes discuss certain events in their arguments for the non-existence of Islamophobia, and their very narrations of these events (perhaps unintentionally) illustrate several processes of the racialisation of religion, as Sheehan writes:

Yes, there is ample evidence that Australians have become uneasy about Muslims in general and hostile in specific cases, but this is about cause and effect. Consider the series of blows to the image of Muslims in just the past three weeks, where the everyday decency of the majority have [sic] been collaterally damaged by the antics of the few (Sheehan 2009).

The cases to which Sheehan refers range from Lebanese Muslim gangs, bikie gangs, a controversy over a Muslim leader by the name of Sheik Taj el-Din al-Hilaly, claims by police alleging homophobic assaults by Muslim men harassing and assaulting bystanders at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, a report on the ‘K brothers’ court case, and the sentencing of students for an aggravated sexual assault (though Sheehan admits that perhaps these students were not ‘all’ of Muslim background). Six of these cases specifically concern Arabs. An alternative position would point out that there is nothing exclusively Muslim or Arab about these events, as homophobia, violent bikie gangs, group sexual assaults and controversies over misogynistic religious leaders are common to all ethnicities and religious groups. The ‘racing of religion’ is apparent in how Sheehan discusses these events to make the following contradictory argument:

Given the abundant evidence of violent cause and fearful effect, involving a small percentage of antagonists, the general charge of Islamophobia is an ideological fabrication (Sheehan 2009)

Pipes, on the other hand, is not as detailed. He lists two ‘Islamist’ groups; ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir’ and ‘al-Qaeda’. Yet in a similar light, Pipes argues that the fear of ‘Islamists’ outweighs the possibility of the existence of Islamophobia (Pipes 2005). Extremist activities here are racialised as ‘Islamic’, even though Pipes does not attribute particular ‘ethnic’ characteristics in the way Sheehan does.

Other writers have moved beyond the ‘fear of Islam/Muslims’ interpretation of Islamophobia. Based on a British Runnymede Trust (1997) investigation into Islamophobia, Sheridan (2006:317-8) uses the term to denote the dread, hatred, fear and dislike of Muslims and Islam. Yet Sheridan also acknowledges the complexity in charting the victims of Islamophobia, and
the blurring between religious and racial vilification. Similarly, Rana argues that Islamophobia is a form of anti-Muslim racism that simplifies an image of a group of Muslims as one (Rana 2007:148). Poyting and Mason (2007) move beyond the idea that Islamophobia is ‘anti-Muslim racism’ and argue that it is also the continuation of anti-Arab and anti-Asian racism. These authors have included ideas of ‘racism’ in their understandings of Islamophobia, and have used ‘Islamophobic’ instances to map out the term, rather than use the term as a starting point. With the political debates in the background, this is a plausible scholarly route to take.

This dissertation shows how Islamophobia is a contested term involving complicated ideas about ‘race’ and racialisation. Opponents of the Camden school used various racialised constructions of Muslims, defined vaguely at different times as dark-skinned peoples, Lebanese, Fijians, Middle Easterners, Arabs, foreigners, and/or non-white peoples. These racialised constructions were also augmented with the label of ‘criminal’. To categorise these constructions under the broad umbrella term ‘Islamophobia’ distorts the diversity of these different national, ethnic, cultural, and regional groups. As such, the term needs to be re-conceptualised to capture the diverse and multi-layered ways that people think about Islam, and the increasingly problematic racialisation of Muslims. Before looking more closely at actual racialised constructions of Muslims in Camden, the next section examines the concept of ‘race’ and, following Hall, argues that it operates as a free floating signifier.

Reviewing ‘race’: The floating signifier

According to Husband (1994), it was in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar that the term ‘race’ was first recorded in the English language (Husband 1994:7). Hall (Jhally 1997) argues that far from being a biological fact, ‘race’ is an unstable category, constantly evolving to include a range of different signifiers: religion, ethnicity,16 culture, skin colour/genetics, class, gender, age and sexuality. Hall argues that ‘race’ works like a language that generates certain meanings. Similarly, Miles and Brown argue that ‘race’ is usually signified through biological descriptors, but that there is no scientific basis to these taxonomies and that ‘races’ are in fact based on imagined differences. Further, the authors argue that ‘...biological

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16 Hall makes similar observations regarding ethnicity (see Hall 1992)
differences are secondary to the meanings that are attributed to them...’ (Miles & Brown 2003:88).

Hall (see Jhally, 1997) argues that the human body is read as a ‘text’, and used to categorize differences and distinguish among people. Skin colour is a prominent signifier used to generate meanings and categorise different groups of people (or supposed ‘races’), popularly leading to a Black vs. White binary (Ratcliffe 2004:16). While Hall (see Jhally, 1997) claims that such readings occur on the surface of the body, other biological and genetic factors have also come to signify imagined ‘races’. People refer to specific human characteristics such as height, weight, leg and arm lengths, shapes of ears and eyes, hair and eye colour, facial structures and even body hair in their constructions of ‘races’ (Miles & Brown 2003:88). Thus, the contemporary understandings of ‘race’ are grounded in various arbitrary and superficial understandings.

The constructivist theory of representation is useful in mapping out how people create and imagine ‘races’. For Hall, representations are an act of reading and decoding the human body and what people construct as its bodily signs. As Hall argues in discussing the constructivist theory in representation, ‘things don’t mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems’ (original emphasis) (Hall 1997:25). ‘Race-thinking’ employs a construction process in the establishing of different ‘races’ and attributing behavioural qualities among these different ‘races’. As Husband argues, racism occurs through ‘…the application of “race” categories in social contexts with an accompanying attribution of invariable characteristics to category members’ (Husband 1994:14).

Today, there is a general consensus among scholars that ‘race’ is a fiction, that the existence of biologically distinct ‘races’ is a myth, what Ashley Montagu calls ‘man’s [sic] most dangerous myth’ (Montagu 1974). Yet in the mainstream vernacular, ‘race’ is still a persistent and common descriptor of peoples around the world, and there is at least the implication that the term has biological validity. A recent ‘scholarly’ attempt in Australia to prove such an outdated approach was made in 2005, where Associate Professor Andrew Fraser of Macquarie University proposed an article for publication in a scholarly journal, in which he argued for a ‘rethinking’ of the White Australia Policy, claiming that if it were not reintroduced Australia could become a ‘colony of the third world’ (Dick 2005). Fraser claimed that Australians should be aware African immigrants and argued that black sub-
Saharan Africans gain lower IQ scores than Whites or East Asians, and exhibit more ‘impulse behaviour and poor judgement’. He wrote: ‘The orthodox doctrine that race is only skin deep is only one of the official fictions…’ (Fraser 2005). As different ‘races’ are imagined, a hierarchy is also developed placing East Asians and Whites over an imagined ‘sub-Saharan African’ race, which is signified through behavioural and biological categories. Fraser’s article was not published; nevertheless, it remains one of the most recent (and failed) attempts to deny the position that ‘race’ operates as a ‘floating signifier’. Yet his arguments illustrate that the biological definitions of race are quickly tied to putative social characteristics and anomic tendencies. What is most pernicious about this argument is that it divides up forms of social behaviour and sociological outcomes along biological lines.

**Race-thinking about Muslims in Camden**

Many of those who opposed the school made it clear that they viewed Muslims as a ‘race’. Even though there was no general consensus on what constitutes a Muslim ‘race’, the most common signifiers were religion, clothing, ethnicity, nationality, class and culture. Even though biological signifiers that were mentioned are considered the most compelling in popular race-thinking, this was not the case in the Camden saga. In Camden, Muslims were more often identified with reference to clothing and ethnicity (e.g. Lebanese). Yet in some cases, opponents would refer to a Muslim ‘race’ without detailing any distinct biological or ethnic signifiers. Rather, behavioural differences marked out Muslims as a ‘race’. For instance, some short letters sent to the Council read that ‘...From past experiences I have found that the muslim [sic] race do not mix well with other races’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 12/11/2007) or that Islamic schools cater ‘for one race and one race only!!!’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007). In these examples, ‘race-talk’ about Muslims appeared vague and abstract. While it remains unknown whether these locals used ethnicity, culture or other signifiers to mark out a Muslim ‘race’, they did use the term to signify deviant behaviour. In the first letter, inter-racial mixing was a problem, in the second, the school was set to cater for a particular racial group, and exclusion of other ‘races’ was a problem.

17 In this section, I am not using the term ‘race’ in the technical sense often claimed by pseudo-science, but acknowledging both its social constructed nature and its significance in popular thought today.
In rare cases, opponents thought of Muslims as a biologically distinct group of people which could not coexist with the White European majority of Camden. These opponents normalised ‘race’ as a realistic biological category rather than a social construct. This was particularly apparent in the public statements against the school by the President of the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. When local residents responded with charges of racism, he was provoked at one point into defending himself by rejecting the premise:

> When will all you pseudo-intellectuals wake up to the fact that people of different backgrounds will only assimilate if they want to? There is no multiculturalism; it is a myth. *People naturally gravitate towards their own kind. It is biological.* The opposition to the proposed education centre known as the Muslim school is based on the right of majority to determine what is good for them (emphasis added) (Sremchevich 2008b:2).

Even though the Camden/Macarthur Resident’s Group campaigned on planning and environmental grounds, their president felt that biological concerns were important, although he did not specify skin colour or facial features. This extract from Sremchevich’s letter highlights how ‘race’, signified through abstract biological differences, informs his position on the school. Obviously, Sremchevich was responding to the ways advocates of the school defended their position by characterising Australia as a multicultural society. But the letter also reveals a conviction that Muslims biologically ‘gravitate’ towards other Muslims, rather than melt into Australian society.

Interestingly, the two white supremacist groups involved in protests against the school did not communicate ideas of skin colour in their constructions of Muslims as a ‘race’. While these groups were a minority among the protesters, they did have a significant role – particularly in attracting media attention to Camden. They only appeared in Camden after media reported thousands of locals protesting at the first rally. One group, the Australia First Party, distributed anti-Muslim flyers in the area and even planned to run in the local council elections to help reject the school. The leader, Jim Saleam, was formerly imprisoned over his attempt to shoot a former African National Congress representative in Australia. The AFP’s flyer read that the school would counter ‘Australian values’ and would prove a step in the march towards ‘Islamifying Camden’ (Stafford 2008).

At first glance, we might be tempted to think that these two groups focus on ideas of keeping Australia ‘white’ in their rhetorical strategies against the school. The AFP’s website, after all,
gives prominence to a quote from a former member of the Australian Parliament, Graeme Campbell,\textsuperscript{18} insisting that ‘Australia must remain predominantly white’ (\textit{Australia First Party} 2012). Yet in Camden no such concerns were expressed by the group specifically agitating against the school. Rather, these groups appeared preoccupied with ideas about patriotism, nationalism and ‘Australian values’. They often portrayed Muslims as ‘un-Australian’ people who will never respect the nation. Saleam, who was present outside Fred Nile’s information forum on Islam and the proposed school, expressed his concern that the issue had implications going beyond Camden when interviewed by a journalist:

\begin{quote}
ACA: You don’t live here?
Saleam: No.
ACA: How come you’re here?
Saleam: Because it’s an Australian problem (Stefanovic 2007).
\end{quote}

The same ACA journalist interviewed a young man who reiterated Saleam’s position, indicating that ‘there are enough [Muslims] in Sydney’. This young man was wearing an Akubra hat with a sticker reading ‘No to Islamic Immigration’ and the name and address of the Party (Stefanovic 2007). This protester epitomised how some opponents utilised traditional Australian bush garments to both establish an Australian identity through iconography and simultaneously protest Islam by positioning it as external to such visual markers of national identity. In brief, with respect to the opposition to the school, signifiers of national identity were the focus.

The Anglo Australian National Community Council (AANCC) was another group present outside the venue for Fred Nile’s information forum. In Camden’s main street, AANCC members distributed anti-Islamic pamphlets and left several outside the door of the \textit{Camden Advertiser}’s office. One local business woman reported that the group had used a child to hand out pamphlets and commented that the contents of these pamphlets contained ‘extreme literature’ (Kinsella 2007d:19). A member of the AANCC was also seen in the background of news reports on Nile’s forum, distributing what a journalist called ‘anti-Islamic propaganda’ (Stefanovic 2007). The leader of the group posted a video on YouTube in 2008, protesting

\textsuperscript{18} Campbell is a former federal politician who was originally part of the Australian Labor Party, then became an Independent, then founded the Australia First Party which he left after losing his seat in the Australian Parliament. Campbell then stood for Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party and since then has been unsuccessful in returning to politics.
the Islamic school and argued the Qur’anic Society was a terrorist organisation that threatened Australia. Yet the video disappeared by the end of the controversy. As with the AFP, skin colour differences played no role in the protests by AANCC in Camden.

It was common for opponents to represent Muslims as criminals and racial Others. Often, they characterised Muslims as Arabs, Lebanese, and (generic) Middle Eastern people. The entanglement of ethnicity, religion, regions and culture would contribute to the representation of Muslims as a distinct ‘race’:

- Muslim middle [sic] Easterners, do not migrate to Australia for the peace and climate, most Migrate [sic] for our Welfare System (Letters to Camden Council, received 6 November 2007)
- Watching on TV what is happening in Middle East is enough. Or do we want our children to be under this influence here in Camden (Letters to Camden Council, received 23 December 2008)
- Who are the fools putting forward this proposal? ...Such a school will eventually bring large numbers of Lebanese Muslims to our peaceful area (Letters to Camden Council, received 13 November 2007)

Various signifiers were at play in these different letters to Camden Council, each communicating a position foregrounding ‘race’, broadly conceived. In the first, Muslims were discursively framed as ‘Middle Eastern’, which led to assumptions that they were anarchic foreigners who came to Australia to exploit seemingly generous welfare handouts. Similarly, the second opponent invoked an imaginary view of the Middle East, in which it is represented as a source of undesirable tendencies. Although, there were no explicit descriptors of ‘race’ Muslims were equated with the war-torn and chaotic Middle East (even though the world’s largest Muslim population is not to be found in the Middle East). The third letter extract uses the ethnic signifier ‘Lebanese’ to characterise a Muslim ‘race’. Here, other assumptions about Muslims as ‘non-peaceful’ were drawn from fears of ‘Lebanese’ people arriving in large numbers. In their opposition to the Islamic school, opponents built unstable categories of a Muslim ‘race’ in their rhetorical strategies. ‘Race’, as it pertains to biology, is only rarely explicitly signified in these strategies. Instead, race features as a floating signifier, based on geographical considerations (e.g. the Middle East) or national identification (e.g. Lebanese), or else based on religious or cultural difference.

Interestingly, the AANCC disappeared from view at the end of 2007, yet another group, called the Australian Protectionist Party, emerged to protest the school in 2008, featuring the leader of the AANCC, Darrin Hodges, as a member.
Turmoils, negotiations and challenges in the discursive constructions of ‘race’

My interview with Andrea illustrated the slippages that occur between categories of ‘race’. When Andrea spoke of her position on the school, there were many ideas of ‘race’ which underlay her ideas of Camden, Australians, immigrants and Muslims. It was as though the interview questions challenged her to rethink and re-assert her own views about Muslims and Anglo-Saxons. Sometimes, Andrea was in turmoil, situating herself within mainstream society, positioning herself as an immigrant and characterising Muslims as the Other.

I spoke to Andrea in a shop in Camden where she worked. Of Irish background, she told me about her migration to Australia before discussing the school. Andrea was impressed that I was able to pick out her accent, as she had lived in Australia for over 25 years, and some people mistook her for British. ‘I don’t classify myself as British at all!’ she stated assertively. In describing the Camden area, Andrea explained she lived specifically in Camden for 12 years and before that lived in the Bankstown area. She described Camden as ‘more friendly, a lot more Anglo-Saxon, more Anglo’. She first heard about the school in a coffee shop, where other locals talked about it. She explained her views of the school:

> Andrea: I was against it, the school. Look, from personal experience, it’s not got to do with the school, it’s the Islamic people, erm, from personal experiences I had... I used to live in the [Bankstown area] which was, had a lot of Islamic people, and Lebanese. They were quite threatening to the Anglo-Saxons, and, um...
> [Researcher]: ...But you’re Irish? Do you identify as Anglo-Saxon?
> Andrea: I’m Irish, I will always be Irish. When I say Anglo-Saxon, I mean people that are not of a dark complexion, like the Europeans (Andrea, interview, 9 August 2009).

Several different signifiers of ‘race’ were tangled in her position against the school; biological, ethnic, religious, cultural, regional and national. Yet, Andrea adopted the Anglo-Saxon identity with ambivalence, rejecting a categorical equation of her Celtic self with ‘Anglo-Saxon/British’. So while she endorsed the Anglos vs. Muslims view of the school saga, she essentialised herself as ‘European’ in the face of the Muslim Other. In terms of this Other, certain religious, biological, national and ethnic signifiers were entangled. Lebanese is used interchangeably with Muslim, or non-Anglo (at times during the interview), and the latter was also referenced as ‘dark skinned’. Such perspectives informed Andrea’s position on the school. The discursive constructions of Self and Other floated as the interview unfolded.
Yet, as these different ‘racialised’ descriptions were negotiated, Andrea also made a conscious effort not to ‘generalise’ or seem ‘racist’ in describing why she was opposed to the school. She discussed her interactions with Muslim customers:

Andrea: Sometimes the [Muslim] men come into my shop here and I find that they look down on me here. They are not all like that, they are not all painted with the same brush. It’s terrible to categorise them, but there is good and bad in every race. But um ...(long pause)
[Researcher]: (breaking silence) are there ‘more bad’ with Muslims?
Andrea: Oh no, dear. I couldn’t say that no. I do find that they feel they’re superior than us, and that’s the aura they give off and that’s what I don’t like... But as I say, there is good and bad in every race. If they would only take it from another immigrant [here, Andrea refers to herself], they need to just fit in... they come in here [to the shop] and always on the Friday, and I know when I say ‘they’, it sounds terrible. But I know it’s them coz they wear the headgear, they come in and they are so rude to us. Always rude when they come in and that sets them apart straight away. One is beautiful, they are friendly, but so many are horrible to us (Andrea, interview, 9 August 2009).

In her denial of racism, there is an accusation that ‘they’ are racist to ‘us’, which works to justify ‘us’ being exclusionary to ‘them’. Such a view could also be linked to the ‘Islamophobia is not racism’ argument as explicit in the aforementioned critiques of the term. Elsewhere in the interview, Andrea indicated that she did not participate in the rallies because she wanted to dissociate herself from ‘local racists’.

Andrea: ...the traffic had nothing to do with it. People in Camden are quite biased against the Islamic community, they are racist towards it [them]. I reckon 90% of it was racist (Andrea, interview, 9 August 2009).

However, when I asked her what her opposition to the school was, she was unable to provide an answer untainted by racist appraisals of Muslims. For Andrea, clothing (‘headgear’) and gendered signifiers mark out Muslim women whom she identifies with a pattern of ‘rude behaviour’. At the same time, Andrea strove to avoid singling out Muslims, reminding us (herself) that ‘there is good and bad in every race’. Obviously, being a ‘racist’ carries certain stigmas that Andrea was at pains to avoid. She did not want to appear ‘racist’ in the way that she associated with other opponents of the school.
Residents would commonly narrate the Camden area using descriptions which foregrounded ‘race’. Another interviewee, David, a local restaurant manager, communicated fluid constructions of ‘race’ in describing Camden. The interview took place outside the restaurant, in its outdoor seating area. David was against the school because he felt it would not serve the local community and did not fit into a ‘rural-paced’ town. David told me that he has ‘lived in the Macarthur area my whole life and have specifically lived in the Camden area for the past 10 years’. Immediately, a sense of belonging to the local Macarthur district was asserted, further giving David some form of ‘authority’ in speaking as a ‘true local’ and determining who or what belongs or is excluded in ‘rural’ Camden, as when David later argued that the area needed to stay ‘Anglo-Saxon’. He distinguished other areas on Sydney’s fringe such as Penrith and Hornsby from ‘more country paced’ Camden. Yet, at the same time, David conceded that certain retail chain stores in Camden did not fit into the ‘country feel’, such as a local Woolworths supermarket and the Subway and McDonalds fast-food chains. Yet even though David felt the school would change the ‘rural pace’, he then came to the position that Camden would eventually change, and was already changing. As a ‘true local’, and therefore an authoritative voice, David was in turmoil in describing the need for Camden to stay ‘rural’ and the idea that change was imminent, and in process.

These contradictory ideas of Camden as a rural-yet-not-rural area paralleled David’s descriptions of Camden’s demography. In describing his objection to the school, he felt that the number of Muslims in the area did not warrant the school, as he described the Qur’anic Society’s proposal as:

...out of character with the rural nature of the area, and to be honest, culturally too. I think it was out of character with the cultural, probably the Anglo-Saxon side of the area. Without putting a racist slant on it, whether it be a Chinese school or an Islamic school, to that scale it was something that was quite large and different to what the community was in the area, in terms of the demographic and the population in the area (David, interview; 7 August 2009).

David was conscious that he did not want to sound ‘racist’ in describing the local demographic, as entangled racial/regional descriptors were at play in marking the Camden Self against Other. His concerns over rural Camden were inseparable from the ways he described Camden as ‘Anglo-Saxon’. David’s bias against non-rural and non-Anglo outsiders
was rationalised through his ‘common sense’ logic. In Camden, the fears about disruption to the local ‘Anglo’ demographic were associated with nostalgic, tranquil and peaceful rural landscapes. Interestingly, Chinese or Islamic schools were mentioned as though they were similar categories. ‘Chinese’ signifies a national, ethnic, and/or language group, yet ‘Islamic’ can signify a religious or a cultural group. Although they contrast significantly, for David they comprised similar alien threats.

Furthermore, David contrasted Camden with Sydney as ‘a multicultural city’, and characterised areas in Sydney’s West with concentrated populations of Arabs (specifically Bankstown and Lakemba) as areas dominated by ‘Islamic cultures’; he portrayed the opening of the school as the establishing of ‘Lakemba’ in the area. The descriptions of ‘rural Camden’ were closely aligned with details regarding the ‘Anglo’ demographic, and at the same time, the people attending the established school were from ‘the city environment, and like they would be bringing that style of life out here I guess’. The cultural representations of particular peoples link with ideas about the city, and David negotiated ideas about ‘race’ in relation to ‘place’ as the interview went on. He would move from fixed ideas about Camden as rural and Anglo, and the city as multicultural, Muslim, and commercialized, to acknowledging that Camden had a lot in common with the city. For instance, he mentioned local Greek and Italian residents in farming areas, which contrasted with his earlier assertions that residents were largely ‘Anglo-Saxon’.

David described ‘Camden culture’ as ‘very Australian’, and talked of ‘big’ Australia Day celebrations there, commenting ‘there are guns down the park, all that colonial sort of thing, World War One military gear, they have exhibitions, it’s got a country feel still’. This contrast of ‘very Australian’ Camden with the ‘multicultural’ city showed how David nationalised the local place. When I asked whether David thought the school would teach ‘Australian values’, David replied ‘No I don’t think it would teach that. It would, I guess, the information I heard of other Islamic schools is that they teach Australian cultural values… they would have to teach, I guess, a state curriculum’. In this contradictory response, it was as though David was re-thinking his position on Muslim schools and Australian values as he was answering the question, and the interview may have encouraged him to question his assumptions about the school. David’s comments demonstrated the instability and ambiguity around notions of ‘race’ and Islam, and the slippage between classifications of Muslims as a religious, ethnic or cultural group. Theses common slippages reflect the complexity in
charting Islamophobia, as it entails notions of ‘race’ that are beyond traditional understandings of skin colour.

**Class positions, ‘race’ and place**

In some interviews, opponents often communicated ideas of ‘class’ in relation to their imaginings of Muslims as a religious group. Terri saw Muslims as working class people, that being Islamic is associated with being poor. Terri worked in a shop in Camden. She attended both rallies against the school:

[Researcher]: Did you attend [the first rally] with friends?  
Terri: My husband and we [sic] met people there that weren’t happy about it.  
[Researcher]: With regards to how you feel about the school, did you object on environmental grounds?  
Terri: It was more on religious grounds for me. What they [protesters at the rally] said was that if it goes to Camden Council they can refuse it, but they can’t refuse it on religious grounds; it was to be fought on environmental grounds (Terri, interview, 9 August 2009).

At first, certain biological signifiers were not mentioned and Muslims were characterised as a threatening religious group. While I tried to get Terri to elaborate on any ‘environmental’ concerns, it was evident that ideas about religion were what influenced her position on the school. Our conversation about religion turned into discussions about Muslim numbers in places like Bankstown and ‘the world’ at large.

[Researcher]: Why do you think so many people rallied? Why do you think there was a big uproar?  
Terri: Because they didn’t want it here. It’s as simple as that, they did not want the school here. Because they know Bankstown, and a couple of places. Bankstown has a big population of Muslims and they built the [Bass Hill] school there, didn’t they?  
[Researcher]: Yes it was approved, recently.  
Terri: And they didn’t like what happened there because they [Muslims] have so many kids, they will take over the world. And I honestly believe that, because white families are not producing.  
[Researcher]: So it’s ‘environmental concerns’ and it was also concerns that once upon a time in Bankstown, a proposed school came along and now the whole population they’ve kinda [sic] “taken over”? And that’s why people were trying to protect Camden?  
Terri: You see they go in and they buy up in an area, they pay big money for the first one, all those people around move out and they buy up cheap, that was the biggest concern. There’s no way in the world they was gonna [sic] bus people backwards and forwards, school kids. They’ll say ‘we can’t do this we will have to buy a house in the district’. And that is what they do, they move in and it all starts.
As the interview continued, it was obvious that Terri viewed the struggle against the school as Muslims vs. White Australians. Racial signifiers were not only used to inform Terri’s views of the school, but were linked with other issues regarding the number of Muslims in ‘the world’. Yet, while notions of ‘race’ would float between ‘religion’ and ‘White’ (used by Terri as both a biological and an ethnic description of mainstream Australians), certain meanings concerning social status were drawn from these unstable and fluid constructions. As a result, Terri viewed the school as a process of Muslims invading and de-valuing local property prices. My interview with Terri is a clear example of the new racism and Islamophobia where the vocabulary of ‘race’ is strangely muted. Terri’s religious concerns are tangled with perceptions of Muslims as working class invaders.

At the start of the interview, Terri held a very different position on the school. It was only as the interview went on that her ‘White Camden vs. Muslim Bankstown’ position became apparent:

Terri: I have no objection, in certain ways, to having it [the school] here, it’s a rural community, we got Chinese here, Greeks here, Italians, and we got, we got even Muslims here…
[Researcher]: Yeah there are apparently 400.
Terri: I thought they said 100 at the meetings that I attended. I went to the first meeting where everyone was up in arms about it.

Terri notes the culturally diverse nature of Camden, even discussing ‘Muslims’ as an ethnic group in the same category as Greeks, Italians and Chinese. For Terri the diversity in Camden was not of importance. She experienced the controversy over the school as a conflict between white Australians and Muslims who could ‘take over the world’. These interesting discussions of ethnicity and the proposal reveal the fickle nature of anti-Muslim sentiment, where tolerance and rejection of Muslims emerge interchangeably.

**Conclusion**

‘Race’ and Hall’s conceptualisation of race as a floating signifier is central to the form of Islamophobia that operates locally in Camden. The different imaginings of a Muslim ‘race’ as demonstrated in interviews with Camden locals call for a re-conceptualisation of the term Islamophobia so that it encompasses the many different ways that Muslims are popularly perceived. The various racialised perceptions of Muslims in interviews, public protests and
letters to the editor also demonstrate how ‘race’ floats as a signifier and how they are overt in the expressions of hostility to the school. As constructions of ‘race’ are not fixed, it is difficult to predict how Camdenites and other protesters think about Muslims in their opposition to the school. For instance, after I first read that white supremacist groups proposed to protest the school, I initially thought such groups would be concerned with maintaining ‘white’ pride. However, the way these groups played their hand in Camden revealed that they were more committed to expressing ‘nationalist’ positions tinged with anti-Islamic views. The actual expressions of ‘white pride’ were absent. Their positions are reflective of what scholars call the new racism (Augoustinos & Quinn 2003; Barker 1981; Cole 1997; Dunn et al. 2004; Gilroy 1987; Goot & Watson, 2005; Hall 1992: 256-8; Parekh 1987; Pon 2008; Sniderman et al. 1991), which is addressed in the final chapter.

This is not to say that ‘race’ is no longer associated with skin colour or appearances. There are instances where stakeholders of the controversy described Muslims as dark skinned people. At the second rally, the hired security guards ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’ were verbally abused as some protesters called them ‘Mohamed’ (Vincent 2007). It is unknown whether the security guards were of Arab backgrounds and/or of the Islamic faith, or whether any of them were being addressed by their true name. The Four Corners news report elaborated on how ‘Mohamed’ was used as a derogatory term by some protesters against security guards:

MAN 3: No-one wants you here.
MAN 4: F**k off wogs, go back to your own country Mohamed [sticks his middle finger at the camera].
MAN 2: We pay our tax mate and we don’t want [indistinct]... (Neighbour 2008)

In these examples alone, there are various slippages in the ways these particular opponents mark out ‘Muslims’. ‘Man 4’ uses the term ‘Mohamed’ in the same ways that ‘wogs’ has been used as a pejorative term in Australia. Together, they signify ‘foreigners’, as he feels compelled to mark out national borders. The words of this man mirror the ways protesters at the first rally verbally assaulted Eileen and Kate O’Hara, two local residents who put up their hands when all the residents at Belgenny Oval were asked if anyone supported the school. Protesters yelled ‘Go back to Bankstown’ (Tibbitts 2007). Both these instances demonstrate
how protesters see the school as something both external to Camden and Australia. ‘Man 2’
dehumanises Muslims as ‘grubs’ and he asserts that he pays taxes as an attempt to provide
legitimacy for his concerns. All these aforementioned examples demonstrate how ‘race’
foregrounds the various ways that locals constructed Muslims in the controversy. Whether
understood to be people ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’, supporters of the school, ‘wogs’,
‘grubs’ or people named ‘Mohamed’, these are the particular manifestations of the
construction of Muslims as a ‘race’ by the detractors in the Camden controversy. To declare
all instances ‘Islamophobic’ would miss the point. Rather, interrogating how representations
of Muslims are wielded is more productive in capturing these complexities.

The episodes of protest in Camden are the latest examples of the Islamophobic reactions with
which Muslims become familiar as they try to settle into Australian society. As the literature
review on Islamophobia has outlined in this chapter, the acceptance or rejections of the term
by scholars and public commentators is linked to various ideas of Muslims. While
Islamophobia has a lot in common with Orientalism, as developed by Edward Said (1978),
the term has greater currency in today’s climate, circulating frequently in academic
discourses particularly since the events of September 11 2001. In the Camden controversy,
many ideas of ‘race’ emerge without an established consensus on what this ‘race’ constitutes.
Instead, we are confronted with interchangeable ideas about what Muslims are. In some
instances, Muslims are people who wear headscarves, in others they are people specifically of
a Lebanese ethnic background. Elsewhere, they are generically Middle Eastern, and in other
assertions they are seen as a distinct (Muslim) nationality, or as a particular class of (poor)
people who are manipulative and parasitic (in respect to the supposedly generous welfare
system, or the real estate market), and most of all, Muslims are represented as a ‘race’ of non-
local people who are incompatible with Camden’s rural and white identity.
Chapter Three

‘It’s the birthplace of our nation’: The ‘race’ for Camden’s past

Heritage has various meanings. People can invoke ‘heritage’ in defence of various forms of conservation and xenophobia. This chapter examines the first context in which the positions against the school are situated, that is, the local Camden context as a semi-rural, largely ‘white town’. This chapter illustrates the way the white heritage defence is the pretext that conceals a more sinister ambition and project of demographic cultural management by the school opponents. I will demonstrate that the particular Anglo pioneering mythology – embodied in the local historical figure of John Macarthur – conceals the area’s culturally diverse legacy (both Indigenous and through Macarthur’s interactions with a Muslim by the name of John Bono outside of Camden). Thus, this chapter shows how Camden’s local heritage, far from providing moral justification for opposition to the Islamic school, is actually a highly partial and constructed vision fabricated for a racist cause.

This chapter argues that implicit and explicit ideas of ‘race’ underlie the popular local narratives of Camden’s past and heritage, which opponents use to represent Camden as an area of conserved and continued national significance. It is these representations of the area as the ‘Birthplace of the nation’s wealth’ (to borrow the local town slogan), that opponents use to legitimise their opposition to the school. This chapter uncovers Camden’s dominant heritage of prosperous European settlement, and demonstrates how it does not acknowledge the other side of Camden’s history, one of not only a long-standing Aboriginal presence, but also dispossession and attempted genocide. These representations of the past are particularly obvious in the ways locals refer to John Macarthur and the history of white economic achievement in their protests against the Islamic school. For these locals, ‘race’ foregrounds the ways they conceptualise heritage as a conserved piece of white Australia’s past, which these residents are determined to see continued today.
Local narrations of the ‘Birthplace of the Nation’s wealth’

‘Birthplace of the Nation’s Wealth’, reads a picturesque sign in large letters on the main road leading into Camden’s business district (see Figure 4). This references the dominant history of the Camden area – one of prosperous and flourishing European agricultural settlement. We can see this story in local history books (Atkinson 1988, Gregory & Turner 1992, Wringley 2001, Mylrea 2002), on the popular Wikipedia page for the town, on displays in Camden Museum and on the local Council’s website. This sign’s slogan operates as a current reminder of Camden’s past.

In 1795, Governor Hunter named the region ‘Cowpastures’ after a herd of cattle from the First Fleet disappeared into the area (Wrigley 2001:7). In retrieving that herd, the early European colonisers were impressed with the area’s landscape and agricultural potential, with the flat plains and low hills. They deemed the landscape suitable for cattle, though the land seemed dry and sparsely scattered with rare ponds (Atkinson 1988:5). In 1803, Governor King and his wife visited the area and gave orders to capture the cattle that wandered into the area. The history section of the contemporary Camden Council website celebrates Mrs King as ‘the first white lady to cross the Nepean River’ and mentions that in 1805 ‘the first house was built near the river ford where Mrs King crossed’ (Camden Council 2010e). The Council’s webpage, titled ‘The history of Camden’ contains no details regarding the Indigenous population of the area which arguably has a richer history which spans over 40,000 years. Rather, the page celebrates white pioneers who crossed rivers and established industries on fertile land. In an insidious manner, these selective narratives of Camden’s past are viewed through the lens of ‘race’ as the area’s ‘beginnings’ are reduced to the acts and experiences of Europeans.

Camden Museum has a similar narrative of Camden’s history with a display called ‘Settlement and Conflict’ reading:
Mrs King became the first white woman to cross the Nepean [river] when she and Governor King visited the Cowpastures in 1803. King ordered a hut, staffed by two constables, to be built there to store salt and house casks of salted meat from cattle culled from the roving herd (Camden Museum).

The main displays in Camden Museum also tell the story of the roaming cows in detailing the ‘beginnings’ of Camden’s history. Stories regarding Indigenous people are included, yet it is obvious that the Museum creators narrate Camden’s history with an emphasis on European contact in the area:

Two bulls and seven cows were brought on the First Fleet. They escaped soon after landing, and were not seen again for seven years. When the Aboriginal people of George’s River danced the ‘Bull Dance’ at a corroboree in 1795 at Botany Bay, the British realised where their cattle were. Two convicts were sent out to investigate and found 61 cattle at a place the Gandangarra [one of the three local Indigenous groups] called Baragal. To the British it became known as Cowpastures (Camden Museum).

In Bulli Cave, located in Sydney’s South Western region (in Campbelltown – a district adjacent to Camden), researchers believe that Koori rock art drawn after 1788 depicts the cattle that escaped the First Fleet colony. These paintings illustrate a group of grazing animals which resemble bulls.

The dominant narratives of local history focus on the legacy of an early English pioneer named John Macarthur who arrived in the Camden area in the early nineteenth century. Macarthur saw Australia as a place of ‘illimitable forests’, where he could possibly raise sheep for wool and provide employment opportunities for thousands of British workers, and he applied for land in Australia to test his prospective ideas (Wringley 2001:9). At the time, Macarthur lived in Parramatta (at a place that is now a tourist attraction called Elizabeth Farm). Macarthur petitioned Lord Camden, the colonial secretary, requesting that Governor King grant Macarthur land to develop a sheep industry in the area. Macarthur had bought a number of Spanish sheep and was equipped with the innovative steam machinery for agricultural and wool development (Mylrea 2002:17). Lord Camden, responsible for the colonies of the British Empire, instructed Governor King to give John Macarthur 5,000 acres in New South Wales for sheep breeding purposes (Atkinson 1988:10). As a result, Macarthur founded and launched the great Australian wool industry that became the source of colonial wealth at the time (Camden Council 2010e).
Macarthur’s legacy is significant to Australian agricultural history. The Australian two dollar note featured a picture of John Macarthur with a sheep in the centre, obviously honouring his efforts. However, this note was in circulation during 1966 – 1988 and has since been replaced with a two dollar coin which features Gwoya Jungarai, an Elder of the Anmatyerr people of central Australia.

Initially, Macarthur named one of the areas ‘Camden Park’ (Wrigley 2001:10), and it has been assumed that the area was named after the man who helped Macarthur in his quest to establish the wool industry in New South Wales (Camden Council 2010e). Macarthur’s third son explained in one of his last speeches to the local Camden people that the name Camden ‘might be traced back to William Camden’, who composed the Britannia, an encyclopaedia detailing the histories of England, Ireland and Scotland (Atkinson 1988:xi). However, the larger region in which Camden is located is known as the Macarthur district, clearly named after the pioneer farmer.

The story of Camden’s settlement is a microcosm of the larger narrative of the nation’s settlement. The narrative of harmonious, peaceful settlers migrating to Australia had long held a place within Australian history books. However, in recent times there has been a very resolute attack on the mythology of the nation. This included debates known as the ‘history wars’ that took place among Australian academics around the establishment of the nation (see Manne 2003, Windschuttle 2002). The narratives of Australia’s beginnings as a ‘peacefully settled nation’ were challenged by the Aboriginal movement and its supporters. While various academics wrestled with the nation’s demons in contemporary times, the local histories have remained strangely impervious to this.

Anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, in 1968, referred to ‘The Great Australian Silence’ regarding the representation of traditional Aboriginal societies in white history books. The ‘silence’ is a reference to the failure of scholars and citizens

...to integrate the story of the Aboriginal dispossession and its aftermath into their understanding of the course of Australian history, reducing the whole tragic and complex story to what one historian had called ‘a melancholy footnote’ and another a mere ‘codicil’ (Manne 2003:1).
On a national level, the Aboriginal movement and its supporters have destabilised the histories of ‘peaceful settlement’, yet local histories have continued the ‘silences’ and the mythology of the settler nation has a peculiar resilience in various localities, of which Camden is an example.

The other side of Camden’s local history

Local Koori stories tell a distinctly different account of the area’s settlement from that of the European narratives of the area. The most significant differences in these narratives involve ideas of ‘race’ and its crucial role in the ways people construct the past. The Indigenous narratives of the area not only conflict with the idea of peaceful settlement, but are largely downplayed or rendered invisible in Camden’s contemporary ‘birthplace of the nation’s wealth’ story. Prior to Governor Hunter and Macarthur’s involvement, Camden was the traditional lands of three Indigenous language groups: these were the Gundungurra (also named Gandangara), Dharug (also named Darrak) and Dharawal (also named Thawaral) peoples (Wringley 2001:6). Camden Museum has minimal information on the place of the Gundungurra, Dharawal and Dharug peoples in the beginnings of Camden. This information is featured on a board titled ‘aboriginal [sic] legacy’. Yet their stories are based on white observations of their presence, rather than on the oral histories passed down to the descendants of these peoples today. The board explains that the Aboriginal people ‘were reluctant to tell the white man [sic] about their customs’. Further this board reads that ‘Europeans admired the people of this area’, thus portraying the relationships between blacks and whites in terms of a romanticised harmony.

The dominant history of Camden is extremely Anglo-centric and has neglected substantial information on the traditional owners; as one local historian states, ‘in other words, nothing much was ever recorded about the Aboriginal way of life at Camden’ (Atkinson 1988:8). Another local historian similarly writes:

It is to our regret that little record exists of the people who inhabited this area before the arrival of the white man [sic]. They did not have a written language and the very early white settlers had little contact with them. This is little doubt that the Camden area was used extensively by the aborigines [sic] as a hunting area. They called the area Benkennie meaning the dry land (Wringley 2001:6)
Undoubtedly, the establishment of the ‘nation’s wealth’ on the Gundungurra, Dharawal and Dharug lands would have included some form of contact with the local Indigenous population. According to Goodall (1996), in 1804 the Gandangara peoples tried to negotiate land usage with Governor King, as they were being shot at by white farmers and were blocked from using fertile land, which they regularly accessed prior to 1788. King pledged that there would be no further white settlement on their lands. After King’s departure from the colony, Governor Macquarie dishonoured King’s agreement with the Aborigines in Cowpastures. Goodall writes that Governor Macquarie ‘ordered military punitive squads into the Gandangara lands, with instructions to hang the bodies of the “guilty” Aboriginal victims in trees “in order to strike great terror into the survivors”’ (Goodall 1996:28-9). To its credit (though diluted), one whole placard at Camden Museum tells of these instances of Governor Macquarie’s orders to massacre Gundungurra families.

The racist attitudes of white invaders in the area are obvious, whether through their attempts to ‘civilise’ Koori people or murder them. In settling into the area, Elizabeth Macarthur (wife of John Macarthur) wrote of the need for whites to help ‘civilise’ the local Indigenous population as she encountered them, describing Aboriginal children as ‘creatures’; she declared that she would introduce them to ‘European modes of salutation’ (Onslow 1973:311-2). Further, local historian John Wrigley wrote that Aboriginal communities in the area would attack Macarthur’s shepherds and kill their wives, and many perished due to diseases contracted from the Europeans. Wrigley wrote that these deaths needed to be seen in context of the impact that European settlement had on the livelihood of Aboriginal tribes in the area (Wringley 2001:6). Historian John Meredith used historical texts to write a book called *The Last Koodargie: Moyengully, Chief Man of the Gundungurra People*. It is one of the few publications that detail the accounts of one Aboriginal language group in the Camden region. Meredith acknowledges the lands of the Gundungurra peoples were stolen from them progressively throughout the 19th century (Meredith 1989:7). This history is relevant to this chapter, in that contemporary locals have neglected these stories in their representations of Camden’s past and in constructing the area’s national identity.

**Local appropriation of Macarthur and positions against the school**

Macarthur’s legacy of establishing the ‘birthplace of the nation’s wealth’ is not confined to the local history books, websites or museums. Some residents are so proud of their local history that it influences their views regarding the contemporary issues facing the area. Some
opponents of the school in Camden cited John Macarthur and his legacy alongside anti-Muslim hostility. At the first rally held at Belgenny Oval in November 2007, local resident, Kate McCulloch invoked the Macarthurs:

Muslims do not fit in this town! We are Aussies, okay? We’re John – it’s the ex- [sic] Macarthur Area and it still is Macarthur, and they’re not gonna [sic] take it away from us! (Neighbour 2008).

At the time that the Camden Council rejected the school in May 2008, McCulloch exited Camden Civic Centre dressed in an Akubra hat with Australian flags, and once again cited the Macarthurs in her victory speech to the media, claiming that ‘the Macarthurs will be proud of us’ (Murphy 2008). McCulloch then became the poster face for anti-Muslim opposition in Camden (Ramachandran 2009). McCulloch positioned ‘Aussies’ in Camden as heirs to Macarthur’s legacy, combining both heritage and nationalism. She was not alone in discussing ‘the Macarthurs’ in relation to the school.

Some letters to Council opposing the school featured arguments that cited John Macarthur. The paragraph below was copied and pasted into several letters:

I believe if this Islamic School is allowed to be built in Camden that we will lose our Camden, its rural way of life and its important links to early Australian history. Camden Council needs to listen to the People [sic] of Camden. Camden is called the “Birthplace of the Nation’s Wealth” in recognition of the commencement of the Australia wool and agricultural industry in the area. I believe Mr John Macarthur would be turning in his grave (Letter to Camden Council, received 23/12/2008).

Here, Camden history is represented as being of national importance. The residents who copied and pasted this paragraph into their letters argued that the school affected their sacred local histories and, would cause injury to John Macarthur’s pastoral legacy. Similarly to McCulloch, these opponents use local history in order to evoke local historical figures in ways that legitimise their opposition to the school. These positions alone illustrate how ‘race’ insidiously informed the perceptions against the school, and how certain narratives of local history, namely of European heroic settlement, shaped popular narrations of Camden’s heritage which precluded both an earlier Aboriginal presence in the region and the potential for a future Muslim recognition of population.
Other opponents treated the school saga as an opportunity to augment the popular heroic narrative of the region’s settlement:

*Would Elizabeth & John Macarthur be proud of the new Camden? I & many other concerned residents are hoping you the COUNCIL will take note of all the above & vote against the proposal & maybe add to the history books by supporting us if need be in the Land & Environment Court. The Macarturs [sic] would be proud of us* (Letter to Camden Council received 9/11/2007).

This letter implies that the first Camdenite pioneers themselves would have opposed the establishment of an Islamic school, thus making the rejection of the school a matter of ancestral importance. Further, a reliving and recreation of history occurs simultaneously in this opponent’s struggle against the school, augmenting the Macarthurs’ proud history. By evoking the white pioneers of the local area, these residents mobilise the Macarthur legacy as though they personally know ‘the Macarthurs’ and make the case for shielding the ‘old Camden’ from the ‘new’. Exclusive ideas of ‘race’ are central to such a position; these residents are not interested in preserving traditional Aboriginal lands, or language groups in the area.

Other residents did not specifically argue that John Macarthur himself would be against the school, but would mention the Macarthurs in arguing that the rural surroundings of Camden needed to be preserved. In such positions, ideas of ‘race’ appear adjacent to local rurality. For instance:

*A Muslim school would clearly not fit into the Camden historical town. Camden is a historical town that consists of Belgenny [sic] Farm, the home farm of John and Elizabeth Macarthur dating back to 1805, Cobbitty, a rural town and Gledswood [sic] (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).*

Similarly, another opponent wrote: ‘Camden has a rich wonderful history, dating back to John Macarthur... [which] needs to be protected’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 31 October 2007). In these views, the farming history of Camden influences the current ways people represent the area. These opponents discuss ‘John Macarthur’ in their attempts to argue that Muslims were not a part of the history of Camden, and therefore had no place within the locality. Thus, locals use ‘race’ to shape the narrations of an Anglo-centric past which excludes both Muslims and Aboriginal people, and use the Anglo-centric past to sustain their notions of race.
The overt uses of ‘race’ were evident elsewhere in arguments against the school. Some opponents even used John Macarthur to argue for the conservation of Camden as an ‘Anglo-Saxon’, Christian town:

There is not a more anglosaxon [sic] town of Christian population than Camden and you are going to put a muslim [sic] school here that is simply absurd. Camden is a rural town and has a long history with the early settlement which all began here with the help of John Macarthur (Letter to Camden Council, received 25/10/2007).

As highlighted in the previous chapter, ‘race’ itself is an unstable category which people construct using a range of signifiers. For this resident, ‘race’ itself is explicit in the ways s/he constructs Camden as a combination of Anglo-Saxon and Christian. These perceptions of ‘race’ foreground her/his case for conservation of the area as white, since s/he sees the proposed school as disrupting the current logic of a white majority in Camden.

It is obvious that opponents use both John and Elizabeth Macarthur in a variety of different positions that collectively oppose the school, and in doing so racialise the past. Perhaps unexpectedly, McCulloch’s citation of the Macarthurs in her anti-Muslim views against the school drew the attention of the direct descendants of John and Elizabeth Macarthur in 2008. Dr Finlay Macneil and his daughter, Reverend Kate Macneil, two of these direct descendants, wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in outrage over the appropriation of their colonial grandparents by McCulloch. Kate Macneil wrote: ‘no one can say what their reaction would have been. But we can say that they were first-generation Australians, who sought to continue to honour their cultural heritage in a new place and valued education for their children’. She added that members of the Macneil family ‘were incensed that Ms McCulloch had used their forebears to justify views they saw as intolerant’. Finlay Macneil wrote:

We don’t live in Camden so who are we to speak for those that live in Camden? But we disagree with attributing thoughts and words to our ancestors that we suspect they wouldn’t have said. In fact if I had to take a guess I think John Macarthur would have been for [the school] if he could see a buck in it for him. They were open to new ideas. For a start they were in Australia and not back in England. They were of course first-generation Australians as well, and trying to maintain their particular values in a new land – so doing the very thing that would appear to me that this Islamic school was attempting to do here (Alexander 2008).
Unlike some of the Camden residents, some of the descendants of the Macarthurs saw them as immigrants, crossing the globe to establish a new life on the other side of the world, finding in this a commonality with recent Muslim immigrants.

Perhaps unbeknown to McCulloch and these many other residents, Muslims are not foreign to the Camden area or to the circles in which John Macarthur moved. A few months before the saga erupted a local Muslim resident donated her sculpture of Elizabeth Macarthur to the local library (Seymour 2007:1), as described in Chapter One. Neither her artwork nor her identity as a Muslim resident sparked any public reaction of xenophobic hostility. Also, at the time of the controversy, a local Muslim family requested that the Council allocate a number of burial plots at the cemetery for local Muslims, as this cemetery has burial plots for Catholics, Anglicans and Jews. The Council approved this family’s request. The family explained to the media that they had lived in Camden for over 40 years and wanted to be buried in the local area. Even the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group commented on the family’s request, supporting their proposal (Ward 2008).

In writing about the history of Muslims in Australia, Kabir claims that in 1829 a Muslim Indian man by the name of John Bono arrived on a ship called the Active ‘and was listed as a footman to John Macarthur’ (Kabir 2005:4). At Macarthur’s residence Elizabeth Farm, a board lists John Bono as an employee of Macarthur and his religion as ‘Mohamaden’ (Muslim). Yet apart from the census details, very little can be traced concerning the identity of John Bono (and this was possibly not the man’s real name). One artist, Vandana Ram, documented the Indian influences on Elizabeth Farm in Parramatta:

In researching the history of the house, suddenly one stumbles upon a more specific reference to one of the domestic servants that appears in the 1820 muster: John Bono, the twenty three year old “coloured” footman, a Mussalman (Muslim) who arrived in Sydney as a freeman on the Brig Active (a ship owned at one point by Samuel Marsden, that sailed constantly between Calcutta to [and] Sydney via Hobart). In May 1843 Elizabeth Macarthur describes in a letter to her son Edward, ‘... the lawn mown on which there is a very heavy swathe of Doob, an Indian grass that the Hindoo worships by an Hymn inscribed to it, as a divinity...’ (Ram 2010)

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This particular case is not the same as the controversy over Muslims buying burial plots in St Thomas Anglican Cemetery in Narellan which was described in Chapter Two.
Contrary to the popular assertion that the Macarthsurs would be proud of some of the current Camden residents for their negative attitudes towards Muslims, John Macarthur himself employed a Muslim man who had regular contact with his wife.

Furthermore, at the time of the Islamic school debate, an article in the Camden Advertiser discussed the role of Sufism in Camden. Frederick Elliot von Frankenberg, a German immigrant and follower of the teachings of Sufism (a mystical form of Islam), settled in Camden in the 1930s. Von Frankenberg was known locally as ‘the Baron’ and members of the Sufi faith would visit him and reside for short periods at his home. The Baron and his guests practiced Sufi rituals including peace greetings in Arabic, meditation and readings from the writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan (Stillitano 2008:8), the founder of Sufism in the West. Baron von Frankenberg’s presence and activities in the district reveal that the Muslim faith and some of its practices arrived in Camden as early as the 1930s.

**Conceptualising ‘heritage’ as a signifier of the past**

From the various accounts cited in this chapter, it is obvious that opponents of the school tell an Anglo-centric narrative of Camden invoking John and Elizabeth Macarthur in ways that exclude relevant information about the presence of Koori people and other minorities in the region. For these residents, ‘race’ foregrounds the ways they represent Camden’s past, enabling them to present an incomplete Anglo-centric version of what they understand to be the cultural heritage of the area. Before this chapter proceeds to assess how these various uses of heritage are strongly grounded in ideas of ‘race’, and the ways they function to enable locals to represent Camden as an area of conserved and continued national significance, it will firstly examine the scholarly definitions of ‘heritage’ to gain insight into the shape that white heritage takes in Camden today.

Similar to the academic efforts that define ‘race’, scholars commonly point out that definitions of heritage, as Susie West argues, ‘remain broad’. To help navigate this breadth, West argues that we should differentiate between official and unofficial heritage

> Official heritage is self-defining as heritage recognised and protected by states and more local forms of government... Unofficial heritage sits outside these bureaucratic processes, lacking formal protection by legislation, under-represented in public collections under-valued according to canonical criteria. It is also more likely to be intangible, encompassing, for example living traditions of song, dance, craft and other expressions of what is often called folk or traditional culture (West 2010:1)
When locals in Camden speak of ‘heritage’, it appears they have in mind both the official and unofficial forms identified by West. Also, for locals, the ‘past’ is synonymous with their understanding of heritage, which takes a specific shape in Camden that suits an Anglo-centric narrative that this chapter has argued is explicitly endorsed among the local public, by the museum, the local council, and local historical narratives.

Graham et al. (2000) argue that heritage operates as a contemporary phenomenon. These authors refer to Hall’s ideas of representation to conceptualise heritage, ideas that are relevant in mapping out the particular forms of local heritages that play out in the school saga. Hall (1997b) argues for two interconnected systems of representation that include mental images and languages, both of which are useful in mapping out discourses regarding heritage. In Camden, protesters against the Islamic school proposal use the terms ‘heritage’, ‘history’ and ‘past’ interchangeably when making their various cases against the school. The arguments that draw on the ‘past’ or ‘heritage’ have demonstrated simplified representations of ‘race’.

The undertones of ‘race’ in these local discourses of Camden’s past, particularly ones that focus on the development of white communities, further demonstrate how certain power structures and biases shape these narratives. Hall (1995:25) argues that heritage illustrates the power dynamics of ‘those who have colonised the past’:

The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context. It is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter. These assumptions and co-ordinates of power are inhabited as natural – given, timeless, true and inevitable. But it takes only the passage of time, the shift of circumstances, or the reversals of history to reveal those assumptions as time-and context-bound, historically specific, and thus open to contestation, re-negotiation, and revision (1995:26)

In relation to the school, the versions of history which matter to some critics espouse the achievements of their white ancestors and their stories of economic prosperity. These stories have encouraged locals to colonise and whitewash Camden’s past of the dispossession of the Gundungurra, Dharug and Dhawaral peoples from their lands. In the face of the Islamic school, these narratives of denial (whether conscious or unconscious) enable opponents to articulate a particular feel-good and heroic narrative of prosperous and peaceful white settlement, to legitimise their protest against the school.
The preservations of white heritage in Camden

Hall argues that the usage of ‘heritage’ in the British context places it as something to preserve and conserve; it is about ‘keeping what already exists – as opposed to the production and circulation of new work in different media, which takes a very definite second place’ (1999:23). In Australia’s Camden, critics saw the school as an obstruction to their efforts to preserve the town’s important heritage. For the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group, the arguments for preservation were at the forefront of their protest (arguably, these arguments were also adopted by members of the group as defence against charges of racism); the group raised funds by producing t-shirts featuring the slogan ‘Preserve Camden’s Heritage’ which were sold in local shops. When a reporter interviewed Emil Sremchevich on Australia Day, he was wearing one of these shirts and had Australian flag designs painted on his face in honour of the occasion. Despite arguing for conservation, the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group has not protested other development applications in Camden which arguably change ‘what already exists’. Nor has the group argued for the preservation of Aboriginal sacred lands.

Samuel observes that histories and heritage play significant roles in society, arguing that heritage is imposed by history books and shaped by various local communities:

...history as a mass activity – or at any rate as a pastime – has possibly never had more followers than it does today, when the spectacle of the past excites the kind of attention which earlier epochs attached to the new. Conservation, whatever the doubts about the notion of ‘heritage’, is one of the major aesthetic and social movements of our time. Family history societies fill record offices with their searchers. We live... in an expanding historical culture, in which the work of inquiry and retrieval is being progressively extended into all kinds of spheres that would have been thought unworthy in the past, that whole new orders of documentation are coming into play (Samuel 1994:25).

For some critics, the preservation of Camden’s heritage required constant vigilance against the kind of disruption which the school would cause:

Camden is loved and visited by people who appreciate our beautiful surroundings, if we do not continue to monitor what is built up around us we will surely lose our Historic Country Town Image.
We live in Camden because of these surroundings (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007)

There are particular discursive constructions of place which stitch ‘heritage’ into their fabric in an effort to preserve Camden. For instance, the local descriptions of Camden as ‘country’
or a ‘country town’ references the historical aspects of the area. In relation to the school some residents argue that ‘Camden’s historic and visual values will be degraded’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 18/12/2008), or that ‘Camden prides itself on our Historic Country Town Image. We live here because it is friendly, relaxing and inviting’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007). The past, for such residents, is something not only embedded into Camden’s contemporary identity as a rural area, but it is something they also maintain daily. These characterisations of ‘historic’ Camden demonstrate how locals draw on particular local histories and commonly see their present town through the past.

The Anglo-centric nature of heritage in Camden was particularly apparent in the ways critics of the school would commonly deem Muslims as peoples incompatible with the history of the area. Muslims were seen as newcomers and possible invaders by some residents, a group who could harm Camden’s reputation as a historic area:

Camden is a unique and historic town. Will the new community that this school will bring to Camden respect and value the historic nature of the town that we fight so hard to protect? Camden is a rural, country town. We wish to preserve the rural aspect of the town and surrounding suburbs. The Development Application [sic] and the future infrastructure that will follow are not keeping the rural nature and spirit of Camden (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).

The rhetoric of locals pitting Muslims against their heritage demonstrates how ideas of ‘race’ formed the basis of how residents thought of local histories and Muslims as people who would violate their efforts to preserve this ‘heritage’:

[I am] against large overcrowded areas as it bringing the city out to the country, bringing all the problems with it. (Smog, car hoons, parking problems, adolescence [sic] fighting and loitering). This is a heritage area, and shouldn’t we protect heritage areas???? (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).

We do not want foreigners taking over our homes, schools, properties, businesses and cemeteries [sic] which have been a part of our heritage, it is an insult for the Muslim community to interfere with any part which has been stated (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).
All these opponents mark out heritage against Muslims, whether they specifically place them as ‘strangers’ who are external to the area, or criminals. Either way, they are deemed incompatible with Camden’s rural heritage.

The Council’s Anglo centric narrations of heritage which were similar to those put forward by the above quoted residents. However, their classification of heritage sites was not always the same as those pinpointed by the school’s opponents. A report prepared for the Council recommending a decision to reject the school detailed their position. The proposed site of the school had a small old hut and Council officers pondered whether this was a heritage site:

*Clause 24 to 25A: Heritage items:* The land is not identified as an item of environmental heritage under LEP 48 and as such clause 24 does not apply to this application. Consequently notice of the application in accordance with Clauses 25 and 25A is not required. Council’s Heritage Report adopted in December 2006 did not identify the listing of the dwelling or its outbuildings as a heritage item or a potential item. As such a Heritage Impact Assessment is not required.

Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the existing dwelling believed to date from the 1880’s or 1890’s [sic] may have some heritage significance. This was an issue raised in submissions. Incorporating the dwelling into the development as a caretaker’s dwelling is supported as a way of conserving the building. Any future development application involving the building would need to ensure a sympathetic maintenance of the original detail of the dwelling (Camden Council 2008:9).

Interestingly, the council report then commends the Qur’anic Society for attempting to preserve a piece of this potential ‘heritage’. This strikingly contrasts with repeated local arguments that Muslims would disrespect the local heritage sites in the area. Though the Council did list a few nearby sites as ‘heritage’ places, it did not feel the school threatened these places:

There is an existing poultry farm located diagonally opposite the site, it is opposite the Camden General Cemetery and 500m south of the Catholic Cemetery. Both cemeteries are heritage areas (Camden Council 2008: 9)

Clause 25B: Development in the vicinity of heritage items and archaeological sites: The land is located in the vicinity of the “Roman Catholic Cemetery” and “Slab Hut” listed under Schedule 1 of LEP 48 and “Camden Cemetery” listed under Schedule 1 of LEP 46. Clause 25B requires Council to consider the impact that a development will have on the heritage significance of a heritage item, archaeological site or potential archaeological site when determining an application. Although development of the school buildings is not considered to impact heritage items in the vicinity, concern is raised in regards
to the impact on heritage items in the vicinity of the required roadworks, the installation of private sewer infrastructure and the relocation of utilities (Camden Council 2008: 27).

While it can be argued that the Council is selective in its identification of ‘official heritage’ based on the interests of white communities in the area, the various efforts towards conserving Camden’s heritage demonstrate how locals attempt to continue this ‘heritage’.

The continuation of white heritage in Camden

At the first public rally, a journalist interviewed a protester, who stated:

...if you want to go back to the heritage of the area, the farm that boundaries the property that they’ve [the Qur’anic Society] bought, I’ve milked there every day or something like that, there are still furrow marks from the First Fleet, there’s still ploughs and things in those paddocks from the First Fleet, and they want to build this obstrosity [sic – ‘monstrosity’] that we have to look at. No thanks (Neighbour 2008).

This protester mobilises the historical backdrop in the struggle against the school. In his account, the surroundings of the proposed site are sacred to the Anglo-Saxon history of Camden. His everyday occupation milking cows is a lived reminder of the past framed to encompass even the First Fleet, an entity accorded national white significance. These efforts of continuing historical practices are pitted against a proposed ‘monstrosity’ of a building, which this opponent argues would ruin local heritage. In this view, only one side of Camden’s local history appears in the struggle against the school. This resident does not remark on the heritage of traditional owners whose presence on the land was established well before John Macarthur or the First Fleet.

Some residents discussed their everyday activities in Camden as a continuation of the white history in the area. These positions are biased in their narration of heritage, as West writes that:

Heritage in practice, on the ground, is important not because it is something that urbanised Europeans do in their leisure time. Heritage matters because it is an active element of living communities who need the freedom and the means to be able to access and express their sense of how their past informs their present (West 2010:1-2)
The settler history remains central to how many conservative residents today understand their locality. The legacy of the Macarthurs has become sacred in Camden today, where a school that would cater for Muslim students was seen to violate Macarthur’s legacy, and their efforts to continue this history today. David, a local restaurant manager, described Camden in ways that illustrate how heritage is experienced as a continuation of the past:

It has a rural feel and still that agricultural side to it. There’s the cattle sides here, and the Macarthur Institute of Agriculture, Macarthur’s original residence out there, still on a couple of thousands of acres, 1835 the property was built during a land grab. So it still has that, um, colonial sort of feel, I suppose. The house out there was built in 1885. John Macarthur was one of the first agriculturists in Australia (David, interview, 7 August 2009).

For David, the historical aspects of cattle grazing and farming continue today, as he positions Camden as synonymous with John Macarthur who was Australia’s ‘first agriculturist’ and who holds both local and national significance. For the local, Macarthur’s farming legacy took place in Camden. Nationally, his legacy (in the view of certain local residents) founded the success of the national economy.

Opponents of the school commonly suggested their daily lives continue the legacies of the past. This was articulated by the Boardman family, who are considered by locals as a prominent family in the Camden area and who own land that is adjacent to the proposed school site. Local resident, Kay Scarlett (member of the Boardman family) spoke in the Land and Environment Court against the proposal. In her testimony, Scarlett described the farming lifestyle that has been continued by the family since the days of the Macarthurs:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this matter which is of great concern to the Boardman family, who farmed from the adjacent Fairview since it was purchased from Elizabeth Macarthur Onslow in the 1880s, but shear-farmed by them before that. I am married to a son of the current owner, Vic Boardman, and join him in the management of our hundred head herd of Angus cross cattle.... We have all watched with alarm the hijacking of this debate of this development by a handful of vocal bigots and a media that has been all too willing to give them air time, and to inflame an ill-informed debate. I want to clearly state they are not the views of the family.... (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – Qur’anic Society v Camden Council (2009) NSWLEC 1171).

Scarlett differentiated the position of the family from that of ‘vocal bigots’, and rightly pointed out the disproportionate focus of the mainstream media on racialised attitudes
towards Muslims. Usually, opponents blamed the media for representing locals as ‘racists’, but the Boardman family distanced themselves from ‘vocal bigots’. Scarlett described a brief history of the local area in positioning the interests of the family against the school. Fairview was purchased by the Boardmans from Elizabeth Macarthur Onslow (a granddaughter of John and Elizabeth Macarthur), and the family had continued an established farming lifestyle there. After describing the family’s environmental concerns regarding the impact of the school, Scarlett argued that the legacy of John Macarthur would be significantly affected if the school were approved:

The result is that the farming activity that has been carried out on Fairview since John Macarthur was granted this land will no longer be possible... Fairview has a very proud history of mixed farming... the activities and method of the past really do hold the key to its future (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – Qur’anic Society v Camden Council (2009) NSWLEC 1171).

The school is seen to impede this legacy – not because it was specifically an Islamic school, but rather because it was a development application located near a farming area. Again, a limited perspective of Camden’s local history is privileged. It is worth mentioning that Scarlett positions herself as someone who witnesses reminders of local histories daily, it is these experiences that influence her rejection of the school on that particular site.

Christine Boardman, another family member, also spoke in the Court. Unlike Scarlett, Boardman did not refer to John Macarthur in her opposition, but rather was content to cite the story of the cows from Sydney Cove making their way to the area:

Having being born and bred at Cawdor, from a long line of farmers, at Cawdor’s beginning, I have seen and experienced this area as a viable ‘dry farming’ valley which sustains itself in good times and bad. I cannot stress to the Land and Environment Court enough that, with the loss of our agricultural land on the Northern Road, how important it is to retain undisturbed, the land at Cawdor valley for rural activities. Allowing an urban footprint onto the corner of this agricultural valley that has been used for agricultural purposes since Camden was first sighted, would be an insult to the land of our ancestors. Every day I see the crops that this land produces, I use the vegetables grown in this fertile soil and the dairy produce from the local farms in my business and you can see and taste the difference. I have operated a food business in Camden, the township for the last 29 years. Each day as I drive to work, I pass the fields that sustain themselves against wind, rain and drought... Why, even the cows that escaped from Sydney Cove in 1790 found their way to the lush valley. My Father’s property is where one of the original stockades for these same cattle stood and this land has been farmed ever since. Again, I would like to point out what the Urban Footprint will do to this Valley and it farming practices.
Boardman used the expression ‘urban footprint’ to describe the school, reflecting how opponents represent the school as an urban setting from the Greater Sydney Area. Boardman’s position expressed in the Land and Environment Court communicated three main structures shared with other opponents: 1) a narration of local history, 2) a continuation of this history, and 3) the evoking of this history in arguments against the school.

In the aforementioned testimony, Boardman talks of the sentimental value of the cows from Sydney Cove making their way to the Cawdor Valley. The court is told that the property neighbouring the school is the exact place where these very cows came to graze. This ‘Sydney Cove cows story’ is the narrative of European beginnings in the area. Here, Camden is ‘first sighted’ (as the speaker puts it) by Europeans, rather than Aboriginal groups in the area. For Boardman, the legacy of this local history is practised on a daily basis, from witnessing the rural environment on her travels past the proposed school site. The farming legacy and rural activities in the area are lived reminders of heritage for some opponents, encapsulated in the mere mention of these open plains. Of course, this continuation of local history connects with the popular narrative of flourishing European agricultural settlement, rather than the realities of Aboriginal dispossession and massacres in the Camden area.

This vision of heritage and everyday practice underpins a powerful rhetorical strategy against the school. Boardman, like other opponents, evokes local white ancestors in ways that portray the proposal as a violation of local history. The development would be ‘an insult’ to the local ancestors – not because it was specifically an Islamic school, but because (for this opponent) it symbolised the production of an urban environment that is seen to be incompatible with the local valley. Of course, the local ancestors are white – this is not a reference to the dispossessed traditional owners.

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21 The next chapter examines how the popular representations of the school as an urbanised entity from the city surfaced among opponents.

22 The lack of recognition of Aboriginal people, as highlighted in this testimony, compliments the racist perceptions that were (and arguably, still are) widespread across Australia prior to 1967, in which Aboriginal people were dehumanised and classified by Europeans as part of the flora and fauna of the Australian landscape.
The birthplace of our nation: Camden’s ‘national’ heritage

It is obvious that the heroic and feel-good narrative of the ‘Birthplace of our Nation’s Wealth’ in Camden is entrenched in the ways that many Camdenites themselves represent their area, whether they try to preserve it in accordance with this narrative, or see their daily actions as continuations of this narrative. Yet, underlining these efforts is a general view among residents that the local history of Camden is of national significance. This is epitomised by the chants of a protester at the second rally protesting the school, where a woman raised a placard reading ‘Keep Camden Rural’ and cited the famous sign with the town’s slogan:

Keep Camden rural and keep its heritage! It’s the birthplace of our nation! (Bourke 2007).

‘Remember the slogan when you cross into this town’ read one letter to council that made a similar assertion. ‘We ARE the birthplace of this nations [sic] wealth! If they [Council] cannot preserve the rest of this area, at least fight for the remaining part to which our ancestors built this country on’ [sic] (Letter to Camden Council, received 1/11/2007). Other opponents referenced ‘the sign’ in their letters to Camden Council: ‘The sign says Historic Camden, well I don’t know if the council still has this in our best interest. The Historic country town of Camden thinks it’s moving ahead but it’s going backwards’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 7/11/2007).

The national significance is seen to be symbolised by John Macarthur’s pioneering efforts. One of the aforementioned opponents emotively references ‘our ancestors’ while articulating both a sense of ownership of this ‘country’ and a connection with local history. Here, Camden becomes the centre of the nation’s ‘birth’, specifically, the birth of white communities. It is here that the ideas of ‘race’ are obvious in the ways they function to inform people of their heritage and identity as a rural Australian town. The slogan is obviously of such historical importance that it connects the present to the past, and the local to the national. These are ways that locals attempt to uphold their white ancestral heritage. Yet, as the protester waving their placard shows, some locals have removed the ‘wealth’ part of the town slogan, and refer to Camden as the ‘birthplace of the nation’. Here, the role that Macarthur played in establishing the ‘wealth’ is of less significance, and the emphasis is placed on the ‘nation’ – an extreme example of the ways locals represent their area as a place of national significance.
Collectively, the local efforts to conflate the local with the national can be further interpreted through Ghassan Hage’s discussion of ‘governmental belonging’, which Hage argues is ‘claimed by those in a dominant position’ (1998:46), explaining further that:

the belief that one has a right over the nation, involves the belief in one’s possession of the right to contribute (even if only by having a legitimate opinion with regards to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it remains ‘one’s home’. This is what I call governmental belonging (emphasis in original) (Hage 1998:46)

School opponents frequently position themselves as having the force of local history (also parallel to the force of the mainstream, the dominant, and the national) behind them. The drawing upon these different factors of heritage, whether continuing or preserving heritage, is simply about claiming for one self a position of governmental belonging, a form of authenticity that allows these arguments of heritage to appear ‘truthful’. By talking about the nation in a particular way, drawing upon an ideologically shaped view on heritage which misrepresents the stories of the traditional inhabitants, locals have a sense of governmental belonging which, as Hage argues, gives people the right and capacity to speak about the nation. Yet what Hage does not discuss (given the scope of his argument in White Nation – see Hage 1997) is how governmental belonging operates on a local level.

It is through a sense of localised governmental belonging that locals construct Camden as an area of national significance. The ‘birthplace’ narrative has particularly enabled opponents to see their struggle against the school as a national fight over retaining a place of Australian importance:

Historical importance of the Camden area the birth place of Australia’s wealth and agriculture. Camden and surrounds needs to be protected from over development (Letter to Camden Council, received 8/11/2007).

This opponent uses the ‘birthplace’ narrative first to position Camden as an area of national significance and then to position themselves as an advocate for its preservation. Thus, they outline the national importance of the area and then make the case for conservation. The stitching together of the local and the national demonstrates how localism in this context is
not differentiated from nationalism. In discussing ‘heritage’, Hall suggests the importance of nationalism in popular representations:

The first task, then, is re-defining the nation, re-imagining ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ itself in a more profoundly inclusive manner. The Brits owe this, not to only us, but to themselves: for to prepare their own people for success in a global and decentred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, ‘tight little island’ would be fatally to disable them (Hall 2008:225)

Hall’s discussion can be applied beyond the British context. In Camden, anti-school views mobilise the birthplace narrative to mark out Australianness in ways that tie it to white settlement.

Among some opponents, Camden’s heritage epitomises Australian rural life, evidently playing on the popular Australian iconic images of country life:

Camden is the birth of the Australian Wool industry, and its culture has been that of a rural community. This will obviously change for the worse. Generations of families have built this town from nothing, to what they see as their idyllic living conditions now (Letters to Camden Council, received 8/11/2007).

This same message appeared in several letters. In this letter, the opponent details the specifics of the ‘nation’s wealth’, where other opponents truncated the town slogan to become ‘birthplace of the nation’, forgetting the full meaning of the slogan which more accurately conveys that Camden is the birthplace of the wool industry, not the nation. Concepts of culture and rurality were further articulated in another resident’s testimony in the Land and Environment Court. Graham Sherade argued that the whole town would be changed if this school were approved:

...on a personal note it is impossible for this development to go ahead and not change our beautiful town, it’s absolutely impossible. It’s the birthplace of our nation, steeped in history and I call for Council, if this development does go ahead, to have the development and associated businesses all to conform with the heritage laws, and to be [sic] no other language signs, no other different architecture, but it must conform to Camden’s heritage (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – Qur’anic Society v Camden Council (2009) NSWLEC 1171)

The need to keep the buildings looking ‘Camden’ was considered a priority in the event that Camden Council were to approve the school. Sherade referenced the town’s historical
narrative as the nation’s birthplace to articulate the national ‘distinctiveness’ of the area. The architecture needed to conform to the Camden heritage and the resident felt that even signs in another language would change the nation’s ‘birthplace’.

The various uses of ‘heritage’ discussed throughout this chapter, whether they were detailed with narratives of a prosperous wool industry, or in the short slogan the ‘birthplace of the nation’, fit into the larger narratives of European peaceful, harmonious settlement. In this case, Australian heritage is, as Logan argues, largely biased:

Australia’s heritage is largely valued internationally because of the variety and relatively pristine condition of its physical environments and these have played a major role in shaping Australians’ own sense of identity, which is reflected in folklore, literature, art and film. In relation to historic places, the system is biased in favour of the Anglo-Celtic legacy which is commonly referred to as ‘mainstream’, ignoring heritage, which dates back 40,000 or more years and remains strong in many parts of the country, as well as the heightened cultural diversity resulting from the mass immigration programs that followed World War II (Logan 2007:214)

As a heritage area, the abbreviated ‘birthplace of the nation’ slogan references an Anglo-centric history in Camden. Opponents chanted it at demonstrations to communicate their view that Muslims had no place in Camden:

The town is one of the jewels in the crown of NSW and should be kept that way. Heritage buildings cannot be altered by law so why should a town that is of an aged status [sic] be changed forever. Afterall [sic], this is the birthplace of the nation, not the birthplace of the Islamic community (Letter to Camden Council, received 10/11/2007).

This opponent combines both local and national history in marking out local heritage against Muslims. Their position speaks volumes for the ways locals place Muslims outside the Australian mainstream, feeding an existing ‘Aussies against Muslims’ binary. Further, their views on the school epitomise the ways racialised descriptors are part of the controversy – as Muslims are not considered white, locals were anxious about them coming into Camden (these ideas are explored at length in the next few chapters where we examine the ways opponents constructed Muslim ghettos and Arab folk devils).

Similarly, another resident cited the famous slogan in claiming that Muslims are planning to invade Australia:
I may be paranoid but I think they have a hidden agenda, to take over by stealth as much of Sydney as possible and what better place to really make a statement than a heritage area and the ‘Birthplace of the Nation’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 10/11/2007).

Here, the opponent uses heritage to claim that Camden is of great historical/national importance. Thus, if Muslims took the national ‘birthplace’, then they would dominate the rest of the country. The next two chapters examine the prevailing invasion anxieties towards the school.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the many ways that Camdenites represented their local heritage in a way that excluded Muslims and the first Australians. It is a selective Anglo-centric heritage that celebrates the achievements of white pioneers and omits the Indigenous narrative which has a longer and richer presence in the area. Here, heritage is a representation that functions only for those who belong, and in light of the proposed Islamic school, some locals use these narratives to exclude Muslims. Hall asks ‘who is heritage for?’, then argues that in the British case it is ‘for those who “belong” within a society imagined as culturally homogeneous and unified’ (Hall 2008:26). Hall’s observations are echoed in Camden. Whether residents talk of local histories, the past, or heritage in its many forms, ‘race’ foregrounds the ways they portray their area as a place of conserved and continued national significance.

Given the many definitions of heritage, Logan suggests a way forward in reshaping heritage in the Australian context:

> The way forward is surely to define heritage widely and inclusively and to avoid narrow interpretations of Australia’s history and heritage based on the views of the ‘dominant’ social and political group. Minority voices, whether Indigenous or immigrant, must be incorporated in the formation of Australian identity. Governments should resist the temptation to manipulate Australian ‘mainstream’ attitudes by recourse to sensationalist misrepresentation of opposing views of the nation’s past and current culture, but should listen to all groups in the community and encourage them to participate in heritage identification, management and interpretation (Logan 2007:220).

In Camden, minority voices are discounted in this heroic legacy of Macarthur and the ‘birthplace of the nation’s wealth’. The local histories of Camden tell the story of migration, white settlement, dispossession of the Indigenous populations and John Macarthur’s national
farming legacies. White communities invaded the area, set up economies to benefit these communities, and various Western Christian denominations established themselves in Camden (Johnson 2010:8, 35, 52; Reed 1978:29, 33). All these factors have resulted from colonialism and migration, where peoples had brought their various idiosyncrasies from another part of the globe to the southern hemisphere. Yet, paradoxically, these factors are localised, seen as natural and local heritage characters of Camden. Today, they have taken on a different meaning, one that discounts the colonial heritage, and sees the Sydney region as the ‘victim’ of migration. The dominant representations of Camden as a country, rural town inextricably link to the popular narratives of Camden’s ‘birthplace of the nation’ heritage. They depict the social role of heritage in Camden, as Harrison writes:

[B]y challenging the histories produced as part of official heritage practices, these unofficial forms of heritage have the potential to transform a society’s understanding of its past and, by extension its present and future. Such interventions in heritage, alongside the ways in which heritage is used in the everyday construction of the local and the community, demonstrate the significant social role of heritage in society (Harrison 2010:273).

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to illustrate how Camden’s past was mobilised in rhetorical strategies against the school. The role of concepts of ‘heritage’ and ‘nation’ has been integral in the arguments which indicate that Camden has been free of ‘foreign’ elements, disregarding the fact that white settlement in its early formation was itself foreign. In the next chapter, we look at the evocation of concepts of ‘heritage’ and place as they are being projected in the future. The school’s opponents rely on doomsday prognoses in their rhetorical imaginings of what might happen should an Islamic school be allowed to establish itself in the area.
‘Changing Camden to Cambowl’:

The ghetto dystopian imaginary of Camden’s future

We have considered the impact of ‘race’ as a construct on the Camden controversy in several ways. Initially, we explored how Muslims and Islam were constructed in racial terms within the rhetorical strategies of those who opposed the school’s development. We then looked at how opponents of the school constructed their own racial identities as white Australian custodians of the land. In looking at Camden’s heritage and history and the deployment of these in arguments against the school, we also saw how ‘race’ operated in a way that saw the selective consideration of Australian history as beginning with European settlement, forgoing acknowledgment of the Koori presence in the area. In this chapter, I look at the ways opponents construct Camden’s future with an Islamic school and observe the significance of ‘race’ in these constructions. I also look at how ‘race’ becomes synonymous with the identity of rural Camden as a place situated on the fringes of a heavily urbanised, culturally heterogeneous city.

In their predictions about what it would mean for Camden to house an Islamic school, local opponents frequently argued that such a development would result in an invasive and wretched change in the area. This is exemplified rather succinctly by the term ‘Cambowl’, which was coined in a letter to Camden Council, where a resident stated: ‘What’s next: Changing Camden to Cambowl?’ ‘Cambowl’ is a term coined as a compound of the words ‘Camden’ and ‘Punchbowl’. Punchbowl is a suburb in Sydney’s South West which has a large concentration of Arabs and visible Middle Eastern presence. This resident’s sarcasm is apparent in the way they predict the impact of the school, where ‘Punchbowl’ is a reference point for this impact – not because it is located in the heart of Sydney’s South West, but because of its large Arab demographic. Similarly, many opponents cited suburbs with either large Muslim populations, or concentrated Arab communities, or culturally diverse areas; and predicted that the school would impact both the existing white demographic and the rural character of the area. The imaginings of Camden’s ghetto dystopian future are situated in Camden’s context where a number of interrelated themes flourish. The ways locals think
about Camden as a typical country town mirror the popular iconographic images of the white ‘Australian bush’ life. Residents have faced difficulties in maintaining Camden’s ‘rural town’ image as it is a place set to grow dramatically, both in terms of population and infrastructure. Also, Camden operates for some residents as a haven for ‘white flight’ from nearby culturally diverse populations, and opponents argued that the school would further displace locals who have already been displaced from other areas. These factors play into the layers of the ghetto dystopian imaginary of Camden’s future as an outer suburb, epitomising the opposite of Camden’s rural and white identity.

**Rural Camden as beleaguered Anglo Australia**

Camden is on the cusp of the urban and rural divide, as one interviewee stated, ‘[Camden is where]... the city stops and the country begins’ (Thomas, *interview*, 1 October 2009). Most interviewees and letters to the council similarly constructed Camden as the first rural town outside of Sydney. In this context, when these residents talked of ‘Sydney’, they were not referring to the actual city landscape of the Sydney city district, rather they constructed the ‘Sydney’ area in a way that included every local government area that began at the border of Camden to Sydney city. In differentiating Camden from this ‘Sydney’, opponents often referred to the visible open plains and scenery in characterising their area as ‘rural’. The local anti-school group (the Camden/Macarthur Residents Group) fundraised by selling anti-school t-shirts featuring the catchy-slogan ‘keep Camden rural’. At the time of the controversy, the group formed a website called ‘keepCamdenrural.com.au’. The site featured a picture of the scenic greenery of Camden. The website’s information read that it was ‘in progress’, yet over time the website expired and featured no information about the group or their motives. Similarly, interviewees often elaborated on their descriptions of rural Camden by citing their environments, some even arguing that Islam is not compatible with rurality, others linking rurality to the Anglo demography in the area:

I would describe Camden as a semi-rural suburb, it has retained that country town feel, and it is an escape from the city almost, to come out here, even to just step from Narrellan to Camden is a relaxing step. It’s more country paced, more country (David, *interview*, 7 August 2009).

It’s a nice, rural area. It is not high density as other places. I am quite happy that the foreigners are staying away from Camden, we need to protect it from foreigners... I believe in protecting our culture
and our places, we need to protect Australia... when I heard that Camden has a low tolerance towards other cultures, I felt ‘Yay!’, it’s where I belong (Estelle, interview, 12 August 2009).

I’d describe it as a semi-rural place, it’s a safe place to live, it doesn’t have as many fast food joints as other places it’s much more quieter (Chloe, interview, 9 August 2009).

In these accounts, the ideas of ‘rurality’ are situated within the broader anxieties about change in the area. David’s description about the local preserved-country ‘feel’ differentiated Camden from other suburbs on the fringe and the Sydney city. Estelle appeared anxious about ‘foreigners’ (or non-English speaking migrants as she expressed later) and keeping Camden ‘Australian’. Her position on the school epitomises the ways opponents assert ‘rural Camden’ in the struggle against demographic changes. For Chloe, anxieties about public safety and commercialisation in the area shaped her thoughts on Camden. Even though my interview with Chloe took place in a newly developed commercial area where several multinational franchises and restaurants are in sight, Chloe still thought of Camden as ‘semi-rural’. These different representations of ‘rural Camden’ seeped through opposition to the school.

It was obvious that one major representation of ‘rural Camden’ took a particular shape that was synonymous with a beleaguered Anglo Australia. Protesters who thought of Camden in this way saw their protest as a way of defending rural and white Camden against the urban and culturally diverse areas of Sydney’s West. It is obvious that there is a union between the ways opponents mark out ‘race’ and place, in the sense that they see these as informing each other. The opponent below portrayed the school and Muslims as alien to the rural nature of Camden. They wrote of a ‘new community’ and ‘Muslim culture’, one that was non-rural and singular:

Camden is a unique and historic town. Will the new community that this school will bring to Camden respect and value the historic nature of the town that we fight so hard to protect?

Camden is a rural, country town. We wish to preserve the rural aspect of the town and surrounding suburbs. The Development Application and the future infrastructure that will follow are not keeping with the rural nature and spirit of Camden...

The Muslim culture calls for Friday prayer meets. There has been no allowance for the extra car spaces and off street parking that will be required to cater for this additional congregation – which will be extreme once the wider Islamic community is invited to attend (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007)
The controversy over an Islamic Prayer Centre in Annangrove mirrors the ways people think about place in terms of ‘race’ as explicit in Camden. In Annangrove, many locals had protested the proposal for an Islamic Prayer Centre (see Chapter Two for details). The area is described by Poynting *et al.* (2004:222) as a ‘strongly middle class, Anglo-Celtic Hills district’, and is described by an *ABC* radio journalist as ‘the Bible Belt area of the Hills district’ (O’Brien 2008). The Baulkham Hills Council rejected the application, claiming that since such a proposal is not compatible with the shared beliefs of the locals, it could not be placed in the local area, and it did not serve the interests of the Annangrove community (*The Age* 2002). Some opponents suggested that Muslims needed to stay in ‘Muslim areas’. These imaginings of the Annangrove space are largely based on the unions of ‘race’ and ‘place’, which result in locals contrasting ‘Anglo’ and ‘Christian’ against ‘Muslim areas’. The ways opponents in Camden characterise their area display similar unions between ‘race’ and place. These characterisations demonstrate that ‘race’ is linked to the way people think about the demographics in suburbs outside of Camden. Also, these unions of ‘race’ and place are grounded in the traditional representations of the Australian bush. Such representations are particularly significant to Camden, grounded in its identity as a rural town with farming beginnings.

To clarify this point it is useful to discuss similarities between Camden and Cronulla, an area located on Sydney’s south coast. Both Cronulla and Camden – sites of controversies and public disorder against Arabs and Muslims – are considered by their locals to be demographically separated from culturally diverse Sydney. Poynting describes Cronulla (also known as the ‘Shire’ among Cronulla residents) as ‘...something of a peninsula demographically, remarkable set apart from the cultural diversity of Sydney’. In the Shire, there is a long tradition of tension at the beach from locals against outsiders – usually young people from the Western and South-Western suburbs (Poynting 2009:48-9). Both Camden and Cronulla exemplify how locals imagine their own areas in ways that simultaneously mark out ‘white areas’ against other parts of Sydney, and mobilise images of Australia against Muslims and Arabs. Popular Australiana iconographies, of which ‘race’ is significant, shape their localities. In Cronulla images of surfers and beaches played out in anxieties about

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23 Often, spectators of the Camden controversy commented that protestors mirrored the Cronulla rioters. Some opponents even claimed that a Cronulla riot would take place if the school is approved. These ideas are discussed at greater length in Chapter Five.
outsiders changing the area (see Dunn 2009; Noble 2009; Poynting 2007). The localism as it operates in Camden feeds off the other popular Australian image – the ‘Aussie countryside’. Located on the other side of Sydney, locals defend the other side of the Australian frontier against Arabs and Muslims. These images of white and Anglo Camden fit into the dominant mainstream images of the Australian bush. Together, these images play into the ways opponents represent Muslims as non-white, urbanised foreigners. Some opponents even discussed the movement of Muslims to Camden as though Muslim communities were both locally and nationally alien. Here, opponents simultaneously expressed ‘local’ and ‘national’ concerns:

This idea of a total Islamic School shows a total lack of willingness to assimilate with the local and Australian public (emphasis added) (Letter to Camden Council, received 8/11/2007).

The rural and suburban ambiguity of Camden today

While locals in Camden like to think of their town as very different from other Sydney areas, and they differentiate their community as both rural and quiet, many features in Camden's business district indicate otherwise. In walking along the main street Argyle Street and the surrounding roads, one can observe a number of franchises that are usually found in suburbanised Sydney areas that destroy the ‘tidy town’ image of Camden (discussed in the next section). For instance, there is a large Woolworths shopping centre adjacent to the community centre where Fred Nile’s information forum on Islam took place and the Council announced the fate of the school. Also, a Gloria Jeans Coffee shop, Dominoes Pizza, a Subway restaurant, Bakers Delight and a Commonwealth Bank are all chain franchises on the main street. The ‘local’ businesses are adjacent to these shops, some of which are global franchises. Interestingly, a version of the store ‘Target’, called ‘Country Target’ which is often found in rural Australian towns, is in Camden in spite of its proximity to the Sydney City. Also, only recently a ‘country style’ (with respect to the building’s aesthetic) McDonalds Restaurant was established at one of the entrances into Camden’s Main Street. Yet in the face of these similarities, ‘rural’ itself is a preferred identity that locals use to characterise the town, whereas in reality, there are many features of Camden which suggests that it is another Sydney suburb.
There is obviously a rural/suburban ambiguity in contemporary Camden which is captured in the debates between the Qur’anic Society and Camden Council in the 2009 Land and Environment Court case. In court, the council and the Society debated whether the school was compatible with Camden’s rural atmosphere, as the Council positioned the school as an urban entity and the Society argued otherwise. Both parties differed in their characterisations of a ‘rural’ space (specifically a ‘rural zone’) and this debate epitomised the contested nature of the representations of ‘rurality’. The Commissioner observed:

Mr Caladine [Planning Consultant for the Qur’anic Society] describes the rural character of the locality as having a mixed character consisting of large parcels of land with urban forms and rural residential to the north-west. In his assessment, the rural character of the locality is influenced by the recently constructed Camden High School, the adjoining poultry farm, Camden landscape supply and existing agricultural land.

Mr Dowd [Planning Consultant for Camden Council] describes the rural character of the locality as broad acre grazing. On his assessment of the locality, the poultry farm and Camden High School do not fall within the locality and as such have no influence on the rural character of the locality (The Qur’anic Society v Camden Council [2009] NSWLEC 1171).

Had the Council included the school, it would have been easier for the applicants to argue that the rural locality was school-friendly on the basis that there was an existing school in the area. Commissioner Brown agreed with the Council’s version of ‘rural zoning’ (his statement is worth quoting at length):

Based on my previous findings on the locality, I agree with the conclusions of Mr Dowd. The locality is almost exclusively made up of grazing with little built form beyond scattered farm sheds and some farm homesteads. The lot sizes are large and generally reflect agricultural uses that would normally be associated with large lot sizes. The property that has a common boundary with the north and west boundaries of the site... has an area of 74 ha and the property further to the north ... has an area of 98 ha. The evidence of the owners and observations on the site view are that the properties are currently used for agricultural purposes including raising cattle for meat, stud cattle and some cropping.

Even if the poultry farm is included in any assessment of the rural character of the locality (as suggested by Mr Caladine), I am generally untroubled in finding that it has little or no impact on the identified rural character of the locality. While the poultry farm buildings are visible in the locality, they are rural in character and not inconsistent with what would be expected in a rural locality, even in a locality dominated by broad acre grazing.
I am not satisfied that Camden High School (located some 800 m to the south) has any meaningful impact on the rural character of the locality as only part of the buildings associated with the school can be observed from the locality and only from the higher parts around The Old Oaks Road. These buildings have little impact on the character of the locality because of the distance from the site and screening by the natural topography (The Qur’anic Society v Camden Council [2009] NSWLEC 1171).

It did not matter that a different school existed only 800 metres away from the proposed site of an Islamic school, this school could not be seen by anyone standing on the proposed site with open plains, a cemetery, a ‘chook farm’ (which is a colloquial term for ‘poultry farm’) and cattle in the distance. In response, the Commissioner outlined that the existing school did not concern the Court, yet paradoxically commented on the existing Camden High School and defended its establishment as it was out of sight of the poultry farm (The Qur’anic Society v Camden Council [2009] NSWLEC 1171).

Evidently, the applicant’s architect and other consultants attempted to give the school a ‘rural-appearance’. I examined the materials by Storey and Gough Lawyers (representing the applicants) and noted that the designs of the proposed school attempted to fit into the ‘rural setting’ of Camden (field notes 30/09/2010). From one view, the school buildings are barely seen as the trees outside the buildings cover the school. Specific Australian bushes, plants and shrubs surround the sketched-buildings. If the Court had approved the development, the school would have been designed as a ‘rural Islamic school’. Yet it was not enough to satisfy the Court or Camden Council. Kevin Dunn, an expert on Islamic development applications in Australia (see Dunn 1999, 2001, 2004) commented on the notion of ‘character determination’ when discussing the Court’s decision in relation to the Camden case. Dunn’s critique of the decision highlights the way ‘character determination’ is a particularly problematic method of assessing development applications:

The only thing that I think is demonstrated here is that we have a problem with our planning mechanisms, and that is this character determination. Determining something is out of character is unfortunately, in planning terms, the best way to smuggle intolerance into our planning system. And it’s a legitimate planning ground at the moment at the local level. And that’s what the Land and Environment Court has affirmed (Herbert 2009).
Rurality has been used to justify and prevent building of Islamic centres. There is no consensus about the implications of rurality. This is particularly apparent in the controversies in Annangrove, Cairns and Mackay (discussed in Chapter Two). In the controversy over the Annangrove Prayer Centre, opponents similarly raised the ‘rural’ character of the area in opposing the application. Some residents argued it would be incompatible with the ‘quiet’ and ‘rural’ Annangrove community (Poynting et al 2004:222). Elaine White, a member of a residents’ group against the centre argued it would change the semi-rural character of the area (O’Rourke 2003). In this case, the Court rejected these arguments, unlike Camden where rural zoning was important. In Cairns, the Imam attempted to assimilate into the rural Queensland setting by constructing a mosque with a ‘Queenslander’ design. ‘Queenslander’ is a term used to describe the architectural designs of houses in Queensland which have large balconies. The process of localising and ‘ruralising’ the appearance of the mosque attempted to, as the Imam said, ‘...appease everybody, to tell them we were local people and wanted to comply and conform to the local streetscape. You know one of the complaints was that it would look out of place because it wasn’t a Queenslander and we made it look like a Queenslander, and I think we have achieved that very well’ (Davis 2010).

Elsewhere too, ‘rurality’ has worked in favour of the applicants with respect to development applications for Islamic institutions. In the 1980 case over the proposed mosque in Mackay (Northern Queensland), ‘rural’ and ‘residential’ character determinations played a role in the debate. Here, the Council initially declared that the area was ‘residential’ and the mosque could not be approved, yet the Society was allowed to build two big minarets at the front of the building. Then the Council declared that the area was ‘rural’ rather than ‘residential’ and allowed the Javanese Society (the applicants) to build their Mosque (Kabir 2005:193). This strikingly contrasts with the case in Camden where Camden Council used ‘rural zoning’ against the applicants. Evidently, there is great inconsistency in the various representations of place that people use against Muslims.

The tidy town and demographic growth

A sign on the edge of Camden reads ‘A Tidy Town’. This sign is the town’s other slogan (as discussed in the previous chapter, ‘Birthplace of the nation’s wealth’ is the town’s main
slogan). One local teenager cited this sign in an interview on *Triple J TV*, arguing that locals oppose the school for this reason – to keep the town ‘quiet’ (*Hack TV* 2008). A journalist of the *New York Times*, Tim Johnston, picked up this idea of Camden as a ‘tidy town’ in his description of the area and the school controversy:

...the first *rural* town outside of the city’s *gritty* outer suburbs. This is where the Australian wool trade started to take off in the 19th century, and local residents – overwhelmingly *white* and middle-class – are proud of its heritage. Signs on the outskirts promote Camden as ‘A Tidy Town.’ It is the sort of traditional, solid place that speaks to *Australia’s lingering self-image* as a nation descended from agrarian pioneers (emphasis added) (Johnston 2008).

Interestingly, Johnston contrasts the white, middle-class, rural ‘tidy town’ with the culturally diverse ‘gritty’ Sydney outer suburbs. Johnston’s view of the controversy explicitly refers to ‘race’ and exemplifies how it crosses into the ways people mark out certain places. Johnston associates Camden’s rural ‘tidiness’ with ‘Australianness’, an Anglo-centric view of white Australian country life, one of the popular images of Australia alongside beach and surfing iconography. As the first rural town outside of ‘gritty’ Sydney, Camden appears separate from, yet a part of, Sydney. The town is separated both socially and culturally from the city, yet is geographically linked to the fringe of the greater Sydney area. The ideas of ‘matter out of place’ as discussed by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) are relevant in making sense of these ‘gritty’ suburbs. Douglas argues that there are several concepts in contemporary cultures regarding what is ‘impure’ and ‘pure’. Douglas argues that dirt is considered ‘matter out of place’, concepts which are ambiguous or unclassified, or concepts and ideas which counter the pre-existing order. In the Camden context, the ‘gritty’ suburbs are districts that counteract the ‘tidy town’ of Camden, as the rest of this chapter shows.

There are predictions that Camden will lose its country town status and become very similar to what Johnston above calls Sydney’s ‘gritty’ suburbs. Demographer Bernard Salt describes Camden as ‘a demographic Island’ in comparison to the culturally diverse Sydney area, and envisions that this ‘Island’ is set to change:

Camden sits like a demographic Island, beyond the fray of an advancing city. Its [sic] almost like here was a reprieve, a sanctuary, from the southwest urban sprawl... Here is an island that has been cut off from the metropolitan system, and quite heavily so. But the reality is that you cannot have Camden
Camden’s population is set to grow sixfold. Some locals fear this will mean Camden will lose its current identity as an Anglo-rural town. At the time of the controversy, the Mayor, Chris Patterson, predicted that the population will increase from 55,000 to 300,000 in the next 20-30 years. Patterson stated that Camden has ‘...to accept that and get the best outcome’ (Wilson 2008). According to the Vice-President of the Qur’anic Society, Issam Obeid, this predicted increase is why the Society chose to build an Islamic school in Camden. He explained, ‘Camden can’t stay like a country town for the rest of its life. It’s going to change whether they like it or not’ (Wilson 2008). The NSW government has earmarked the South Western Macarthur region as a potential growth area, and a spokesperson for the NSW Planning Minister cited Camden as the site for this growth to occur:

Over the next 25 years, parts of Camden will change from that of a rural area, but careful planning and sensible infrastructure delivery will ensure this growth is sustainable and result in attractive places to live and work (Wilson 2008).

This population increase will change the area and Camden’s rural ‘tidy town’ image will be difficult to sustain. Locals are aware of the growing culturally diverse cities nearby and some residents are eager to stop their town resembling these areas. Others have accepted that this is the fate of their rural town, but have still expressed their dismay, as one volunteer at the local Camden museum, Lionel Stein, discussing the future changes in Camden observed:

Camden is losing that country air. If we knew 36 years ago what we know now, we probably wouldn’t have moved here (Wilson 2008).

With or without the presence of an Islamic school, rapid change is taking place. Farms are disappearing across Camden as areas are earmarked for housing and commercial development. In an interview with the Australian, one local farmer, Edgar Downs, said there were approximately 100 farms, and now there are fewer than ten. Downs declared that ‘This is the last of a little Oasis’, arguing that the local residents will move away from Camden ‘if the rural character of the region keeps disappearing’ (Wilson 2008). To predict the shapes of these changes, locals look to areas such as Liverpool and Campbelltown, and fear that Camden’s rurality will be compromised by turning into another culturally diverse, urbanised
area such as these. As one local member of a group called the ‘Camden Residents Action Group’, 24 Bev Batros, put it:

> It’s an issue of urban sprawl...How far do we want Sydney to move out into the rural areas? When does it stop?...The forces are building, so we’re retreating to a certain extent (Wilson 2008).

In researching the Camden controversy for the past five years, I have observed that several advertisements for the local ‘Camden show’ appear on shop-fronts, signs and banners in the area towards the end of every summer. The slogan on these advertisements is ‘...still a country show’, which signifies a local sense of beleaguered rurality. Locals are desperately holding onto their representations of Camden as a rural ‘tidy town’ while Camden Council is trying to embrace this change (Stillitano 2010). There is something in this slogan that demonstrates locals are fiercely protecting their rurality, which speaks volumes of local anxieties regarding change in the area. In March 2010 Camden held the 124th Camden show. Events included: ‘Youth and Agricultural’, ‘Young Farmers Challenge’, ‘Junior Rural Ambassador Program’, ‘Paddock to Plate’, ‘The Farm Discovery Trail’ and ‘Sheep Shearing exhibitions’; illustrating the farming and country characteristics, contrasting the future predictions for the area. 25

**The narratives of Camden as a rural haven for Sydney ‘expats’ and ‘white flight’**

Of the 22 interviewees, half lived in the Sydney region before moving to Camden, and all moved to Camden so they could live in a ‘quiet’ atmosphere, except Samuel, who moved for work. These residents can be categorized as ‘Sydney expats’. ‘Expat’, an abbreviation of ‘expatriate’, is a colloquial term for persons and individuals temporarily or permanently living in an area/country other than that of their upbringing or previous residence. Some of these expats argued that they retreated from Sydney due to suburbanisation, commercial growth and/or the infiltration by ‘foreign’ migrants. The representations of ‘rural Camden’ as an escape from the Sydney area were particularly asserted by local residents that formerly

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24 This Camden Residents Action Group is a different group from the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. The former was established long before the latter, and the former was established to protect the ‘unique’ historical character of Camden whereas the latter was established specifically in response to the Islamic school. At the time of the school controversy, Bev Batros of the Camden Residents Action Group wrote a public letter, clarifying that the opinions expressed by the Camden Macarthur Residents Group were not the opinions of her own residents group (Batros 2008:22).

25 As discussed in Chapter Three, some school opponents re-lived history while protesting the school. It is a lived-history that clashes with the imminent changes to the locality.
lived in the Sydney area. The rest of this section discusses the main reasons for ‘expatriation’ in detail and argues that these residents, in positioning themselves as expats, predict the impact of the school by discussing their experiences at previous residences. These residents draw on their experiences to predict ‘what will happen’ if Camden Council approved the application.

In the Land and Environment Court, Commissioner Brown heard from one such expat, Patricia Manthey, who spoke of her recent migration to Camden from Sydney’s inner city. She predicted that Camden would transform into a polluted area with additional traffic. As an expat, she characterised Camden as a rural ‘escape’ from the polluted and high density city:

I am a new resident in the area. I have lived in Camden Council area for fifteen months. I came here to escape the cityscape, inner city area. Um, I came to this area because it’s a unique area, it has a rural environment, and when I heard that they were going to do more development out here I was very, very disappointed. And so when I had a look at the plans of the school, I came to the opinion that they would bring too much additional traffic into the area, too much pollution (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – Qur’anic Society v Camden Council (2009) NSWLEC 1171)

Other expats who protested against the application foresaw changes caused by the school based on references to their pasts in Bankstown, Fairfield and other Sydney cities. The school encouraged them to think about their reasons for moving to Camden, and how they felt about the school violating Camden’s quiet atmosphere:

I have lived in the area for ten years, it’s a quiet country town... I used to live in the city, in the North Shore, and there’s more traffic in the North Shore than there was this way... It [the school] would’ve impeded on my lifestyle, which I moved here to get away from, and now they would’ve brought it here. I came here for a quieter life, not a chaotic life, where I would be sitting in traffic all day to get to work (Amelia, interview, 7 June 2009)

Other residents who moved for the ‘rural lifestyle’ of Camden also characterised their escape from the increasing urbanisation of their previous home suburbs:

Eliza: ... I came from Padstow [near Bankstown], and we were there until my daughter was three, I grew up there, and married there and we moved here. But a lot of my friends worked in the area and a lot moved here so we decided to as well.
[Researcher]: Was it to escape the area [Padstow] to the country?

Eliza: No, my husband likes the rural area, he’s a country boy! So we thought about the mountains but that’s too far so we thought Camden was a good compromise, and the M5 came in so it made it an even better idea so the city wouldn’t be so far ....We left Padstow for that reason, it was changing, becoming more like the city (Eliza, interview, 17 July 2009).

Some of these expats who left Sydney cities to escape culturally diverse, Asian, Arab or Muslim populations would express their fears that Camden is set to change from an Australian rural haven into an overpopulated foreign city. These people would engage in ‘white flight’, a process whereby white communities in Sydney would leave areas that became increasingly culturally diverse, particularly with the introduction of multiculturalism in the 70s. Their escape from these areas flavoured the way they predicted the impact of the school:

Don’t get me wrong, I have travelled all over the world and I have stayed in Turkey and I loved it, I just was in the North Shore once and I was served by a lady who could barely speak English, I want to get away from that (Estelle, interview, 12 August 2009).

With immigrants, Australia needs to be careful when bringing them in. I mean look at Sydney, the city, there were so many Chinese in one place, they called it Chinatown! I am not a racist, the thing I don’t like about Muslims is that they left Lebanon for a better life, and they came here and they overpopulate, they cause problems, and I mean they go on about Allah this, Allah that. We don’t wanna hear any of it. They stick together, they overpopulate with each other, and I think if they are not going to appreciate Australia they should go back home to Lebanon where they can be as Muslim as they like. In Mount Druitt, in Blacktown, they overpopulate, they are coming in... (Samantha, interview, 30 July 2009)

Both interviewees characterised local Camden as ‘white/Australian’ and contrast the local demographic to that in other parts of Sydney where Muslims (who are incidentally interchangeable with ‘Lebanese’ in the above citation) overpopulate (this idea is discussed towards the end of this chapter). Opponents predict that foreign minorities would take over Camden, and impose a distinct and oppressive lifestyle that is incompatible with rural white Australia. It is obvious that constructions of parts of multicultural Sydney are significant to the ways these expats represent Camden as a haven of white nationalism.
Some Sydney expats (such as Samantha and Estelle discussed above) would describe their ‘escape’ from the city in xenophobic terms. They argued they were escaping the supposed ‘Muslim’ areas of the city:

I had friends in Bankstown, Minto, Granville. They all said the same statements at why they decided to leave [sic]. These areas had become [sic] dangerous to shop at night, to walk at night, even to sit on your own front porch [sic] sipping a cup of tea, or reading the paper at night these activities just don’t happen anymore (Letters to Camden Council, received 8/11/2007).

The term ‘white flight’ applies here, as it describes large-scale migration of peoples of various European backgrounds from culturally diverse urban regions. The destination of the ‘flight’ is usually to a racially homogenous area, suburban or rural, and usually driven by fear of crime and violence. A recent study conducted by the University of Western Sydney investigated ‘white flight’ in relation to schools in NSW, and found that white students are ‘fleeing’ public schools, leaving behind Aboriginal, Middle Eastern and Asian students (Patty 2008). Former federal opposition Labor leader, Mark Latham, also wrote in support of the school and characterised Camden as a ‘white enclave’ filled with expats from the Sydney area:

While an area like Parramatta, close to the demographic centre of the city, increased its proportion of overseas-born men from 43 per cent to 55 per cent, the fringe suburbs have moved in the opposite direction. Some of the estates are white enclaves. Visit their shopping centres and playing fields and you will not find an Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern or African face. While governments talk about the virtues of multiculturalism, the residents of these areas associate it with ethnic gangs and trouble in their old neighbourhood. One of the challenges of globalisation is to cross social and cultural boundaries. Yet the evidence shows that Sydney’s suburbs, in Australia’s so-called global city, are becoming less cosmopolitan and more segregated. Indeed, the liveliest tabloid controversy in recent times has been the struggle to establish an Islamic school at Camden, in Sydney’s south-west. The opposition to the proposal has been frightening. The school site has been defaced with pigs heads mounted on poles. Small children have appeared on TV declaring their hatred of Muslims (Latham 2008:16)

‘Race’ is central to Latham’s observations of the lack of Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern or African ‘faces’ in public areas. Further, it is central to the ways he identifies the local desires of some opponents within the Camden community, crusading to keep the area ‘white’. However, for opponents, Camden’s rural and white identity is central to their reasons for ‘flight’. For these critics, the school would change Camden’s rural and ethnic demographic. It
seems as though the loss of whiteness concurrently brings with it the loss of rurality in these constructions. To support such arguments, these critics referred to other local government areas in Sydney’s West and South-West, and claim that these areas have Muslim majorities and as such operate as ‘no-go-zones’ for white Australians.

While there is truth in arguing that most Muslims live on the middle and outer regions of Australian cities, most are also Australian born (Dunn et al. 2007:565) and there is no suburb in Australia with a Muslim majority, despite the stereotypical views of suburbs such as Punchbowl and Bankstown. Most Muslims reside in Sydney and Melbourne, and their migration patterns parallel the dominant patterns of Mediterranean migration and settlement in Australia: most recent migrants settle in these two cities, and Muslim immigrants are no different in their settlement patterns (Humphrey 1990:213). There is nothing unique about the settlement patterns of Muslims in contemporary Australia in comparison to other social groups, yet in light of the Camden controversy, some residents single out Muslims and Arabs as a significant problem in suburbs of Sydney’s West.26 Locals often contrasted their perceptions of Sydney ‘Muslim’ suburbs with their imaginations of Camden as a quiet, rural town, free from (extreme) racial or cultural diversity as well as being free from urban over-development.

Commentators of the controversy often referred to Camden as a ‘white area’ in their descriptions of the anxieties against the school. Australian journalist Sally Neighbour stated that the rural Camden township ‘...is like a microcosm of Australia before multiculturalism changed its face’ (Neighbour 2009:13). Other journalists from mainstream Sydney newspapers, the BBC and the New York Times often described Camden as a middle class white area. For some interviewees (not all), ‘race’ was explicit in the ways they described Camden as a ‘white area’, an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ area, or ‘Australian’. Some of these participants

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26 There are areas in Sydney and Melbourne which have concentrated Muslim communities from a variety of backgrounds, these include: Albanian, Bangladeshi, Bosnian, Indian, Indonesian, Iranian, Lebanese, Pakistani, South African, Sri Lankan, Syrian, and Turkish to name a few. They originate from over 70 different countries, speaking a variety of African, Asian and European languages. Approximately 50% of Australian Muslims are under 24 years of age and most Australian Muslims live in Sydney and Melbourne. In the Sydney area, most Muslims live in Western suburbs such as Auburn, Bankstown, Greenacre, Lakemba, and Punchbowl. In Melbourne, most Muslims reside in Coburg, Dallas, Meadow Heights, Noble Park, and Reservoir (Dunn 2004:343-344, Saeed 2003:1-2). Similar to other Australians, Muslims have migrated to Australia under a variety of categories. Some have arrived through family migration, assisted passage, others on skilled immigration programs, and others as refugees. Dunn et al argue that these different entry methods are rarely accounted for (Dunn et al 2007:565).
desired Camden to stay that way and saw their protest as a struggle to keep Camden both rural and white:

It’s a country community, and everybody knows everything, about everybody else, and everybody is happy. It’s a nice small country town. It’s different from other places, not to be racist, but there’s a lot of white Anglo people out here, it’s not racist, it’s not racist, just an easy way to describe it, not a big amount of multicultural people like other areas in the city, like Campbelltown, it’s not as big as those areas. Not as multicultural. They haven’t migrated out to this way yet. There’s a lot of farmers out here, or farming families out here for generations... Crime isn’t big here, it’s peaceful, when it’s school holidays, yeah, but apart from that not really (Matilda, interview, 14 October 2009).

Look, it’s a very Australian area... I know Sydney places have all the foreigners, but Camden is very different (Melanie, interview, 3 June 2009).

Camden is a nice, peaceful town, but its changing. It’s different from the other places because there are a lot more Australians around here... I don’t know much about the crime, it’s only different because there are lots of Australians, unlike Cabramatta and Auburn (Sally, interview, 3 July 2009).

While all of these residents are against the school and describe Camden as ‘white’/‘Anglo’ or ‘Australian’ similarly, they cannot be placed in the same basket. Matilda supports an Islamic school in Camden but is against having the school at that particular site. She imagines Camden as a small populated ‘white Anglo’ area. Matilda acknowledges the local cultural and ethnic makeup and does not mind future demographic changes in the area. Yet Melanie, in contrast, constructs ‘Australian’ Camden in a racialised sense, using the term ‘Australian’ as though it meant ‘mainstream’ or ‘white’, which influences her anxieties about demographic changes that she later expressed in the interview. Similarly, Sally describes ‘Australian’ Camden as ‘white’ in opposition to places containing ‘less whites’, referring to culturally diverse places such as Cabramatta and Auburn. Both Melanie and Sally’s descriptions of ‘Australian’ Camden exemplify the ways some locals define their community in accordance with Hage’s (1998) ideas of the ‘white nation’ fantasy, as he writes:

I argue that both White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White ‘ethnics’ are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will. This White belief in one’s mastery over the nation, whether in the form of a White multiculturalism or in the form of a White racism, is what I have called the ‘White nation’ fantasy. It is a fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy (Hage 1998:18).
Their positions illustrate the localisation of whiteness inside Camden and how Anglo/white is a synonym for ‘Australian’. While observers of the controversy might think that the description of Camden as ‘Australian’ is a national signifier, it in fact takes a narrower form that is based on ideas of whiteness. The everyday vernacular of the term ‘Aussies’ is largely a descriptor of ‘whites’, an implicit reference to nationalists involved in what Hage terms a modern day desire of ‘white supremacy’.

**Ghetto dystopian imaginary of Camden’s outer urban future**

Scholars have charted the ways particular social communities become characterised as ‘ghettos’, where high density, poverty, crime and ethnicity are the most common factors that people use to mark out a supposed ‘ghetto’ (See Butler 1977; Fisher 1976; McMahon 2004; Park 1928; Wirth 1928). In the Camden context, the ghetto dystopian imaginary takes shapes that are particular to the Sydney area and result from the establishment of an Islamic school. Opponents forecasted that Camden would transform into a non-rural, non-white, urban, crime-infested city that replicates existing Sydney suburbs with culturally diverse populations. Rarely did any opponent use the term ‘ghetto’, however, the fears concerning ethnic enclaves in parts of Sydney’s West reflected anxieties similar to those expressed by academics Bob Birrell (1993) and Geoffrey Blainey (1993) in the early 90s. Burnley *et al.* (1997:36-7) demonstrate that Birrell and Blainey’s critiques were primarily directed towards Asian migration to cities at the time (also see Dreher 2007). In Camden, similar views target Sydney areas with concentrated Arab and Muslim populations. The assessments of the school turned into assessments of whether Camden should (or even could) ‘turn’ into an ethnic ghetto. As one interviewee specifically put it:

... we don’t want Camden to be Muslim, we don’t want it to be a little Bankstown or little Liverpool...

*(Jackie, interview, 31 July 2009)*.

Evidently, this opponent thinks about areas on Sydney’s fringe in predicting the changes that accompany an Islamic school in Camden. ‘Race’ influences their perceptions of Bankstown and Liverpool, and their predictions of Camden’s future as an un-Australian ‘Muslim’ ghetto. In letters to Council, local newspapers and some interviews, opponents wrote and spoke of
‘another Bankstown, ‘mini-Bankstown’ and/or ‘little Lakemba’. These constructions reflect the ways some locals symbolise the impact of an Islamic school in Camden, with one letter to Council epitomising these fears: ‘...[If the school is approved] Camden will quickly become a ‘little Lakemba’’ (Letter to Camden Council, received 6/11/2007). The representations of these areas (such as Bankstown, Lakemba and Punchbowl) as no-go zones for white Australians were so fierce that some opponents even dared local politicians to visit these places. As Geoff Corrigan was one of the very few political actors to support the school, a resident suggested:

If Geoff Corrigan thinks that having a Muslim School in Camden is not going to change the landscape of Camden, I think he should go and spend some time in suburbs such as Lakemba, Capris [sic], Parramatta, Belmore and Punchbowl to see if he would be happy raising his children and grandchildren in that environment (emphasis added).

Another encouraged the Councillors to visit these areas:

Would Council really like to see our great area turned into a Punchbowl-Bankstown type area? What’s next: changing CAMDEN to CAMBOWL? I urge council members to take a walk (not drive) through suburban Punchbowl before making any decisions regarding this awful proposal (emphasis added) (Letters to Camden Council, both received 30/10/2007).

These opponents do not elaborate on why Geoff Corrigan might not be happy raising his children or grandchildren in Bankstown or Lakemba, or why a walk through these suburbs would spur the Camden Councillors into rejecting the school. These suburbs are stigmatised to the point where the stereotypes of ethnic ghettos ‘speak for themselves’ – in other words, they are powerful images that signify wretched social decay. The stigmas of Sydney’s West are a set of images that are appropriated by opponents in predicting the shape of this ghetto dystopia.

The predictions of ‘white minority’ status

The ghetto dystopian imaginary included the predictions of White Camdenites becoming a minority in Camden, where ‘more Muslims’ would eventuate in Camden officially becoming

27 Usually, opponents characterised these places as the antithesis of the imaginings of Camden (discussed in the previous section).
28 To the best of my knowledge, there is no suburb in Sydney of this name.
‘Muslim’ territory. These future projections were frightening for locals, not only because they felt that an increase in Muslims could compromise Camden’s rurality, but also because some opponents forecast an imminent process of invasive change in the area. ‘More Muslims’ means ‘less Australians’, which in turn means less ‘Australian’ ownership and power in Camden. This was the view of local resident, Andrew Wannet, the media spokesperson for the Camden/Macarthur Residents Group. In a letter to the *Camden Advertiser*, Wannet warned:

The proposed Islamic school would inevitably lead to an increased local Muslim population with the inevitable requirement for a mosque in Camden as well. *Migrant/non-Australian* groups like to live near their educational and religious institutions. I believe in the recent census that no persons of the Muslim faith declared themselves to be living in the Camden township itself. If we look at the above scenario then in say 10 to 20 years there may indeed be a large (possibly a majority) of Muslims in Camden township itself. Only a town with no self-esteem or pride in its cultural and community past would not greatly resist a “*Muslim takeover*” (emphasis added) (Wannet 2007:8).

The ‘race’ of certain Others, homogenised as ‘migrants’, ‘Muslims’ and ‘non-Australians’ influences the ways Wannet responds to the school. In this view, the spatial concentration of Muslims results in ‘less Australians’ leading to Wannet’s ‘10 to 20’ year forecast, in which he warns of a ‘Muslim takeover’. The discursive constructions of ‘Australians’ vs. ‘non-Australians’ has a racial undertone which is significant to the protest against the school.

I interviewed Paul who said the school issue encouraged him to think about Muslims and whether he could become part of an ethnic ‘Anglo’ minority in Camden if the school ‘went ahead’. Paul spoke of how he went to the doctor in Bankstown and felt ‘excluded’ when he walked around the ‘Bankstown Square’ shopping centre:

> It’s just a different vibe, yeah, and I guess that’s how foreigners feel with the general Anglo-Saxons, like not a member of that community. So I guess the tables are turning a bit. Yeah, it’s like we are once the majority, not the minority, yeah like you get afraid of things becoming that way (Paul, *interview*, 5 August 2009).

Even though Anglicans and Catholics form the two largest religious groups in both Bankstown and Camden, and Paul himself identifies as an Anglican, he felt out of place in Bankstown. What is of significance here is Paul’s fear that Camden could come to resemble Sydney’s West. Thomas shared this view that the school would transform Camden into
‘another Bankstown’ (yet Thomas described the spatial concentration as those of ‘Lebs’ [Lebanese] instead of Muslims):

It is a concern [that Camden will turn into ‘Bankstown’], actually I am not saying it will, it might happen, it might not happen. So, I prefer if it didn’t happen, I mean why run that risk, I prefer to live out this way, I grew up out here as well, so, I would prefer to get away from all the Lebs [Lebanese] (Thomas, interview, 1 October 2009).

Thomas struggled to negotiate a position on the changes that might take place if the Council approved the school. He drew on his lived experiences of Camden as a place where he ‘grew up’, and he positions these experiences in opposition to the ‘Lebs’ in Sydney’s West. He used the school and these areas to predict the demographic changes that might occur.

The loss of public safety in the ghetto

Letters to Council and the local newspaper below highlight how ‘Bankstown’ and ‘Lakemba’ (and other ‘Arab ghetto’ suburbs) are seen as synonymous with ‘crime infested areas’ and Camden is seen as potentially transforming into one of these areas:

We dont [sic] want our beautiful Camden to become another “bloody Bankstown”, in the news for all the wrong reasons, we dont [sic] want to feel unsafe, or intimidated, yet this will happen when they all move here (Letters to Camden Council, received 31/10/2007).

Those who are not prepared to acknowledge the fear and harassment people live with, in suburbs such as Auburn, Lakemba, Bankstown and as close as Liverpool need to move to these areas and embrace the alternative culture displayed there (Channell 2008:8).

...I have lived in Camden my whole life and I feel safe there. If we bring those type of people into our town it will end up just like punchbowl [sic], bankstown [sic] (Letters to Camden Council, received 19/12/2008).

These letters referred to a variety of suburbs in Sydney’s West, predicting the loss of public safety in Camden. Such depictions of these ‘Muslim areas’ highlight how ethnicity is central to these ghetto fears (Poynting 2000). Ideas of ‘race’ influence the ways these opponents characterised the ‘ghettoes’ of Sydney’s West as ethnic ‘crime infested zones’. It is here that
‘race’ insidiously influences the positions against the school, as these opponents draw on particular stigmatisations of certain suburbs.

From the beginning of the Camden controversy, predictions of a crime wave were alive in the minds of residents who would forecast the impact of the school. The layers of the criminal dystopian ghetto of Camden’s future were grounded within Camden’s identity as a haven for ‘white flight’. One of the first radio reports on the school controversy was a scene where protesters at the first rally cheered a speaker when she cried:

PROTESTER 2: I have seen what has happened at Bankstown! (cheering). Bankstown used to be a really nice town! People are terrified and in this audience alone, I know of approximately about 120 that used to live over there, and they've moved to this area, to a country area (Edwards 2007).

‘People are terrified’ because they equate places like Bankstown with ethnic concentrations and characterise them as crime infested zones. The narratives of ‘expats’ who escaped the Arab ghetto of Bankstown serves to create a powerful narrative that this opponent uses against the school. These symbolic appropriations of places in Sydney’s West function in ways that enable opponents to predict changes in the area including the loss of public safety.29

The overpopulated ghetto

‘White flighters’ played a significant role in the narratives predicting that the rural nature in Camden would be compromised and the area would transform into an overpopulated culturally diverse crime-infested zone. Several opposing letters to Camden Council featured a copied paragraph:

29 In some cases, opponents discussed the Lakemba drive-by shooting of 1998 or alluded to other moral panics. As the next chapter outlines, some opponents reprised certain moral panics in expressing their fears against the school. As a result, Bankstown itself and the surrounding areas developed a bad reputation in the eyes of the media and mainstream public (see de Freitas 2000). Even throughout this decade, the negative stereotypes of Bankstown have persisted. Even in recent moral panics such as the Cronulla riot (Poynting 2007), Bankstown became the subject of discussion, where NSW parliamentarian (and, at the time, independent) David Oldfield (former adviser to Pauline Hanson) suggested that barricades be placed around Bankstown with checkpoints (Manly Daily 2005). Criminalisation is a significant part of the imaginings of places with concentrated Arab/Muslim families.
Many of the “old & young folk” have come to Camden to settle and call it their home because of the colonial heritage here. Indications of what can happen to our beautiful, Historic [sic] town can be seen by visiting Bankstown, Lakemba, Greenacre, Chullora, Punchbowl, Auburn, Liverpool, Blacktown & Parramatta. All of these towns are heavily populated with Islamic schools. The whole environment of these towns has changed in the past 30 years. The “old” local residents have been forced out of these areas because of crime, intimidation and a general threat to their way of life. We have no need for a school of segregation here and we do not want one (Letters to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007)

The ways ‘race’ shapes these residents’ predictions of overcrowding are obvious in their descriptions of ‘old local residents’, a reference to white flighters. The colonial heritage and local history (discussed in the previous chapter) offer a haven of Australiana for these people escaping the high density of their previous homes. Unusually, these residents also asserted that these towns are ‘heavily populated’ with Islamic schools, yet each listed suburb has only one Islamic school (with the exception of Blacktown and Chullora which do not have any). The number of Islamic schools in Sydney was exaggerated, yet these critics were able to fabricate the impact of Islamic schools in their self-appointed authority of knowing Camden’s fate with an Islamic school.

The aforementioned resident described an ‘invasion’ that displaced white communities and introduced crime and the social disorganisation attributed to urban landscapes. Suburbs perceived as criminal ‘hot spots’, with high concentrations of immigrants, are upheld as examples of social disintegration and hence justification for rejecting any potential for increased cultural diversity in Camden. For such critics, Sydney’s West is everything that Camden presently is not. Sydney’s West is suburban, culturally diverse, overcrowded or ‘Muslim’, and Camden is rural, largely ‘white’, uncongested with a small number of ‘Australians. At an anti-school rally, a protester wearing an Akubra hat with a sticker reading ‘No to Islamic Immigration’ had the following conversation with a tabloid current affairs reporter. He expressed his opposition to the school by referring to ‘Sydney’ in a way that characterised it as a place with ‘enough’ Muslims:

Resident: Keep the [Islamic] school out and keep them [Muslims] out
Reporter: How come?
Resident: We don’t need them here. There’s already enough in Sydney. We don’t want them out here (Stefanovic 2007)

Similarly, another opponent wrote to the Council:
Opponents referred to the Sydney area for a reason – they saw Sydney’s highly populated, culturally diverse west as ‘Camden’s future with an Islamic school’. For these critics, the Sydney area is a place that Muslims have invaded. Both these opponents (above mentioned) imagined a border between Sydney’s West and Camden, and placed Muslims outside their imagined geographies of Camden. They saw the school as a stepping stone that would cause extreme demographic changes which would result in the breakdown of this imagined border - Camden would become an area with high numbers of Muslims, and the local existing Anglo demographic would diminish as a result.

The concerns over demographic changes among critics of the school parallel other controversies over proposed mosques and Islamic schools. In a recent controversy over the proposed mosque in Newcastle, opponents cited concerns over the growing numbers of Muslims in the area, for instance one opponent said: ‘We don’t want to end up like Lakemba where there are thousands of people going to worship, shutting down the whole suburb’ (Davidson 2010). The same concerns over ‘too many people’ in Lakemba came up in the 1983 Bass Hill controversy. When Bankstown Council rejected the application for a mosque, the United Arab Muslim Association (the applicants) appealed this decision. In Court, the Council’s Town Planner used ‘Lakemba’ as evidence. The Town Planner argued that the Lakemba Mosque had a negative impact on the local traffic and crowds of Muslims who would ‘flood’ the streets on particular Eid days (Kabir 2005:179). Evidently, anxieties over extreme over-population are part of controversies over Islamic development applications.

**Signage/economic takeover of the area**

The aesthetic, symbolic colonisation of the Camden space is central to these widespread anxieties regarding invasion, crime increases, loss of rural character, overpopulation and the transformation into ‘another Sydney suburb’. In predicting the shape of this potential ghetto in the making, some opponents discussed Arabic signage in these areas as though it symbolically portrays a ‘Muslim takeover’. Here, Arabic is understood as the language of all Muslims even though the native languages of the majority of Muslims around the world are
not Arabic. In a letter to the *Camden Advertiser*, ‘Austin’ expressed fears of Muslims setting up ‘Muslim’ buildings, transforming Camden into ‘another Bankstown’ or a ‘Middle Eastern’ area. Austin went into detail describing the nature of these buildings:

> They will set up their own businesses such as takeaway cafes, restaurants, fruit shops, hair-dressers, bakeries, butchers. Argyle Street, Camden will be lost to us, as are the following locations of the metropolitan area: Haldon Street, Lakemba, Beamish Street, Campsie, Rawson Road, Auburn, Chesterhill [sic] road, Chester Hill, Punchbowl Road, Punchbowl and Chapel Road, Bankstown. A walk down any of the above locations is an uncomfortable experience unless you are of Middle Eastern extraction. The language isn’t English. The shop signage is in Arabic. Watch out Picton, Goulburn, Narellan [sic], Mount Annan, Campbelltown and any other town Muslims set their minds on (Austin 2008:27).

What Austin predicted was the shapes of this future Muslim ghetto, by drawing on what they feel are existing ‘ghettoes’ of Sydney’s West. Citing these main streets of so-called ‘Middle Eastern areas’, Austin symbolised Muslim invasion in spatial, economical and racial terms. Also, Austin portrayed ‘Arabic’ signage as a symbol of a Muslim takeover, even though it is an inaccurate description of these suburbs. In arguing the area would be ‘lost to us’, certain ideas of ‘race’ are explicit, for Austin, ‘us’ implies Anglo-Australians, as opposed to the Muslim ‘them’ who have conquered Sydney’s West, transforming it into ethnic ‘ghettoes’.

**The ‘mosque’ as the ultimate form of cultural colonisation**

The ultimate signifier of this ghetto dystopian imaginary of Camden’s future was a mosque, which was seen as the vital catalyst changing Camden’s rural, small white haven to a high density, un-Australian ghetto. Locals predicted that a proposed mosque would follow after an established Islamic school, though there were no official plans to establish one. Rumours of a proposed mosque in Camden were widespread and convincing among protesters at the time of the controversy, that even former One Nation politician, Pauline Hanson, walked the streets of Camden to help locals protesting a ‘mosque’, learning only later that it was an Islamic school (Kinsella 2007b:9). The idea of ‘a mosque’ in Camden frightened some residents, even though there were no plans by the Qur’anic Society to establish one. Opponents portrayed mosques as places attracting an Islamic invasion of the existing Camdenite rural ‘way of life’. One protester at a rally said to the media:
Why would you want to come and open a school in this area, then an all purpose hall, which will be used as a mosque, and don't tell me it won't be, and if it's not us it'll be someone else after us (Krugar 2007).

This opponent is obviously suspicious of the school plans. Here, the ‘mosque’ and school symbolise an invasion process. Letters to council similarly symbolised mosques in this way:

It is scary to think of what will become of Camden. You only have to go [to] Bankstown, Lakemba to see how it all turns out. It starts at a school, than a Mosque, Camden will never ever be the same (Letter to Camden Council, received 12/11/2007).

The establishment of a mosque is seen as the initiation of the other fears concerning the migration of ‘foreigners’, and the arrival of the ‘ghetto’ and a dominating community.

Locals predicted that a proposed mosque would have drastic consequences in their area, often depicting the mosque as a large building. The picture for one of the facebook.com groups protesting the school even featured an extremely large mosque with a large minaret, and the ‘group starter’ drew a large red circle on the picture and put a line through it. The aesthetics of the pictured mosque alone (see Figure 5) (undoubtedly from another country) would have frightened some locals. Interestingly, a pictured large mosque epitomised the representations of a ‘large development application’, or a ‘large’ takeover. The magnitude of the proposal is exaggerated, particularly by the rumours that circulated:

Gone would be the Camden we all know and love. I overheard two women of the Muslim faith talking in Camden saying how wonderful that this could be the Birth [sic] place of Muslim culture as it has been for the Australian White man. I have also heard a rumour, and as I see if rumours usually have a certain amount of truth in them albeit they can be exaggerated. That the old High school is to be a Muslim University and that the farm across [sic] from the proposed school on Burragoarong [sic] road is to be a Mosque (Letter to Camden Council, received 8/11/2007).

Cohen argues that rumours are important in that ‘they serve to validate a particular course of action’ in the emergence of a moral panic. Further, such rumours are ‘paralleled in the
genesis of other types of violent outbreaks such as race riots’. The rumour mill regarding the school had a particular agenda, and such speculations became ‘facts’ that ultimately ‘sanction[ed] what the crowd wanted to do anyway’ (Cohen 2002:130). Rumours of the proposed mosque and other Islamic buildings, all of which symbolise the antithesis of Camden, were utilised as validations for the hostile positions against the school.

**Conclusion**

This chapter illustrated how ‘race’ featured in predictions about Camden’s future with respect to the addition of an Islamic school in the area. Protesters frequently argued that such an addition would result in an invasive and horrible change to Camden. Effectively, Camden would be displaced both in terms of rurality and whiteness. The Camden controversy also reveals how ‘race’ influences the ways people construct both local and non-local places with agendas, and in the case of the school saga, this is largely undertaken in order to reject the school. The various imaginings of place need to be seen in relation to one another. With encroaching culturally diverse cities nearby, the town is set to change from ‘country’ to ‘outer suburban’, and significantly is set to lose its white racial identity in this process. In some cases, the constructions of local places, and the anxieties over changes to these places, are entangled to the point where they are difficult to separate.

It is evident that the racialisation of place surfaced throughout the controversy, as did the racialisation of ‘crime’ in relation to ‘place’. The references to ‘Muslim areas’ in Sydney’s West, such as Bankstown and Lakemba, highlight that discourses about the school link with broader discussions about social fears. These fears are not specifically about Bankstown and Lakemba, but rather about the people in these places. Further, the confusions between the local and the national created a false dichotomy of ‘Aussies’ vs. ‘Muslims’, containing several racial undertones that are explored in Chapter Five. The fears of spatial concentration, crime, and Arabic signage need to be set in the context of the moral panics concerning the Arab Other (Poynting et al. 2004). The next chapter analyses these constructions of deviance attached to Muslims.
Chapter Five

Camden’s Arab folk devil

In winter 2008, an Australian comedy talk show called ‘Salam Cafe’ ran on SBS television for ten weeks. The panellists were well-known Muslim Australians, ranging from academics to comedians, a medical doctor, refugee activists and even a rap artist. As the program aired during the Camden controversy, one of the comedians, Nazeem Hussain, played a character he created named ‘Unkle Sam’, who decided to campaign (unofficially) for election as mayor of Camden. Through this character, Hussain attempted to mock anti-Muslim hysteria as expressed by local residents. Hussain depicted Unkle Sam by dressing up with a Muslim prayer hat and gown, a thick black beard and a Palestinian scarf, and he put on a thick Sri Lankan accent (Hussain is of Sri Lankan heritage) and adopted the appearance of an elderly man. Evidently, Unkle Sam was a hybrid of the many ways some Australians see Muslims. He stated on the program:

> It is Day One of the race for Camden and I’m going to Camden to meet the people, to ‘press-the-flesh’, the halal flesh, to see what makes them tick in a non-explosive type of way. We are here in Camden, which will soon become ‘Islamden’... If people are worried about one Islamic school, I will build ten Islamic schools, I will build ten mosques, ten halal butchers. Why not? [Camden will be] the first Islamic state in Australia! Knock down all the pubs and make playgrounds instead! (Salam Cafe 2008)

As he walked Camden’s Argyle Street wearing socks with his sandals, some locals saw the humour in his comedic election campaign, others seemed horrified at the possibility of Unkle Sam becoming Camden’s mayor. The point of beginning this chapter with a description of Hussain’s character lies in the fact that Unkle Sam epitomises some of the many figures that this chapter terms ‘the Arab folk devil’. Hussain’s character was a deviant, oppressive, cunning and invasive buffoon. Unkle Sam planned to invade Camden, impose a culturally alien lifestyle, while overthrowing the current way of life to achieve a pub-less ‘Islamden’ overrun by mosques, Islamic schools and halal butchers.

The previous chapters articulated how ‘race’ underlies the ways opponents’ construct ideas of Camden’s past, present and future. This chapter examines these representations of Muslims and Arabs in greater detail through the concept of the folk devil, which comes out of my
engagement with the empirical data. The Arab folk devil is one that is crucial to the hostile reactions against the school; it is not an unchanging construct but rather a cumulative one, continuously created and recreated in light of past and emerging events that find resonance in the Camden context and the racial constructions of Muslims and Arabs as Other. The Arab folk devil takes on a particularly racialised character that is specific to Camden but draws on pre-existing constructions which together fuel antagonistic reactions towards the school.

This chapter uses the term ‘Arab folk devil’ to refer to the various criminalised representations that some opponents attribute to people who identify (or are identified, sometimes mistakenly) as Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern. This mythical construct is one that mobilises an evolving set of representations that are constantly in flux – negotiated, renegotiated and contested in different contexts, yet with a foundation that seems stable across a number of different boundaries. According to moral panic theorists, folk devils usually occupy outsider or out-group positions in society. As such, folk devils are, by definition, ‘visible reminders of what we should not be’ (Cohen 2002:2), and ‘the personification of evil [...] stripped of all favourable characteristics and imparted with exclusively negative ones’ (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994:28). In the Australian context, Poynting et al. (2004) argue that the Arab Other is the pre-eminent folk devil of our time. This chapter examines the many permutations of this folk devil, both within the Camden context and the recent, broader Australian context. In keeping with one of the overarching arguments in this dissertation it is crucial to highlight that the reactions in Camden are part of a broader cultural context while simultaneously assuming a local character. The concept of the Arab folk devil is one of the many ways in which the broader resonance of Camden is illustrated.

Several Australian and international moral panics30 centred on the maligned figure of the Arab Other have cumulatively contributed to the nature of the folk devil in Camden (see Al-Natour 2010a, 2010b; Al-Natour & Morgan 2012). Invoking these many deviant characteristics, some opponents see their struggle against the school in a way that mirrors the clash of civilisations thesis as developed by Huntington (1992) (explored later in this chapter). The cumulative nature of the folk devil means that its evocation is fluid, variable unpredictable: shaped, in a multitude of different examples, by the characteristics attributed

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30 The Introduction featured a discussion on the limitations of moral panic models in relation to the Camden controversy.
to the image of a folk devil by each individual opponent of the school. The many signifiers of the folk devil are also interchangeable and need to be seen in the shadow of the Cronulla riot which occurred only 40 kilometres to the east of Camden in 2005. The specifically racialised shape of Camden’s folk devil is evident in the many antagonistic reactions against the school. It is to these considerations that I shall now turn.

‘We don’t want to be Muslimized’: The racialised character of the folk devil in Camden.

With each succeeding episode of moral panic, controversy or scandal that mobilises broad anti-Muslim stereotypes, the representations that are foundational to the concept of Arab folk devil vary. The folk devil, in its many diverse forms that are examined in the following sections, took a particularly racialised shape in Camden. Opponents treated the school saga as though it was an opportunity to comment on Muslim communities, where various narratives that alluded to the folk devil’s ‘race’ surfaced:

Don’t even start now with a school. The school will lead to other things such as the library. Can we control the content of imported books in their language? Then muslim [sic] shops, food, (they refuse pork) so we will be seeing food under the label: not containing pork, muslim [sic] restaurants, and muslim [sic] clothes etc. Do not contaminate Camden ...care for the next generation, we don’t want mix marriage occur in our great-great grandchildren [sic]. And the most important is: we don’t want to be muslimized [sic], not the future generation of Australia! (Letters to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007)

In this letter to Camden Council, a resident coined the term ‘muslimized’ to describe a process of invasion and ‘contamination’ through miscegenation. Aside from the racist extremism inherent in the fear of miscegenation, the resident also adopted an alarmist tone, portraying the school as a force that would cause dramatic changes in the local area which would have grave implications for Australia’s ‘future’. The author of the letter began by positioning themselves as a local, then a patriot, demarcating clear, racialised categories of Self and Other, belonging and exclusion. Through the term ‘muslimized’, the resident characterised Muslims as a monolithic, homogeneous ethnicity. This is made evident in references to ‘their language’ and the cultural homogeneity assumed in Muslim ‘food’, ‘shops’, ‘restaurants’ and ‘clothes’. The cultural characteristics homogenously attributed to Muslims are seen as undesirable and prevented from tainting Camden and its presupposed racial purity. While this resident imagines a homogenised, ‘muslimized’ language, other
opponents similarly thought about Muslims through simple ideas of invasive peoples. Often, they would imagine a unique and singular ‘Muslim culture’ in a similar way:

I have nothing against the Muslim culture, but Camden cannot logistically tolerate this invasion (Letter to Camden Council, received 16/12/2007).

A resident scrawled this sentence on a general letter that was sent to Camden Council, depicting Muslim ‘culture’ as something invasive, singular and simplified. There is obviously a racialisation of Muslim as the antithesis of Australian, similarly captured in the statements by other residents:

There’s no more Christmas lights in Bankstown anymore. This is an Anglo-European society okay, made up of Christians (Santow 2008).

A critic made this statement to an ABC radio journalist before the Council meeting to reject the school in May 2008. For her, the development application is an opportunity to represent Australian society and complain about what she sees as a Muslim area (though the majority of people in Bankstown are Catholics and Anglicans). This critic specifically has an image of Bankstown as an intolerant, anti-Christian place. This resident positions the school as something that does not fit into what she imagines as a religiously, racially and culturally uniform Australian society (which, arguably, excludes minorities that were either recent migrants or Indigenous peoples who resided here prior to European colonial settlement). Her position shapes the ways the folk devil operates as the antithesis of White Australia, where the signifiers of the ‘un-Australian’ are interchangeable with anti-Christian. Thus, there is a heavy layering of religious, racialised and national concerns that play out in the racialisation of the Arab folk devil in Camden.

**The cumulative nature of Camden’s Arab folk devil**

The racialised components of Camden’s folk devil are inextricably linked to various moral panics and controversies that not only shape the responses against the school but further detail the origins of the signifiers that form the basis of this folk devil. The Arab folk devil is formed by a constantly evolving set of sometimes similar, other times disparate, representations of Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern peoples. A number of previous moral

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31 While it could be easily illustrated that Christmas lights, decorations and other Christian religious items feature in public spaces in what Australians know as ‘Muslim’ suburbs at Christmas time, this dissertation is not interested in countering these myths. Rather, it is interested in identifying how these misperceptions shape positions on the school.
panics and controversies, including those prompted by the 1998 drive-by shooting of the Lakemba Police Station, the Sydney gang rapes of 2000 and 2002, the September 11 2001 attacks in the United States, the Bali bombings of 2002, the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal and the Durack scandal (these last two are both discussed later in this chapter) collectively provide a political and cultural legacy, shaping the representations that opponents use against an Islamic school. This does not mean that the images collated by these examples are simply added together to form, in sum, the mythical figure of the Arab folk devil. The ways in which the Arab folk devil has entered the mainstream consciousness is far more complex and unpredictable.

An early instance of a moral panic that contributed to the cumulative image of the folk devil arose over a drive-by shooting of the Lakemba police station in Sydney’s south west (Collins et al. 2000). At this time, many public figures openly held members of the Lebanese community primarily responsible; even the state Premier Bob Carr commented ‘...investigators have revealed that a Lebanese gang involved in drugs and car theft has been identified in relation to recent disturbances.... You’re dealing here with a gang that is fully employed in criminal behaviour’ (Sydney Morning Herald 1998:1). A decade later in Camden, some opponents treated the development application process as an opportunity to comment on Arabs and Muslims generally, and to express personal observations about them through allusions to unrelated criminal activity such as this 1998 drive-by shooting. Such comments were not uncommon. These residents often raised unrelated incidents that had sparked previous moral panics (Cohen 2002) while communicating broad anti-Muslim stereotypes:

My family & I lived peacefully in the Canterbury-Bankstown district for 15 years until the 1980’s. After large numbers of Middle Eastern Muslims had moved into Campsie- Belmore – Lakemba & surrounding areas major crime escalated to an alarming degree. These Hoons had no respect for women, police or anyone else. I remember an occasion when they sprayed Lakemba police station during a night of drive by shootings in the area. A crime epidemic will erupt if this proposal is approved & there will be grave consequences (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007)

This correspondent claims the ability to speak with authority by drawing on personal experiences (from another time and place) as a local ‘witness’ to crimes committed by ‘Middle Eastern Muslims’. To this critic, the shooting was a ‘Muslim event’ though there was no evidence to support this conclusion. They also speak from an emotive family-oriented perspective while criminalising large numbers of Muslims as a problem. The peaceful
backdrop of their past suburban life contrasts with their apprehensive characterisation of the situation today, and the Lakemba shootings are one of many anti-Muslim themes that shape their position.

There are a number of disparate representations of the Arab that are apparent in this correspondent’s position. For instance, the opponent uses the word ‘Hoons’ interchangeably with ‘Middle Eastern Muslims’. ‘Hoon’ is an Australian (and New Zealand) vernacular term that is used to describe others who engage in anti-social behaviour (Fuller 2007). Two constructions stand out in the opponent’s characterisations of these ‘Middle Eastern Muslims’ and ‘Hoons’; one concerns the supposed behaviour of Hoons and the other concerning their (likely) ‘ethnicity’. The behavioural details pick up on misogyny (Said 1978), disrespect for local authorities, and disrespect for others in general (Sharma & Sharma 2003). These details are associated with both the Lakemba shooting specifically and the Arab folk devil more generally.

Other opponents portrayed Arabs and Muslims as misogynists, paedophiles and sexual predators. These constructs were cumulative and were made explicit on websites protesting against the Islamic school in Camden. One particular website, established by an unidentified person or group, called for an Australia-wide protest against Muslims. The curator/s of this website made their case against the school and argued Islam encourages paedophilia and other forms of sexual deviancy. This opponent discussed one particular crime known as the Sydney gang rapes of 2000:

Have you ever wondered why Bilal Skaf shows no remorse for the packrape [sic] of 'captive girls'? maybe ...just maybe it is the above ‘They are free from blame’. While MUCH more could be said, it should be clear by now, that there is a gulf and divide between Muslims and non Muslims which is impossible to assimilate or break down. This [sic – thus], it is plain LUNACY to encourage in any way, the growth of such values in our community

A young man named Bilal Skaf was the ring leader in a series of gang rapes that occurred in Sydney in 2000. The perpetrators were men of a Lebanese-Australian Muslim background. These events are largely known as the Skaf case because Bilal Skaf and his brother were involved. During the Skaf case, the victims testified in court that the perpetrators called them names like ‘Aussie pig’ and ‘slut’, and alleged that one rapist said ‘I’m going to fuck you Leb-Style’. An Australian tabloid newspaper had a front page title quoting one of the rapists


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as saying ‘You deserved it because you're Australian’ (see Dagistanli 2007, Saniotis 2004, Gleeson 2004). Media reports suggested the perpetrators represented Arab and Muslim communities, and the rapes were an attack on the ‘Australian nation’. ‘Arab sexual predators’ were not only criminals, they were ‘un-Australian’. This was one instance of the Arab folk devil amongst many that invoked classical Orientalist ideas that the Muslim male is barbaric and driven by uncontrollable sexual urges. The gang rapes are upheld as one example of this – which itself hinges on a number of popular myths both about gang rape and other forms of sexual assault being the preserve of misogynist and sexually perverse Arab men (as opposed to men of other ethnicities), while adhering to the misconception of ‘stranger rape’ (See Dagistanli 2007; Dagistanli & Grewal 2012; Gleeson 2004; Grewal 2007; Ho 2007; Kabir 2008; Noble 2008; Saniotis 2004).

For the resident above, the Sydney gang rapes form a foundation for one among several anti-Arab stereotypes utilised to justify the protest against the application. A sense of ownership over ‘our community’ is explicit in this opponent’s position on the school, which they portray as a site where young people will be taught that forced sexual assaults against women are acceptable. They also framed the school as a cause to inspire a national struggle against Muslims, and on the basis of such a view, the resident attempted to inspire an Australia-wide protest. The moderators behind the website communicated unfounded suggestions that the school would condone gang rape, paedophilia, patriarchy, and ‘un-Australian’ values – as though paedophilia, sexual assault and patriarchy did not exist in Australia prior to Muslim immigration. These assumptions of what would be taught at the school reflected the nature of the Arab folk devil – weaving the Sydney gang rapes into a calculative construct to produce a stereotype of Arab men as sexual predators. The Skaf case is one of many signifiers that the opponent uses to represent Muslims.

The overseas events of 9/11, the 2002 Bali bombings and other atrocities (see Neighbour 2003; Poynting 2002) augmented the basis for constructions of the Arab folk devil, as critics of the school discussed these episodes in their crusades against the development application. While opponents often discussed 9/11 and Bali, fewer residents discussed a wider range of terrorist attacks. One example appeared on a popular video clip posted on YouTube by an unknown protester, who similar to other critics of the school, called for a nationwide protest against Muslim peoples in Australia. The school saga enabled this protester, a man who identified himself as ‘Joshua of Nun’, to portray the school as an attack on the entire nation. In this clip, Joshua screened a collage of horrifying terrorist attacks, including 9/11, and the
Madrid, Bali, and London bombings. Joshua juxtaposed these atrocities with a clip of a Muslim man with an English accent, preaching that Muslims should take over the USA and UK (his accent indicates that perhaps he is born and/or raised in the UK). Joshua then argued that Islam is incompatible with democratic values and on verses in the Qur’an which are critical of Christians and Jews and encourage wars against non-Muslims for the purpose of subduing them. While these verses draw on a particular historical context relevant to the time of the Quran’s revelation, Joshua interprets these passages as though they are practiced and enacted by Muslims worldwide in contemporary times. Towards the end of the clip, Joshua presented a number of convoluted statements:

By way of conclusion, and drawing all this together, and giving it some focus and direction, I want you to join me in a guided tour of some very core values of the Islamic faith. They won’t be the values that you would hear about from an Imam or from a ‘friendly Muslim’ or ya [sic] neighbour. But they will be the values that are at the epicentre of Islam, historically and in the life of Mohammed, and his companions, and how that, how those values have affected everybody else around the Islamic world since Mohammad until this day. It’s time to take off the Jehovial, the ‘ah, throw another shrimp on the barbie [BBQ]’ fairly light-hearted attitude and we are gonna [sic] get serious, because this is life or death for every single one of us (JOSHUAofNUN 2008)

The credits at the end of his clip read that his protest is dedicated to residents in Camden and the people of Australia, exemplifying how Joshua experiences the local struggle against a proposed school as a broader fight against Muslims in Australia. The clip is a tool for recruiting others in his crusade against Islam, as he positions himself as someone well-aware and well-informed of the ‘dangers’ posed by Muslim immigrants. Joshua also spoke in a broad Australian accent, using colloquialisms which relate to his audience.

The nature of the Arab folk devil is explicit in Joshua’s portrayal of Muslims, which conceals the distinctions between fundamental, moderate and secular Muslims: Joshua conflates Muslims of all persuasions with a minority of extremists. Terrorists are firmly placed in the same category as fundamentalists, prospective invaders, dictators and anti-nationalists. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the ways the noisy and vocal minority are upheld as representative of Camden as a ‘racist area’ and the fundamentalists that are upheld as representative of Muslims as a whole. Joshua, who appeared in a balaclava (perhaps ironically drawing on ‘terrorist’ or ‘niqab’ iconography) mockingly dismissed the idea that Camden was full of ‘hill-billies’ and ‘rednecks’ who were ‘intolerant against Islam’, by proceeding to provide ‘proof’ that Muslims are rightly characterised as such. Joshua drew on
the events in New York City, Madrid and Bali to make the declaration that intolerance against Muslims is justified. Innocuous requests by Muslims, such as the development application for a school in Camden, conceal a far more dangerous overarching agenda of violence against Western societies. Joshua ends with the ominous warning that this is a matter of ‘life and death’.

Hyperbolic statements opposing the development application were not unusual: the ‘grave consequences’ (as a resident wrote in a letter to Council) or ‘life or death’ situations to which local opponents referred sought to construct the proposal for an Islamic school as a sign of a far more significant and urgent matter which required immediate action. The message consistently imparted through recurrent references to the Arab folk devil was that any attempts to nurture Muslim religious and cultural practices must be extinguished before they inevitably breed fundamentalist ideologies and ultimately terrorism against Western society. Such extremes draw on the largely discredited theory that a ‘clash of civilisations’ exists between the West and the Muslim world. Developed by Samuel Huntington (1992:22), this theory is built on the argument that future world conflict:

will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts will occur between nations and groups of different civilisations.

The fundamental premise is that several different civilisations will form and one titled the ‘Western civilisation’ will be one. This Western civilisation includes Australia, North America, most of Europe and New Zealand; while an ‘Islamic civilisation’ includes North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey and parts of Asia. The principal future clash between the West and Islam for Huntington is unwittingly mobilised by critics of the school who draw on the racialised character of the Arab folk devil as terrorist, gang member and sexual predator – belonging to a civilisation distinct from the one formed by ordinary ‘Australians’ – to substantiate their arguments.. Notably, this sort of commentary on Islam, as forming a distinct group of peoples who threaten and clash with Western values, is fairly common on anti-Muslim, white supremacist and extreme right-wing websites (Dagistanli & Grewal 2012). In the arguments against the school, previous terrorist attacks, the Sydney gang rapes and the drive-by shooting moral panics (Dagistanli 2007; Poynting et al. 2004; Collins et al. 2000) form part of the record of clashes between “ordinary” Australians and Muslims, thus
an accumulation of these events forms the basis for the emergence of a particular Arab folk devil in the Camden context.

Other events and atrocities were evident in this local ‘clash of civilisations’ against the Arab folk devil. While the aforementioned moral panics (9/11, Bali Bombings and the Sydney gang rapes) were the most common in arguments against the school, other world events were significant in the construction of Arabs and Muslims that formed the basis of Camden’s folk devil. The letter below illustrates how these events were commonly cited:

Radicalised Islam is one of the most dangerous problems facing the western world today and our country’s involvement in the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan does not help the situation, to say Islam is not a violent religion is ridiculous as it glorifies suicide as a way to get to paradise. I have always believed that a person’s religion was a personal matter, however since events like 9/11, The [sic] Bali bombings, the Moslem gang rape attacks in 2004 and the Moslem gang vengeance campaign in response to the Cronulla riots of 2006 I have had to revaluate [sic] my thinking (Letter to Camden Council, received 30/10/2007)

This local positioned themselves as an observer of a series of atrocities that involve Arabs and Muslims, and listed these episodes (which have incorrect dates) in an attempt to justify their assumptions about Muslims and their stance on the school. This resident attempted to position themselves as open-minded and tolerant, as a proponent of freedom of religion, yet then endeavoured to justify why, in the case of the school, this freedom should be violated. They position ‘us’ as the Western world, as though the school is one of many obstacles in the struggle against radicalised Islam. The Arab folk devil and the sinister episodes of suicide bombing, gang rapes, and riots are invoked by this opponent in order to provide foundations for their arguments about the dangers of something as innocuous as a Muslim school. The broader arguments that Muslims are a distinct, racialised people who culturally clash with the Western world exemplify how they are all tarred with the same radical brush.

In rejecting the school, the opponent denies Muslim people the right to be ‘ordinary’: Muslims are not seen as ‘normal’ people who could be classed as ‘Australians’, or as people who might undergo a ‘normal’ education or promote moderate values (see Deen 2003). Muslims are all associated with a minority who engage in backward, extremist practices, that opponents argue clash with Australia’s ‘Western’ culture. A number of accumulated events are used in order to construct the identities of Muslims as fundamentalists, terrorists, gang rapists, violent gang members and suicide bombers. These constructed identities provide the opponent with ammunition to use against the Islamic school, demonstrating how the Arab
Huntington’s clash of civilisations theory underpins most constructions of the Arab folk devil. While this theory has received a tremendous amount of support, largely by academics and anti-Muslim activists it has also attracted substantial criticism (Berman 2004; Fox 2005; Henderson & Tucker 2001; Mungiu Pippidi & Mindruta 2002; Poynting & Mason 2007; Said 1997; Sen 2004). For instance, Sen (1999:16) argues that diversity is a general feature among many cultures worldwide, thus it is impractical to construct civilisations as monolithic and disparate entities completely estranged from one another. Berman (2004) argues the hypothesis is unrealistic, arguing that the prediction of a clash of civilisations is not convincing, and there is no supposed ‘western civilisation’ and distinct ‘Islamic civilisation’, particularly when considering the strong relationships between the United States and Saudi Arabia. For Said (2001:11-13), Huntington’s theory is evidence of the ‘clash of ignorance’, arguing that Huntington’s characterisation of civilisations omits the idea that ‘culture’ itself cannot be fixed. Describing the theory as ‘reductive and vulgar’, Said argues it exemplifies ‘the purist invidious racism, a sort of parody of Hitlerian science directed today against Arabs and Muslims’.

The level of protest in Camden can only be understood as a local ‘clash of civilisations’ if we embrace the racist view that Muslims and Arabs are genuinely barbaric, sexual predators, gang members and terrorists and that the community of Camden embodies the antithesis of these things. The cumulative nature of the Arab folk devil only exemplifies how residents perceived their protest as a struggle between the West and Islam. In these struggles, opponents commonly portray Muslims as a monolithic entity, forming a distinct civilian entity or nationality (articulated in the ‘Aussies’ vs. ‘Muslims’ binaries apparent among opponents). By drawing parallels between opponents’ views and Huntington’s theory, this chapter aims to map out the views that make up the Arab folk devil. This shows that the theory is only useful in charting racialised stereotypes that form the basis of the folk devil in Camden, in that protesters adopt these views of Arabs and Muslims.33

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33 This dissertation does not endorse the view that the world will experience a clash between Islam and the West, which is arguably flawed and provides ammunition for Orientalist views, enabling them to misrepresent the diversity amongst Arabs and Muslims, and vilify communities racialised as ‘Muslim’.
The Moral West vs. the Islamic Other

These discussions on the ‘clash of civilisations’ mythology are crucial to charting the majority of antagonistic reactions against the school, Muslims and Arabs. The binary of ‘the moral West vs. the Islamic Other’ captured how some locals saw their struggle against the school as something of global significance. In the Land and Environment Court, the Commissioner heard Kate McCulloch’s long and convoluted testimony against the school. In arguing that Islam threatens Western societies, the Commissioner heard a number of misrepresentations of Muslims and Arabs that he eventually ignored in his assessment of the school:

I have a family, I have a genuine love of friendship and peace. Over the years with the September 11th, the Bali bombings, Madrid bombings, the bombings in the Philippines, over in London bombings, I find it a deep atrocity. I turn on my television at night and I am moved by what is [sic] happened to many children and women, all because of religion... If you look this war [sic] in Islam has been going for 1400 years now. And it's not stopping. Nearly all the Arab states are either living in a war zone or their children and women and men are dying of starvation. I suppose we have moderate Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, yet they do be-headings, cut people's hands off for stealing. Women cannot drive cars. This isn't Westernised Society. They [Muslims/Arabs] are going to United Kingdom, westernised countries like Australia and America, and they're managing to set up schools and not allowing the children to move in and learn, and live an Australian way of life (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – The Qur’anic Society v Camden Council [2009] NSWLEC 1171).

In a Court that dealt specifically with environmental and planning issues, McCulloch tried to make a case that the Commissioner should hear ‘cultural’ concerns. McCulloch also tried to contextualise her views on the school by portraying herself as family-oriented, declaring ‘I have a family’ before vilifying Muslims. This was an attempt to position herself with some sort of credibility that she held good communal intentions, before detailing various terrorist attacks that have occurred in the past decade. Here, the cumulative nature of the folk devil is clear, where these attacks provide McCulloch with ammunition to use against the development application.

McCulloch positioned herself as an observer of a number of atrocities, detailing that she is ‘moved’ by these events. Her characterisations of herself are the antithesis of the ways she portrays the Other. She misrepresents as ‘moderate’ the extremely conservative kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country with a strong allegiance to the United States (that she upholds as the
Western equivalent of Australia). Here, Saudi Arabia represents the values of all Muslims, even though a minority of Muslims around the world follow Wahabism, which is an ultraconservative version of Islam and is by no means moderate. Muslims are not afforded the opportunity to be ordinary people – they are all conflated into one sensationalized category of extremist folk devils.

There is also a fluid construction of ‘us’ in McCulloch’s testimony in the Land and Environment Court. She talks of Arabs and Muslims moving to America and not endorsing an ‘Australian way of life’. The dualisms are obvious here, as she experiences the struggle against the school as a broader war between the West and the East, reminiscent of Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilisations (1993). This comes out in passages in her testimony such as: ‘I classify the United Kingdom as very similar to Australian values’ (not included in the extract above). Unlike other residents who anchor their protest in the nation, McCulloch experiences and draws on a global struggle. A number of binaries surface in her testimony, including Australians vs. terrorists, the West vs. Barbaric Arabs, and Christianity vs. patriarchal, war-mongering Muslims to identify the most common ones. The cumulative signifiers around the Arab folk devil enable McCulloch to grossly misrepresent Arabs and Muslims, and portray her protest against the school as a crusade within a broader ‘East vs. West’ dichotomy. This is epitomised in McCulloch’s final statement to the Commissioner, addressing the Court as though it was a personified entity:

Let’s start making people understand that the Western way of life is the best way of life. Please Land and Environment Court, bring this into the courts, allow culture to be part of it because our country is about culture (Excerpt from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – The Qur’anic Society v Camden Council [2009] NSWLEC 1171).

Unpredictable and fluid: The unstable constructions of Camden’s Arab folk devil

Not all opponents were as detailed in their descriptions of the Arab folk devil. At times, the cumulative nature of the folk devil in Camden took a fluid and unpredictable shape. This meant that some residents raised a number of past events while others raised only recent events, depending on what resonated with each individual critic. For the opponent below, it was the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal which took place in 2006 that seemed to be of greatest significance:
...we are expected to bend over backwards to accept their cultures, BUT, do they accept ours?? NO!! Our Aussie girls are just “dressed meat” to be subjected to rape and demoralization (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).

Only a year before Camden Council received this letter, a media circus around a controversial Ramadan sermon by the former Mufti of Australia, sheikh Taj Al-Deen al-Hilali, took place across Australia. Journalists took the following extracts from al-Hilali’s sermon and published them in news reports across Australia:

If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park, or in the backyard without a cover, and the cats come and eat it... whose fault is it, the cats or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem... If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred (cited in Kerbaj 2006)

These comments drew condemnation from both the Australian mainstream and Muslims, yet for the opponent above, al-Hilali’s comments are seen as representative of the values of all Muslims. The ‘uncovered meat’ scandal resonated with opponents of the school, enabling them to portray Muslims as misogynists and unapologetic sexual predators who place the responsibility for being raped on raped women. This critic framed the school in the context of what they saw as on-going injustices committed by Muslims against mainstream Australians. The opponents’ assumptions about a clash of cultures foreground their position on the school and they draw upon the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal as evidence of this clash. The characterisations of a mainstream ‘us’ against an Islamic ‘them’ are clear. ‘We’ are accepting and tolerant of Islamic cultures, whereas ‘They’ are invasive, dominating and exploitative of the generosity exercised by ‘us’. Assumptions of ‘culture’ and ‘race’ organise their views, particularly in their characterisations of Muslims threatening ‘our Aussie girls’. Evidently, Muslims are not ‘Aussies’ in this view and mainstream Anglo-Saxon females are threatened Australians, bearing the brunt of what this critic sees as a clash between Australian values and Islam. There is no mention here of the fact that Anglo-Saxon females could be threatened also by non-Muslim, Anglo-Saxon men (See Ho 2007).

This resident’s position details Muslims as intolerant, misogynists, ‘un-Australian’, and sexual predators. The resonance of the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal is based on the misconception of al-Hilali as a spokesperson for Islamic values, also highlighted in another letter to Council:
...we feel unsafe and intimidated by Muslim males. They do not respect Australian women, as we all heard from the much publicised Sheik Al Halili’s [sic] comment’s earlier this year (Letter to Camden Council received 12/11/2007).

This opponent positioned their stance with an assertive ‘we’, communicating that they speak for other locals, though they focus on what they see as the predatory masculinity of Muslim men. Their observations of the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal shape their views of the school and, unlike the previous critic, this correspondent positions al-Hilali as though he can represent Muslim men. The evolving nature of the folk devil is evident, particularly in the resident’s statements ‘...as we all heard... earlier this year’. Folk devils are unstable representations that evolve as events unfold. This letter shows that the folk devil takes a specifically ‘male’ form, unlike other constructions which also involve Muslim women.34 Further, it is a sexual predator targeting mainstream white women, and therefore their struggle against the folk devil is important for the entire nation.

Opponents exaggerated the uncovered meat controversy at extreme levels. An assumption developed that the school would form a local community of Muslims in Camden who thought of white women in Camden as ‘sluts’:

Do we want to welcome a community to our shire whose religious leaders tell their flock that Australian women are ‘sluts’? (Letter to Camden Council, received 3/11/2007).

As with other opponents, this resident evokes a simple personalised pronoun ‘we’ in order to position themselves as having local authority. Even though al-Hilali is one leader, this opponent cited the controversy as an episode where many Muslim ‘religious leaders’ made such statements. Yet, unlike other residents who discussed the ‘uncovered meat’ controversy, this resident does not make reference to ‘Australian women’ as ‘our women’. Instead, the writer refers to a broad threat to ‘Australian’ women.

This resident aimed to simultaneously oppose the school and warn the council of the patriarchal dangers of Islam as though such dangers were the preserve of Muslims. An accumulation of representations are apparent in these efforts. These include representations of sexual predators exclusively targeting mainstream women, and of religious fundamentalists. Although neither al-Hilali himself nor his comments is linked to the Qur’anic Society, the ‘uncovered meat’ scandal provided opponents of the school with resources to depict the Arab

34 The construction of Muslim women as a potential threat is rare, however such constructions depict Muslim women’s dress as particularly threatening with respect to security. Muslim women’s (traditional) attire is often depicted as ‘un-Australian’, oppressive and patriarchal and ultimately a means for concealing weapons.
folk devil as patriarchal, un-Australian and an apologist for sexual violence. Other short letters to Council would implicitly refer to this controversy in characterising Muslims as sexual predators:

Are our daughters and granddaughters to be treated as pieces of cats [sic] meat left out for those dogs to take? (Letter to Camden Council, received 12/11/2007)

The ‘uncovered meat’ scandal resonates in this resident’s position against the school. This resident poses an emotive rhetorical question to Council, communicating a particular narration of the school, one of predatory masculinity. The innocence of locals is obvious in their characterisation of women as ‘our daughters and granddaughters’ in contrast with the ‘dogs’, a dehumanising reference to Muslims. Here, a specific ‘male’ folk devil is grounded in the ways this resident thinks about ‘rapists’ interchangeably with Muslims. This resident made their argument through racialised representations of Muslim men as barbaric ‘dogs’ in contrast with innocent, local white women.

The evolving and fluid nature of the Arab folk devil in Camden is further evident in the ways opponents discussed the Durack school controversy, which took place in 2008 while residents were testifying in the Land and Environment Court and sending a second batch of letters to Camden Council airing their positions on the amended plans for the local school. A former teacher at the Australian International Islamic College in Durack, a suburb of Brisbane, told The Courier-Mail newspaper that the College ‘banned’ the singing of the national anthem. A chairperson of the school responded that the students did sing the anthem, but only on important occasions. According to one of the school’s trustees, an investigation into the decision found that the Principal preferred the students not to sing the national anthem every morning and decided accordingly, without the endorsement of the board (Elks 2008). Yet, for some residents in Camden, the Durack controversy was evidence of the ‘un-Australian’ nature of Islamic schools:

It was most alarming to read about the Brisbane Islamic school that banned the Australian National Anthem and that Australian values were disparaged (a “no – no”)… I was greatly saddened to hear that, because I felt that the children at this school were missing out on a greater understanding and appreciation of their host country on the one hand, and, on the other hand, I felt it was a very dangerous way to bring up young people. It was almost like encouraging them to disparage Australia and to have a hostile view of our country and its values (Letter to Camden Council, received 24/12/2008).
This opponent portrayed their struggle against the school as one of national significance. They observed the Durack controversy in a way that positioned themselves as the ‘host’ of Muslims ‘visitors’ in their country, thus they communicated a position as a local and a nationalist. The expressions ‘I felt’ and ‘I was’, personalised their response to the school, unlike other residents who positioned themselves as speakers for the community. This resident made assumptions that Australian values were also banned along with the dropping of daily renditions of the national anthem, as though national values and the anthem are one. The Durack controversy, arising in the middle of the Camden controversy, provides an instant political and cultural target that opponents utilise in their depictions of Muslims as anti-patriotic and ‘un-Australian’.

In the NSW Land and Environment Court, local resident Judith Bond discussed the Queensland Durack controversy as though it was ‘evidence’ of a larger Islamic threat to Australia and its culture. The cumulative nature of the Arab folk devil in its entirety, from mild references to the Sydney gang rapes of 2000, to the recent national anthem scandal, is captured in her testimony:

They [Muslims] will also be bringing students from overseas. They will stay here, they will become citizens, and this will lead to breeding grounds for Muslim terrorists, the surge of gang rapes, looting, attacking infidels... Deception. Blind obedience. Teach intolerance. Brutality. Do we want this on our back door step? Do we want this under our nose? I don’t think so. These people want to divide and destruct [sic] our society. Will they, at this Muslim school, fly the Australian flag? The teacher in Brisbane at the Islamic school there said that they are not even using the national anthem, and his comment was – it’s like a paramilitary camp. Imagine that in Camden in this beautiful area (Excerpts from a video screened at the Land and Environment Court – Qur’anic Society v Camden Council (2009) NSWLEC 1171).

Bond positioned herself as all-knowing concerning the teachings at the school, criminalising and positioning ‘them’ against her ‘we’ – a catch-all category enabling her to talk about the Camden community and Australia as one unified entity. In reflecting on the previous events concerning Arabs and Muslims, Bond absorbed these instances as representations of Islam, and the previous moral panics and controversies shape her position that the school is of national significance. The term ‘infidel’ is familiar to all three Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) in referring to nonbelievers. Yet Bond positioned the term as though it was exclusively Islamic, and used it to express how she felt Muslims portrayed mainstream Australians. In this, Bond represented ‘Australians’ as a homogenised group victimised at the hands of ‘intolerant’ Muslims.
For Bond, Muslims are cunning invaders, un-Australian and fundamentalists, and the school is a place where such values are taught, values including public disorder, gang rapes, terrorism, organised crime, and blind following of Islam. These signifiers of Muslims are captured in Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994:28) argument that folk devils are ‘the personification of evil... stripped of all favourable characteristics and imparted with exclusively negative ones’. The cumulative representations function to justify hostility to Muslims and Arabs, criminalise them in various ways, and to hold a position that, as Bond stated at the end of her testimony while she raised her fist into the air:

This proposed Muslim school must be stopped. Say no, loud and clear!

**The interchangeable signifiers of the Arab folk devil in Camden**

The cumulative signifiers of the folk devil link with other signifiers that appear interchangeable in the ways that opponents communicate them. Some of the constructions that form the basis of the Arab folk devil are cumulative, other constructions are interchangeable, and other descriptions are both. This section argues the importance of the interchangeable representations of Arabs and Muslims that also forms the basis of the Arab folk devil in Camden. The fluid shape of this folk devil is further apparent in these interchangeable representations that surface in views opposing the school.

‘Task Force Camden’: Rapists, robbers and terrorists from Bankstown

Often, opponents criminalise Muslims and Arabs in ways that exemplify the interchangeable nature of the Arab folk devil:

We don’t want to feel like we can’t go out in Camden at night just in case there are fights at the pubs, muggings, rapping’s [sic – rapes], robbery’s [sic] and drive-bys etc (Letter to Camden Council, received 2/11/2007).

These people bring serious crime into all places they inhabit. I.E. Rapes, murders, drive by shootings, ram-raid robberies etc (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).

These residents see an increase in crime as an inevitable by-product of building an Islamic school in the Camden area. Both discuss the increases in crime in similar ways, though the first opponent speaks as though they represent the interests of the area, particularly through the possessive pronoun ‘we’, and the exclusionary phrase: ‘these people’. The representations of Muslims that form the Arab folk devil are an insidious accumulation of previous moral panics, namely the drive-by shootings of the Lakemba police station, and the Sydney gang
rapes. Along with other criminal traits, the interchangeable nature is apparent in the ways these opponents juxtapose the rapist with the murderer, gang member with the shooter and mugger. The positions of these locals illustrate the focus on the folk devil’s behavioural aspects. Yet others conflate ideas of ethnicity with criminality:

It would be expected that this school would attract many families to the area of Middle Eastern heritage. The NSW police force has set up Task Force Gain to cope with the higher levels of crime associated with the Middle Eastern community. This is in response to the indisputable fact that crime statistics shows a disproportionate number of offences are committed within such communities. It is significant to note that currently there is no “Task Force Camden” (Letter to Camden Council, received 9/11/2007).

Task Force Gain is a squad in the NSW police force, designed specifically to target what it calls ‘Middle Eastern’ crime in south western Sydney. This resident uses Task Force Gain to make a point that crime is exclusively the domain of Middle Eastern communities in Australia. Although the task force was not set up to target ‘Muslim crime’ (rather what the NSW government termed ‘Middle Eastern crime’) this resident treats categories of Muslim, Middle Eastern and ‘criminal’ interchangeably.

In the aforementioned letter to Camden Council, there are fewer details that form the basis of the Arab folk devil in Camden, as no specific crimes are discussed. Yet there is an emphasis on ‘large numbers’, implying that a concentration of ‘Middle Eastern Muslims’ gives rise to conditions conducive to crime. ‘Middle Eastern’ refers to a broad and diverse community of people, not all of whom are Muslim. Yet, as highlighted in Chapter Two and throughout this dissertation, opponents often thought of Muslims as Lebanese people, and also as Middle Eastern people. The resident last quoted does not draw on personal experiences, rather on what they feel are indisputable facts regarding this ethnic/religious hybrid Other. They position the school as a magnet for Middle Eastern Muslims specifically, which they characterise as a threat to public safety as it exists in Camden.

These views reflect the shape of Camden’s folk devil, which took on a particular ethnicised and criminal quality that contrasted with the ways Camdenites saw themselves as rural, peaceful and white. Also discussed in Chapter Four, opponents often predicted the school would change Camden into ‘another Bankstown’. These arguments even seeped into the Land and Environment Court, where the Council argued that there are broad links between
Islamic schools and crime rates, and alleged a specific link between the Qur’anic Society and a supposed ‘terrorist organisation’ called Tablighi Jemmat.

The barristers for the Qur’anic Society argued they were being placed in a position where they needed to dispute such allegations, and Commissioner Brown ruled these were not ‘public interest’ concerns. These allegations made by the Council in the Land and Environment Court, reflect the broader criminalisation of Arabs and Muslims. A biased set of ideas were raised by the Council in Court that particularly vilified Muslims. If Camden Council included all ‘public interest’ concerns regarding crime, they would have included a report submitted by Camden Police to Camden Council before the May 2008 Council meeting to reject the school. The report warned of ‘anti-Islamic gangs, violence and vandalism’ considering the ‘high protest activities against school development’. Also, the report warned of the formation of possible ‘rival gangs’ with Camden High School and that the Islamic school would most likely be damaged and vandalised after school hours (Bowie 2008i:2-3). Yet Camden Council did not raise these specific policing concerns in Court; rather, they raised broader issues that criminalised the Islamic school, Muslim people, and areas in Sydney with large numbers of Muslim families.

In response to these arguments that crime rates were higher in Bankstown, and thus an Islamic school would increase crime in Camden, a journalist researched and compared crime rates in Camden and Bankstown:  

The statistics tell a mixed story. On some measures, Camden and Bankstown share similar rates of crime - although the raw numbers differ given the relative population sizes. When it comes to robberies, murder, assaults and drug offences, the Bankstown-Canterbury region has a far higher proportion of crimes. But the rates of property damage and sexual offences are higher in Camden. Figures from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research show 34.3 sexual assaults per 100,000 people last year, compared with 30.1 in Bankstown-Canterbury. The rate for malicious damage to property in Camden was 1342 per 100,000 (up from 993.6 four years earlier). That compared with 1011.1 per 100,000 in Bankstown-Canterbury. The rate for threatening behaviour and “private nuisance” was greater in Camden (Wilson 2008).

Bankstown was obviously chosen because it was repeatedly mentioned in arguments against the school as a crime infested area.
Statistically, there are no correlations between crime rates and the larger concentrations of Arab and Islamic populations within a particular locality and it seems that rates for certain crimes associated with Muslims are slightly higher in Camden than for the Bankstown-Canterbury area. The point here is not to disprove the claims made by such critics of the school, but rather to highlight how Camden’s folk devil operates through both a criminal and a terrorist form.

'Aussies vs. Criminals' and policing the folk devil

These representations of Muslims as ‘robbers’, ‘rapists’ and ‘terrorists’ contribute to certain antagonistic reactions against the school, where Camdenites identified themselves as ‘Aussies’ and Muslims/Arabs as ‘Criminals’. One particular resident expressed these assumptions as they aired concerns over integration, public safety and the maintenance of social harmony in Camden:

> Is [the] Camden police force large enough to handle any more problems if any arise through the building of another high school so close to the one already there and with the knowledge that there [sic] religion is against integration (Letter to Camden Council, received 31/11/2007).

This opponent portrayed the school as a law and order problem, as they expressed their concerns over local policing resources, and made a claim that criminal behaviour is a result of a lack of integration into Australian society. The opponent juxtaposed local policing concerns with integration, reflecting the interchangeable nature of the Arab folk devil as criminal and resistant to cultural integration. The other common dualism that played out throughout the controversy was of ‘Peaceful Australians’ pitted against ‘Criminal (and violent) Muslims’. Therefore, it was a broader version of a local ‘Camdenites vs. Muslims’ binary.

> We don’t want to experience a Cronulla incident in our town, or have to fight for our right as Australians in OUR own country (Letter to Camden Council, received 31/11/2007)

This resident referred to the Cronulla riots (also discussed in the final section of this chapter) in a way that communicated national concerns. It is unclear how this resident narrates the riots, yet the second part of their statement detailed that perhaps they experience these events as an ‘Australian’ protest (similar to the other residents described in earlier parts of this chapter). There is an emphasis on ‘OUR’, demonstrating a position that Hage (1998) describes as nationalists attempting to exert their control and ownership over the nation. The
The interchangeable characterisations of Camden’s Arab folk devil as foreigners and criminals are apparent in these ‘Camdenites/Australians’ vs. Muslims binaries:

How will this effect [sic] the local emergency services, do we have enough police officers etc it is an unfortunate situation that we find ourselves in as there may be a problem of integration and clash of cultures, which may lead to unrest or even violence, I do not condone this in any shape or form...

(Letter to Camden Council, received 31/11/2007)

This resident’s agenda was similar to that of the last quoted opponents, namely to portray Muslims as foreigners to Camden and the Australian landscape. Also, this resident framed the school as a law and order problem, which is signified by two factors. The first is what they saw are ‘integration problems’, which highlights their depiction of Muslims as foreigners. The second is a perceived clash of cultures, which again views Islam as incompatible with Australia (as discussed above in the section on the clash of civilisations). The extract above is significant as it details the interchangeable signifiers that form the Arab folk devil’s identity as outsider, non-integrator, ‘un-Australian’ and violent criminal. Collectively these signifiers contribute to the antagonistic reactions of peaceful nationalists in Camden against foreign criminals.

Anxious residents even speculated that Islamic schools encourage:

...immigration through the ‘back door’, to grant overseas students permanent residentcy [sic]. The school is therefore a facade to higher goals (Letters to Camden Council, received 24/12/2008).

This letter also echoes the binary of Australians against Muslims, of local ‘us’ against foreign, immigrant ‘them’. This resident communicates their anxieties regarding what they feel is an imminent invasion of Muslims coming from outside Australia (unlike others who, as detailed in Chapter Four, felt Muslims would move from the south western Sydney area). By taking a position on the school, they experience this fear of invasion. The interchangeable ‘un-Australian’, deceitful and foreign natures of the folk devil are clear in this letter. The school is seen to cater for migrants rather than Australian Muslim youth, and the school operates as a cunning immigration tactic, as one step allowing foreign Others to jump
existing immigration ‘queues’ and invade the nation. Based on the views of other opponents, these images also intersect with other representations of Muslims as patriarchal, misogynistic sexual predators.

‘Females are classed as lesser beings in this culture’: Islamic misogynists and sexual predators

Some residents argued the school specifically threatened women’s rights, welfare and safety in Camden. On this particular topic, Camden’s folk devil took specific forms of the sexual predator, the misogynist, the paedophile, the male supremacist, and the assailters of women. Therefore, on the topic of women, there are interchangeable variations of Camden’s folk devil:

Yeah under Islam women have so many rights lol. Thats [sic] a joke they right the right [sic] to be beaten, raped, married off to whoever their family sees fit wow thats [sic] so many rights. (Posted 1:27pm 26/09/2008).

A resident posted this comment on one of the many facebook.com groups protesting the Islamic school. Through sarcasm, this commentator positioned himself against the school because he thinks Muslim men violate women in multiple ways, whether through physical and sexual violence, or generally extreme misogyny. Within two sentences, the opponent exposes a number of assumptions about Islamic theology which evoke gender inequality as a trump card against the essence of Islam. It is obvious that the stereotype of Islam as an exclusively patriarchal religion resonates in the views of opponents of the school. One of the most obvious examples came through the form of an ‘information pamphlet’ which was a ‘guide’ to Islam, attached to a letter to Camden Council. This pamphlet explained how Muslim men typically ‘treat’ women. Typically, the pamphlet explained, Muslim women are subordinated, covered, used as toys, and ‘are like a rib – crooked’. The pamphlet explained that a ‘Muslim’ husband was able to satisfy his sexual desires at any time, even if his wife was in the midst of cooking him food. Along with sexual violence, it read that a Muslim man could beat his wife if she did not fulfil his sexual desires. After the reader was informed that Muslim men were sexual predators and that rape was ‘permissible’ in Islam, it warned that women who were planning on marrying a Muslim man should consult the pamphlet before doing so (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007). This echoed the sentiment of another letter, to which I referred previously, that expressed fear of miscegenation between Muslims and “Australians” in future generations.
The message that the opponent sends to Camden Council is that Muslim men violate women in various ways, and that such values will be taught at the school. Thus, the position of this opponent, like many others, is based on fear of the teaching of values that are seen as alien to the Camden community and Australia (as though patriarchal values, domestic violence against women, rape and sexist gender roles do not exist in Australia – see Dixson 1994 and Gleeson 2007). For other opponents aspects of the sexual nature of Camden’s folk devil were also associated with ideas of Australianness and ‘the nation’. Here, opponents communicated both concerns – that the school would threaten both women and ‘Australia’:

WE BELIEVE that if successful, this school will not accept non-Muslim children. The students won’t be taught the standard Australian education curriculum, they will be taught only the Islamic/Muslim way of life. The female students will be segregated in one part of the school as females are classified as lesser beings in this culture (Austin 2008:27)

This extract is from a letter to the editor sent to the Camden Advertiser. The capitalised ‘WE BELIEVE’ emphasizes how the resident communicated their position, speaking on behalf of the Camden community. In articulating their concerns over the nation and the welfare of females, they pit Australian culture and values against what they see are Islamic ideals of patriarchy. Their position reflects both the interchangeable and cumulative nature of the folk devil, with ‘un-Australian’, patriarchal and intolerant identities. Also, the resident characterised Muslim culture as singular, discussing ‘this culture’ as though Islam is a monolithic entity, which is typical in the context of a perceived clash of civilisations. Thus, the interchangeable and cumulative nature of the folk devil functions to grossly negate or deny diversity among Muslims.

These discourses on gender and patriarchy which portray folk devils as misogynists serve to legitimate antagonistic reactions against the school that takes a particular shape of ‘Christian Camdenites vs. Misogynists’. The intersecting of localised, religious and national concerns is particularly apparent in this dichotomy. It is almost a unity of sub-dichotomies that include ‘Camdenites vs. Non-locals’, ‘Australians vs. Muslims’, ‘Christians vs. Muslims’ and ‘feminists vs. Misogynists’ (some of these are discussed in the relevant sections below). These common religious and national concerns were further complicated with fears of Islamic patriarchy, shaping a greater number of antagonistic reactions:

I AM a Christian responding to last week’s [article]…I was appalled with the unkind reception that was given to Fred Nile and others in the community who have been standing for values and truths that have established this great nation. I find myself waking up to the fact that I live in the Great South
Land and I want to serve my generation in a way that will bless the people of Australia and help to continue the establishing of a godly nation. It says in the paper that the Muslim school would teach Christians, Hindus, Jews and people of any other religious [sic] would be welcomed at the school and their religions would be taught if required. How would they teach Christians, Hindus, Jews and people of any religion if it is a Muslim school and who would teach them? I wouldn’t want my children to be taught the Muslim way of treating women. In Australia we are taught that all men and women are created as equals and we are created in the image of God (Reynolds 2008:8).

Reynolds reacted to an article titled ‘Muslims Respond’, published in the *Camden Advertiser* in early February 2008. A journalist from the *Advertiser* interviewed Issam Obeid, the vice-president of the Qur’anic Society because: ‘Thousands of Camden people have expressed a concern and asked for more information since the Quranic Society lodged its plan for an Islamic school last October’ (Stringa 2008:1)

Even though Jeremy Bingham was the spokesperson for the Society, residents claimed the organisation was secretive and shared little information. Obeid attempted to address the various anxieties about religion, the nation and patriarchy:

THE Qur’anic Society insists it has received no overseas funding, its students would not be forced to wear hijab and the school would not exceed government limits on the time spent teaching religion... he [Obeid] stressed that the co-educational school, which would be built in stages – initially primary and eventually a high school, over a period of about eight to ten years – would be for everyone not only Muslims. He said Christians, Hindus, Jews and people of any other religion would be welcomed at the school, and their religions would be taught if required... “We are a group of Australians wanting to build a school and the money is all coming from Australians... We’ve got one nation, one flag – let’s all work together towards those things” (Stringa 2008:10)

 Yet Reynolds was not convinced. In her response, she used emotive expressions like ‘Great South Land’ to position herself as a local, patriot and Christian. She also tried to portray herself as a person of goodwill in the matter, as someone grateful for living in Australia, working towards a positive future. The way she experienced her religious values is embedded in her assertions of her national identity. The interchangeable nature of the folk devil is clear in her position against the school. Muslims are represented as patriarchal, intolerant to other religions, un-Australian, incompatible with the nation’s ‘Christian’ origins, and un-godly; all of these images fuel a series of dualisms of Australians, Christians, and nationalists against patriarchal, Muslims, and un-Australian Others.
‘Suburban Holy War’: Un-Australian, anti-Christian, folk devils from Lakemba

The ‘un-Australian’ nature of Camden’s Arab folk devil is further complicated with religious signifiers. Residents often thought of their locality as a place with national significance (as examined in Chapter Three), and associated a Christian identity with ‘the nation’. The common identification by residents of ‘Australians’ as ‘Christians’ often meant that the folk devil took on the antithetical qualities of ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Australian’. In a similar spirit to the clash of civilisations theory, such views are explicit in the ways The Daily Telegraph initially reported the beginnings of the controversy. ‘SUBURBAN HOLY WAR’ read a front page headline describing the school saga. This title equated a local communal dispute with a religious war. Sensationalising the issue as a ‘battle’, the article conveyed the impression that residents feared changes in the Camden area, some arguing that an Islamic school would result in a proposed mosque later on (Vallejo 2007:1). The previous chapter discussed how residents often feared the school would lead to an established mosque, which they argued would begin an Islamic ‘takeover’ of their town. Thus, local invasion anxieties are central in this supposed religious war. The second part of the article featured a large picture of a smiling resident, Rebecca Napier, with her two young children in the centre of Camden’s business centre. Thus, readers are presented with a family-oriented picture of innocence, in contrast with a picture of the face of Issam Obeid (the vice-president of the Qur’anic Society) on the same page. A large Christmas tree stood behind Napier, which parallels her arguments about Muslims and integration and Christmas tree lights:

Camden Council, which has received about 300 official objections, has indicated it would only be approved or rejected on planning grounds - not the basis of religion. Local Rebecca Napier said Camden had a real community concern that the Islamic school wouldn’t fit in with because Muslim’s [sic] “refused to integrate”.

“We lit up the Christmas tree the other night and that is something they wouldn’t be into because they’re anti-Christian,” Ms Napier said. “It would become more like Lakemba and less like the country town that we love.” (emphasis added) (Vallejo 2007:4).

The editors of the Daily Telegraph chose to publish the above extract at the very end of the article, thus leaving the reader with a distinct impression cultivated by such final comments on the controversy. There are a number of features of this article which encourage this idea of imminent warfare, including; the layout of the article with a haunting message at the very end, the sensationalised title, a subheading describing the school saga is a ‘battle’, and the
pleasant picture of the resident with her children – arguing that all Muslims are ‘anti-Christian’ and not interested in Christmas tree lights. These factors work to together make the Camden controversy a newsworthy front-page story.

Napier positioned herself as though she spoke on behalf of the local and national interests, contrasting local ‘country town’ Camden with Lakemba - a suburb with Anglican and Muslim majorities. Her choice of the expression ‘we’ indicates a position of authority, floating between ‘we’ as Camdenites, ‘we’ as Australians, and ‘we’ as civilised people who are not patriarchal or misogynistic or violent or barbaric or unreasonable or anything else that is associated with Islam in the racist Western imaginary. Napier’s concerns slide between the preservation of a rural area, integration of Muslims into Australian society and the incompatibility of Islam with the dominant Christian composition of Camden. All of these factors shape her position on the school. The obvious juxtaposition of these concerns further reflects interchangeable constructions of Muslims. These include characterizations of anti-Christmas, anti-Christian, destroyers of Camden’s rural heritage, and non-integrators, all of which form the basis of Camden’s Arab folk devil.

Napier’s reference to Lakemba exemplifies how local opponents commonly see parts of south-western Sydney as predominantly populated by Arabs and Muslims, and therefore as invaded territories. The representations of the folk devil as the invader had several variations:

It is NOT ONLY a school, it is a Visa Factory, Transporting OVERSEAS students, teachers and other things associated. Whether student visa or working visa, through some ways could have access to a Permanent Resident, then a Citizen. Which means, more intellectual members for The Muslim Party. Are we looking forward to a Muslim Prime Minister in 50 years time? [sic] (Letter to Camden Council, received 13/11/2007).

Certain parts of this letter are capitalised, reflecting how the opponent highlighted the important parts of their anxieties. ‘NOT ONLY’ communicated how they position the school as something beyond the establishment of classrooms, a library and parking lots. ‘OVERSEAS’ emphasized that the opponent sees the school as catering for foreigners, thus portraying the school as something external to the national landscape. The resident positions themselves as a nationalist and a predictor of the consequences of an Islamic school. In these predictions, they characterise both the future staff and students of the school as invaders, which is also interchangeable with their portrayal as foreigners. These juxtaposed constructions compliment this resident’s description of an invasion process that begins at the
local level of a school, morphs into a political party, then escalates into a takeover of the Australian federal political scene. Such fears of invasion and infiltration underlined the most common binaries explicit throughout the Camden controversy, that of ‘Camdenites’ against ‘non-locals’ or ‘Muslims’. A number of interchangeable signifiers of Muslims as ‘non-locals’ played out within these binaries:

If the majority of people in Camden do not wish to have a certain exclusive religious order imposed upon them, they are called all kinds of names.... In the case of the Muslim school for Camden, the minority wants to impose itself over the existing community which does not want the school here, as it is totally out of character with this township and its heritage. For people outside this township who probably don’t even know where Camden is and have never been to Camden, to suggest that we the residents should accept outside imposed culture is wrong and is also a denial of our rights as residents of Camden to make our own choice (emphasis added) (Sremchevich 2007c:4).

This extract appeared in one of the many letters to the editor about the school controversy at a time when the Camden Advertiser wrote that it was inundated with letters about the school. Its author, Emil Sremchevich, (president of the local residents’ group fighting the application) had his letters published frequently. These letters are organised around binaries, including Camdenites vs. Outsiders, Camdenites vs. Muslims, Camdenites vs. local strident minorities, and Camden’s heritage vs. those who seek to destroy this heritage. As explored in Chapter Three, locals often narrated a very Anglo-centric version of their heritage in ways that frame their struggle against the school as something of national significance. Sremchevich’s position outlined in this letter details how, for some opponents, Camden is a metaphor for ‘Australia’, reflecting broader binaries that surface throughout the school saga.

‘Aussies/Christians vs. Muslims’ and Fred Nile’s crusades against the Islamic school

State upper house and ultra conservative politician Fred Nile organised the second protest against the Islamic school for reasons he claimed were religious and national. Through an information forum on Islam and the proposed school in Camden, Nile attempted to recruit voters for his Christian Democratic Party. A television tabloid news program juxtaposed his comments against the school with those of Jeremy Bingham:

Nile: Will the school at Camden follow the state government’s education curriculum? Or will there be excessive teaching of the Quran?
Bingham: The Muslim schools that already exist are developing a very good reputation for providing a very good education, so we confidently expect that there will be a significant number of non-Muslim children at this school once this school is established...

Nile: Now the Quran has in it many critical aspects of the Christian faith. It says anyone who says that Jesus Christ is the son of God is a corrupt or perverted unbeliever [indistinct]. I don’t want children being taught that kind of anti-Christian propaganda. It also says in the Quran that Muslims, believers they call them, should not make friends with Christians or Jews. Now do we want that kind of material being taught at a school in NSW, in Camden?

Bingham: Unfortunately, I think Fred Nile, he is a little bit out of date, and I think someone should tell him that the crusades were over about a thousand years ago (Bourke 2007).

Unlike the local concerns raised by the residents themselves, Nile approached the controversy as an elected member of NSW parliament concerned that an Islamic school in Camden would adversely impact ‘Australian values’. Although since 2007 there had been several development applications for mosques and Islamic schools submitted to Councils across Australia, Nile chose to devote his attention to Camden. He called for a moratorium on the building of mosques and Islamic schools, which was echoed by Godwin Goh a candidate for Nile’s party in Camden, but Nile had not organised other protests for proposed mosques and Islamic schools in other districts. In Camden, locals showed immense anti-Muslim sentiment, and so Nile used the school as a form of political opportunism, and an excuse to criminalise the Quran and Muslim people. At the forum, Nile told reporters that ‘all the Aussies celebrating carols by candlelight this week are condemned by the Quran’ (Bourke 2007). Several religious and national aspects influence Nile’s position on the school, which form the basis of the Arab folk devil as a critic of the Christian faith, anti-Jewish/Christian, and intolerant. These interchangeable signifiers of the folk devil are conflated to the point where they appear ‘un-Australian’. In reality, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Jews and other religious denominations are also critical of Nile’s version of Christianity (even some born-again Christians themselves would also be critical), yet Nile singled Muslims as critics that, specifically, Australia should be alarmed about.

Nile was not the only protester who cited both national and symbolic religious arguments against the school. An anonymous critic (or perhaps ‘critics’) scrawled a number of biblical verses and statements on a wooden crucifix found on the site of the school in Camden. These actions epitomised how locals framed the controversy as a multilayered battle of Australians, Camdenites and Christians, against Muslims, invaders and ‘un-Australian’ entities:
David and Goliath. The battle is won. This is the king of kings land. Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare (Kinsella 2007d:19).

When the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will lift up a flag against him (Kinsella 2007d:19)

The person/people who placed this crucifix specifically chose biblical passages that cite particular terms they feel are relevant to their protest, terms such as ‘the flag’ and ‘warfare’. Other details also epitomised the fears of ‘invasion’, as the enemy comes in ‘like a flood’. This/these opponent/s expressed anti-Muslim positions alongside their assertions of Australian identity. The crucifix itself epitomised a number of spatial, religious and national anxieties about Muslims. The idea that Muslim people ‘comes in like a flood’ speaks volumes about invasion anxieties. The cross itself is a religious symbol meant to ward off these Others, and the ‘flag’ has significance in that the protester/s feels it is an item of protest against Muslims. Interestingly, two weeks after this incident, an actual flag appeared on the proposed site – accompanied by two pigs’ heads (Bowie 2007c:10). Perhaps this/these protester/s thought that severed pigs’ heads would deter Muslims from coming to Camden. When I asked residents why they thought someone placed these pigs’ heads on the proposed site, most seemed unsure. There was a general view that ‘Muslims don’t eat pork’, and perhaps this is why they placed them; they interpreted the situation with uncertainty. In similar controversies, opponents placed severed pigs’ heads on the proposed site of an Islamic Prayer Centre in Annangrove in an attempt to contaminate the site (Krugar 2007). Yet the pigs’ heads in Camden came with an Australian flag, aligning anti-Muslim sentiments with patriotism. Interestingly, the pigs’ heads protest in Camden encouraged both a police investigation and international media reporting of the school controversy. Yet the wooden crucifix did not. It was only after the pigs’ heads incident that the cross was removed. Though both are hostile actions against Muslims, local police acted sooner against the pigs’ heads.

Both the pigs’ heads and the crucifix illustrate how opponents saw the school as a religious and national struggle, where the school is a battle-front for the ongoing war against Muslims. A number of representations of Muslims expressed through these actions are of anti-Christian invaders and ‘un-Australian’ foreigners, all of which are interchangeable. The Old Testament story of David is adapted in ways that place Muslims as ‘Goliath’, the stronger, giant villain who was defeated by an innocent, benign, younger hero. The simplified binary of David vs. Goliath speaks volumes of the way extremist opponents of the school saw the magnitude of the enemy, as though David was a metaphor for the innocent and humble nation under threat.
of a giant Goliath-like Islam. Goliath operates here as a virtually pre-historic Arab folk devil. The effect of such an evocation produces a contest or clash of ‘civilisations’ narrative of mythological and transhistorical proportions. Paradoxically, the Goliath story predates Islam by more than a millennium.

Camden’s folk devil: Constructed in shadow of the Cronulla riots

This final section draws together the arguments made so far in this chapter and details the particular shapes of Camden’s Arab folk devil which drew significance from the Cronulla riots. These events were fresh in the minds of protesters, having taken place only two years prior to the Camden controversy. On the southern Sydney coastline, in December 2005, approximately 5000 people, mostly white Australian males, gathered at Cronulla beach, some attacking people they thought were Muslims, Arabs, or (to borrow a standard policing description) ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’ (see Abdel-Fattah 2007; Ho 2007; Poynting & Mason 2007; Poynting 2006; Poynting et al. 2001; Pugliese 2003). The violence supposedly began the week before, where a group of young Lebanese men clashed with three off-duty Anglo surf-life savers (Clennell 2006; Strike Force Neil 2006). These events, which became known as the ‘Cronulla race riots’, are relevant to this chapter in that the representations of Arabs and Muslims that were explicit among rioters parallel those in Camden of the invader, patriarchal, sexual predator, terrorist and gang member (see Jackson 2006, Collins 2009, Morgan 2007, Noble 2009, Levey & Moses 2009, Perera 2006, Wise 2009 for details), the key ingredients of the folk devil. It is important to situate the Camden protests in the aftermath of the Cronulla riot, as Camden’s folk devil takes a particular shape that concerns Australian identity and ‘the flag’, as explicit in these riots.

In Camden a white supremacist group attempted to organise protest activities in ways that sought to ‘re-live’ the Cronulla riots. In their view, the events in Cronulla were precipitated by a need to ‘defend the turf’, and they saw that a similar need was now arising in Camden. Organisers from this group set the date of this protest for Australia Day (January 26) in 2008, and called for activists to assemble in Camden, Cronulla and near the War Memorial at Hyde Park in the city of Sydney (Hildebrand 2008). For this group, Camden was a site of anti-Muslim struggle and an extension of the riots which occurred only three years before. These people saw the protests in Camden as a sequel to their anti-Muslim activism of Cronulla, thus
there are particular characteristics of the folk devil which mirror, and for some opponents were an extension of, the Cronulla riot.

Newspapers reported the Cronulla riots under headlines suggesting they exemplified racism in Australia. *The Daily Telegraph* reported the event as a ‘shameful day’. Other newspapers, even those which had contributed to social anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hysteria in the past (see Poynting *et al.* 2004), also reported the riots in a way that condemned them. Across Australia, reporters took the standpoint that the event was shameful. Given this was the popular narration, locals in Camden were quick to claim that their protest, though it mirrored the rioters in Cronulla, was not racism – and neither was Cronulla. A local activist against the school in Camden communicated this in an interview where she similarly discussed the episodes in Cronulla in a familiar tone:

WOMAN (Camden, New South Wales, 4 November 2007): What about the Cronulla protest? The journalists and the TV made it out to be a riot. We can’t even protest, you class this as a riot, you should be ashamed of yourself. It was a protest, we have a right to protest. It stops here and it stops now. You can’t go and molest our girls. We have a right to go to the beach, it’s our tradition, and that’s taken away from us (Neighbour 2008).

This interview, presumably about the protests in Camden, took place one day prior to the first official rally against the school. The woman positioned her protests as an extension of the Cronulla events, highlighting that the protestation is about a common enemy that forms the constructions of the Arab folk devil. Simple possessive pronouns of ‘we’ and ‘our’ demonstrate how this protester positions herself with a sense of possession over ‘girls’ (presumably, White Australians), ‘the beach’ and ‘traditions’; which arguably operates as metaphor for an archetypal Australian lifestyle dominated by surfing and beaches. ‘Our tradition’ signifies how this protester herself attempted to speak for Australians, not just the communities in Camden and Cronulla. The media coverage of the events in Cronulla as a riot obviously frustrated the woman, as she argued that the characterisation of protests against Muslims as a ‘riot’ was not warranted. A number of both interchangeable and cumulative signifiers of Arab folk devils are apparent in her position; they are un-Australian violators of national and iconic traditions, patriarchal and sexual predators. Also, the antagonistic reactions are clear in these discourses, particularly that of ‘Australians vs. Criminal misogynists’.
At the 2008 council meeting where the school was rejected, this same protester’s views on the school were again screened on television (on *ABC News*), as she exited the Camden Civic Centre wearing an Australian flag. The following exchange took place:

**REPORTER:** Why are you wearing an Australian flag?

**CAMDEN RESIDENT 3, CAMDEN RESIDENTS' GROUP** [The resident discussed above]: Why shouldn’t I be? Why is Channel 2 [ABC] against Australia?! (Iggulden 2008)

Chapter Two summarised the recent protests against development applications for mosques and Islamic schools across Australia, and detailed that Camden, though with similarities to these instances, is distinctive in that protesters have used the Australian flag as a prop when demonstrating against Islam and Muslims. The only comparable example was on the Gold Coast in Queensland (see Pierce 2009), where protesters chanted Australian slogans and played songs considered ‘Australian’. This exchange above shows the particular symbolism of the Australian flag and the connotations it has in the Australian context. These connotations are explicit in the way this resident positioned herself as a patriot opposing the school, and any challenges are met with accusations of ‘un-Australianess’. Journalists noted how other protesters, at this meeting also held national flags and other symbols which took on meanings of national significance:

On Tuesday evening, the Catholic mother of four stood in the bedroom of her Mount Hunter home in a dress of patriotic yellow and green and, looking in the mirror, she completed the *Cronulla chic look* with an Akubra adorned with small Australian flags. A few hours later [Kate] McCulloch was the poster girl of the revolution as Camden Council voted unanimously to reject the school proposed for Sydney’s rural outskirts on planning grounds alone (emphasis added) (*Brisbane Times* 2008).

Protesters like McCulloch treated the school issue in Camden as a battle front against Muslims in Australia. Dressed in the way described, McCulloch left the Camden Civic Centre and addressed the media, arguing ‘we’ do not want Arabs or Muslims in Camden or Australia, that they are ‘a dictatorship’, suicide bombers, oppressors of women, and dependent on welfare handouts. Thus she echoes the constructions of the Arab folk devil charted throughout this chapter and the jingoism voiced during and after the Cronulla riots.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined the various racialised, cumulative, interchangeable and contextual signifiers of the Arab folk devil that are at play throughout the controversy over an Islamic school in Camden. Conceptually, the folk devil is a useful analytical tool that not only pinpoints the ways disparate representations are accrued and become interchangeable (at times), but also in identifying how these constructions take a particularly racialised shape. Whether the opponents were reprising previous moral panics or controversies, or communicating general negative stereotypes of Muslims, folk devils in Camden operate as powerfully criminalised and deviant figures. Opponents mobilise all (and at other times, some) of these stereotypes and moral panics as ammunition to use against the school.

The positions against the school are situated in the broader Australian context, where there are increasing levels of hostility towards Arabs and Muslims. In the wake of several moral panics over the Arab Other (as highlighted by Poynting et al. 2004) and other events deemed controversial such as the uncovered meat scandal and the Durack controversy, the many interchangeable and cumulative signifiers of the folk devil intersect and overlap. Camden’s Arab folk devil is constructed as a patriarchal terrorist, who is also a gang rapist, murderer, drive-by shooter, and a hostile ‘un-Australian’ invader. Because of the frequent invocation of these images by locals protesting against the school, the Camden controversy needs to be contextualised and related to these previous panics. In the past decade, the Arab folk devil has haunted the Australian mainstream through several events that scholars (Poynting et al. 2004; Collins et al. 2000; Poynting & Morgan 2007) refer to as moral panics. Thus, it is no surprise that a proposed Islamic school received such a hostile reception by locals in Camden.

As Chapter Three detailed, there are sites all around Australia where local communities have crusaded against proposed mosques and Islamic schools.

In this and previous chapters we have looked at constructions of Self and Other and the ways these constructions operated in the rhetorical strategies used by opponents against the school. We have yet to address the fact that a portion of Camden’s residents were vocal against what they saw as the racism involved in opposition to the school. Additionally, the empirical data also allows us to explore the ways in which opponents cultivated strategies in order to deny or combat accusations of racism. This shall be the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Six

Islamophobia and its relationships with ‘race’ and racism in Camden

Previous chapters have discussed and deconstructed various narratives of Arabs, Muslims, Australians and Camdenites; and how ideas of ‘race’ are constructed to serve these discourses. Building on these discussions, this final chapter argues that there is a strong and malleable relationship between ‘race’, racism and a type of localised Islamophobia that is situated in the context of the school saga. Islamophobia, as it plays out in Camden, is not a single set of ideas that particularly target Muslims, but is a space of contestation where various ideas are negotiated in the Camden and the broader Australian contexts. The implicit and explicit significances of ‘race’ are inextricably linked to the ways people define ‘racism’. If people use Islamophobia as a substitute for the term ‘anti-Muslim racism’, as briefly explored in Chapter Two, then the definitions of racism in Camden are worth investigating.

This chapter argues that racism is a significant part of the controversy and explores how the term was raised in my data. Residents often denied racism, or accused other locals of racist views. These residents either negotiated a very limited definition of racism, a broad definition, or simply denied it. In analysing the ways some Camdenites approached ‘racism’, this chapter investigates what these discourses inform us about Islamophobia specifically in the context of the school saga. The malleable relationship between racism, ‘race’ and Islamophobia is evident in these discourses, particularly in the strategies that some opponents utilise in their denials of racism. These strategies demonstrate a type of ‘localised’ Islamophobia which plays out in Camden, which is not a single set of ideas that targets Muslims exclusively. Rather it is a space of contestation where various discourses are negotiated in the Camden context and in relation to the broader Australian context. This chapter is not concerned merely to point out that Islamophobia is a form of ‘racism’. This is too simplistic and I intend to expose the various ways that racism is manifested through prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, general hate and fear. Nor does it seek to divide a population into ‘racists’ and ‘non-racists’, or to distinguish ‘Islamophobes’ from ‘non-Islamophobes’.
‘World thinks we are racist’: Racism and the school saga

Some Camden residents feared that the community’s reputation was being tarnished by vocal bigots in the area. During the controversy, the editors of the *Camden Advertiser*, who were generally ‘pro-school’, commonly condemned local racism in their editorials. One editor, Alicia Bowie, wrote of the need for a ‘silent majority’ to vocalise their acceptance of Muslims and condemn the vocal minority who did not. The definitions of ‘racism’ and the denials of racist views need to be seen in the context where racism is considered socially unacceptable and most people prefer not to be classed as ‘racists’. Furthermore these practices of denying and defining racism should to be contextualised in the broader contemporary Australian context, where Federal Governments have legislated several anti-racism and anti-discrimination measures (Fenna 2004:179). Against the backdrop of these social standards legitimated by law and policy, many protesters and some interviewees felt the need to declare first and foremost that they were ‘not racists’. Indeed, racism was more strongly associated with Muslims who were homogenously seen as refusing to integrate via a steadfast eschewal of Australian values.

The media documented a number of protesters disowning racism at rallies. One popular example took place outside Fred Nile’s public information forum on Islam and the proposed school. One seemingly intoxicated protester, wearing a rugby league jersey and surrounded by protestors who wore Australian flags on their clothing, told *ABC* reporters that his position against the school was not influenced by racism at all, then went on to express an opinion which suggested otherwise. As reported in one news bulletin, the protester said:

> I said it's not about racism, it's about doing the right thing for the community. You know what I mean? Like, ay [sic], if we go down to Lakemba, Bankstown and shit like that, you walk through there, mate, they despise ya, they don't want to talk to ya. Half of us would get f***en knifed or robbed. I guarantee ya, mate. If they want to come down here and try take over, the same thing is going to happen in f***en them [sic], mate (Iggulden 2007)

This protester also made the following statement, which was reported elsewhere:

> If it does get approved, every ragger [“raghead”] that walks up the street’s going to get smashed up the arse by about 30 Aussies (Vincent 2007).
On a news program, other statements by the Parramatta-jersey protester were of a similar tone to that of the previous reports:

> We don’t want them. Look how many people is [sic] here? F**k them all, get rid of them all...
> (Neighbour 2008)

The various clips of the Parramatta-jersey protester illustrate the contradictory ways that people become defensive about racism, and how they position themselves in relation to the school and the Islamic community. Here is a situation where a protester used derogatory stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, and yet he positions himself as ‘not racist’. This begs the question: what is ‘racism’, and how do people use it or deny it in relation to the controversy? The Parramatta-jersey protester threatened physical violence against these dangerous Others whom he saw as coming from Bankstown and Lakemba. It is through this protester’s characterisation of Muslims and how they allegedly interact with other Australians that he attempts to legitimate such threats against these Others. This protester questions the use of the concept ‘racism’ to describe his attitude to Muslims, a frequently expressed challenge which necessitates an investigation into the ways racism is denied or negotiated according to the complex of positions people have on the school. This is not to suggest that all ‘denialists’ of racism were in fact racist, but that accusations of ‘racism’ are not usually taken lightly and produce defensive responses.

Research for this dissertation managed to find only one media report which showed a resident proudly declaring that her opinion against the school was ‘racist’. On Australia Day, in 2008, a local resident told a *Triple J TV* reporter that Australia is an easy going country and Muslims had no place in Camden. When the reporter questioned whether the contents of her opinion were racist, the resident shrugged her shoulders and agreed: ‘It’s probably racist, yeah, but that’s just the way it is’ (*Hack TV* 2008). Such assertions were rare. Only one of my interviewees embraced the tag ‘racist’, though with sarcasm: ‘I am quite happy to be placed within the category of racists, but I have friends from all different nationalities...’ (Estelle, *interview*, 12 August 2009). However, for most stakeholders in the controversy, views qualifying as racist were those of a vocal minority. As a result of these ‘loud minority’ voices, Camdenites became defensive of their tolerance and reputation. In an article titled ‘World thinks we are racist’, journalist Alicia Bowie (2008u) discussed how the Camden
Advertiser’s website was swamped with ‘comments calling Camden residents racists’. The comments section of the article online attracted a heated debate among residents:

Is it possible to take legal action on behalf of the townspeople against the news outlets that have affected Camden's reputation? Camden needs to be defended - it is a lovely, friendly town which has been unjustifiably attacked. If an individual had been spoken about in that way, surely there would be an urgent need to defend that person’s reputation.

Posted by Skye, 5/06/2008 9:32:32 AM

Skye, Camden isn't being seen as racist because of media outlets portraying Camden that way. Camden is being seen as racist because racist people in Camden parade their racism in the streets of Camden and in the comments section of newspapers.

Posted by Graeme, 6/06/2008 11:05:30 PM

There are parallels between the ways that the media misrepresents Arabs and Muslims (see Manning 2002; Poynting et al. 2004; Hage 2002; Saniotis 2004) and the misrepresentations of local Camdenites as ‘racists’. A local wrote a letter to Salam Cafe (the Muslim TV comedy talk show discussed in the previous chapter), explaining that they felt the media were being unfair in representing Camden as a bigoted community due to the actions of a few extremists, to which a panellist replied, ‘Welcome to being Muslim’. The exchange between Skye and Graeme epitomised how locals debated who was responsible for Camden’s tarnished reputation; the burden would be placed either on news outlets or the local ‘racists’ themselves. These debates, which occurred over the internet, were not screened on these news outlets, perhaps because they took place online instead of at protests where there were cameras and journalists present.

‘The most deplorable load of bigoted rubbish’: The reactions against racism

The changing understandings of ‘race’ and racism, and recognition of the complexity of the social processes at stake, have led many to talk about ‘new racism’ (Augoustinos & Quinn 2003; Barker 1981; Cole 1997; Dunn et al. 2004; Gilroy 1987; Goot & Watson, 2005; Hall 1992: 256-8; Parekh 1987; Pon 2009; Sniderman et al. 1991). According to these scholars, the ‘new racism’ is particularly explicit in anti-immigration ideologies. In public discourses that treat particular migrants as a threat, ideas of ‘culture’ and ‘the nation’ are central. The focus of ‘race’ moves beyond a category that concerns a person’s skin colour (as outlined in Chapter Two), and it concentrates on ‘culture’. Critical ‘race’ theory (CRT) is relevant to
these relationships between ‘race’ and racism that are explicit within the Camden controversy. CRT originated from legal scholarship in the United States and was spread across to other disciplines by activists and academics (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 1993, 2000; Solórzano 1998). CRT enables a critical explanation of ‘race’ and racism, and recognises that racism is normalised and deep-seated within American society (Delgado and Stefancic 1993; Solórzano 1997). In the Australian Camdenite context, CRT can help uncover the discursive narratives about ‘us’ and ‘them’ that are central to this dissertation. Three of the basic tenets of CRT (that are relevant here) are of the intersections between ‘race’, gender and class (and other identities), essentialism, and cultural nationalism (Ladson-Billings 1998; Valentine 2007; Dixson and Rousseau 2005; Parker and Lynn 2002). The intersectionality was apparent in the material covered in Chapter Two, particular in the constructions of Muslims as a ‘race’ and the many relationships this ‘race’ had with class, gender and ethnicity. Chapter Two also identified how Muslims were essentialised as ‘Arabs’ or ‘Middle Easterners’. Chapter Three expanded on these ideas in relation to cultural nationalism, where opponents utilised their own versions of Camden’s history as ammunition against the proposed school. Here, I argued that they nationalised their protest. The remainder of this chapter builds on these ideas with a specific focus on racism and Islamophobia.

In recent times, the populist discourses regarding the state of the nation and its relationship to the presence of immigrants or minorities have exemplified this ‘new racism’ by attempting to disguise racially motivated perspectives (Barker 1981; Dunn et al. 2004). Barker argues that discourses of ‘genuine fears’ and the ‘common sense’ approach of protecting our ‘way of life’ illustrate that ‘racism is theorized out of the guts and made into commonsense’. Barker goes on: ‘This, then, is the character of the new racism’ or what he calls ‘pseudo-biological culturalism’ (Barker 1981:23). In accordance with Hall’s ideas of ‘race’ as a floating signifier (discussed in Chapter Two), people replace ‘race’ nowadays with ‘culture’. It is argued here that the Camden controversy specifically entails both ‘new racism’ and what scholars would term ‘old racisms’, that is, racism focused on skin colour and appearances. Whether Australian flags were being planted on the proposed school site, or hired security guards at protests were verbally abused because they were ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’, or the ‘Lebanese’ were the prime focus of anxiety, there are a variety of layers that form a distinct discourse of Muslim ‘race’ in the Camden context.
Some residents who were against the school purely on fears that it would increase traffic, or others who were supportive of the school, would try to separate themselves from what they thought of as local ‘racists’. Their characterisation of ‘racists’ are reflective of what scholars term ‘old racism’ and ‘new racism’. For one interviewee, Matthew, the protest against the school was indeed ‘racist’ and had inspired him, he claimed, to modify his opposition to the school to a neutral stance. Yet in the course of the interview, Matthew negotiated between ‘complete apathy’ and opposing the school:

I didn’t care, either it came or it didn’t come. It’s a school. What difference would it make? I don’t see why there was so much drama over it. Um, the only thing I had a problem with, was the roads. Um, we can’t support what we got now, and they wanna [sic] bring another school. That’s what I was worried about (Matthew, interview, 3 July 2009).

The interview became a space where Matthew thought about his position towards the school. In light of the ‘drama’ the proposal unleashed, Matthew attempted to avoid participating, declaring that ‘indecisiveness’ was a strategy of differentiating himself from the ‘dramatic’ opponents, whom he condemned. When I discussed with him these opponents at length, understandings of ‘racism’ came up:

[Researcher]: What about your friends who attended the rally, were they concerned with traffic?
Matthew: No, no. It was more for the Muslim side of it, that’s what they were concerned about. They were [pauses and takes a deep breath], they were brainwashed by the media. I don’t think a lot of people were open minded to who they were. And they thought Muslims, terrorists. That’s exactly what they thought. And that’s what they went with. So, yeah.
[Researcher]: So you obviously disagreed?
Matthew: Yeah, I don’t believe that just because you’re Muslim, you’re a terrorist, I don’t believe that, that’s crap! That’s like saying that just because I’m Australian, I’m racist. That’s how we are looked upon now at the moment. It’s not like that.
[Researcher]: Were they at all concerned with ‘infrastructure’, ‘environment’ or other things?
Matthew: I think to be honest, a lot of people used the infrastructure as an excuse. I think deep down, it was the Muslim background, that’s why they didn’t want the school. If it was a Catholic school, they would’ve had it there. I don’t think there would have been so much drama over it.
[Researcher]: so it was about racism? You think?
Matthew: Yeah, it was about racism, I don’t care what anyone said, it’s racist, what happened here was racist (Matthew, interview, 3 July 2009).
For Matthew, people that portray Muslims as terrorists are racists driven by stereotypes. He sought to distance himself from them. Other locals interpreted similarly certain protest actions against the school, such as a flyer distributed by the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group. Locals found this flyer in their letter boxes in April 2008 as the Council was processing the development proposal. The group requested that locals write letters to the Council, even though the submission period for council letters against and for the school had expired, and to Geoff Corrigan, the only local elected political supporter of the school at the time. The group requested donations from members of the public to fund pamphlets, environmental and planning reports, and another anti-school rally. Many locals argued this flyer was intolerant and racist and the local police inspector declared they did not receive an application for another anti-school rally (Bowie 2008f:16). For local newspaper editor, Rebecca Senescall (2008d:6), these actions were ‘Flyers in the Face of Tolerance’. One local resident, who misunderstood the flyer and thought Corrigan had organised them, sent him a death threat for being a ‘racist’ and hoped Muslims ‘blew’ him up (Senescall 2008c:1). Some residents of Camden, both for and against the school, would define these pamphlets as ‘racist’ or ‘bigoted’ and wrote to the local paper expressing their concerns:

...I don’t know where these uneducated people come from – they most likely do not represent the community as a whole and know nothing about the people they are so bigoted about. Their question: ‘Will this threaten your lifestyle?’ My answer: Do any of the other schools in Camden municipality threaten your lifestyle – including the public and Christian schools? Their question: ‘How much of your taxes are subsidising this proposal?’ My answer: Probably no more than anyone’s taxes are subsidising any other school in the Camden area. Their question: ‘What will be the traffic impact?’ My answer: No doubt the same as any other school in the area, public or private, Christian or not. Their question: ‘What will be the environmental impact on our agricultural land?’ My answer: Good grief, what are they going to grow?... I am not of the Islamic religion and find this pamphlet the most deplorable load of bigoted rubbish I have ever seen in my community. There is a huge population of Islamic people who are Australian by birth and heritage and many who are new Australians – all of which [sic] are no different to any non-Islamic people. I suggest this so called residents’ group checks into the history of the Christian religions and non-Christian/non-Islamic people before they poke their sticks at everyone else, trying to stir up hatred. It’s another method of terrorism and they want the community to do their dirty work for them.... to deliberately try to cause hatred towards an innocent group of people based on their religion is ridiculous. Surely we’re past that. It is important we don’t just hear the opinions of a few. Have your say as an Australian (Bond 2008:24).

For Lyn Bond, Muslims are Australians – contrary to the ways some other locals constructed them. Furthermore, Bond was sceptical about the concerns raised in the pamphlet. In each of
her responses to the questions posed by the group, Bond normalised the application as a ‘school’ and observed how other issues regarding traffic, taxes, and environment were mobilised to disguise views that would single out Muslims. For Bond, bigotry was obvious in the ways people drew out a number of concerns that were not expressed about non-Islamic schools. Another critic of local opponents, Emma Davies, similarly questioned whether some opponents spoke of planning issues in ways that covered their racially motivated opposition. Davies explained that she no longer patronised the local post office because it displayed a set of leaflets against the school for the residents. Also, her local petrol station had exhibited ‘Camden Pride’ T-shirts and she argued that Southern Cross stickers and tattoos have been misused as protest items (Davies 2008:2). Davies, like Bond, questioned how some opponents expressed anti-Muslim sentiment. A week later, Danny Himbrechts wrote to the Advertiser agreeing with Lyn Bond’s letter. He called a number on the leaflet and asked to speak in favour of the school the next time the Camden/Macarthur Residents’ Group decided to protest against it. After a ‘heated’ argument ensued, the person on the other end ‘hung up’. Himbrechts wrote that the group are ‘a detriment and a danger to society more than the belief that they seem to represent. Until they get their facts right, hold them responsible for inciting racial tendencies in our community. That is the real crime’ (Himbrechts 2008:17).

These three positions exemplify how some residents identified local anti-Muslim sentiment and made the warranted point that not all Camdenites hold these views. These residents identified how others constructed Muslims as recent immigrants or generally ‘un-Australian’, before moving to dispel such stereotypes as born of racist myth-making. Bond felt that certain anxieties expressed in the pamphlet only came up because it was a Muslim school, and similar to Davies, highlighted how anxieties over Muslims link with expressions of national pride. In taking a stance against local anti-Muslim bigotry, both residents were motivated to articulate their positions on the school in light of these opponents. Himbrechts took a position in support of the school after reading the pamphlet distributed by the Residents’ Group, which he felt was inciting racism.

The anti-school campaign elicited a progressive anti-racist response both within and outside of Camden. Young people in particular were involved in this, as some Camdenites of the Australian ‘Facebook generation’ (Macgibbon 2011) started various facebook.com groups against local protesters. The Camden Advertiser interviewed three such youths. One felt that there was ‘too much hate and intolerance displayed in Camden’. Another seemed passionate
about removing Camden’s tarnished image as a racist community. The third had observed all the anti-school groups on facebook.com and expressed disappointment (Bowie 2008b:3). Also, another young girl published an article challenging the stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs, commenting that the ‘plan is to build a school, a place of learning and education, not a place of brainwashing or violence and misogyny’ (Kelaita 2008:25). A local young film maker created a short film called ‘Jamelah and James’ (Ryan n.d), a story of a Muslim ‘Camdenite’ (Jamelah) who becomes romantically involved with a (presumably) non-Muslim resident (James). The storyline unfolds after the characters notice each other during their day-to-day bus trips through Camden. The climax of the film takes place when James, seated on a bus, sees two local youths attacking Jamelah on the side of the road, ripping her headscarf off. James plays the hero card, yells ‘stop the bus!’, and rescues Jamelah, though landing in hospital himself after the two youths beat him up. In these ways the controversy galvanised expressions of multicultural acceptance.

Spectators of the controversy were particularly focused on the pigs’ heads episode which attracted the spotlight of the international media. Television writers, in creating storylines about anti-Muslim racism, took inspiration from the incident. For instance, on an SBS television crime series East West 101, a Muslim police officer visits a site for a proposed mosque. He finds pigs’ heads on stakes and notices Australian flags on nearby properties. This scene was strikingly similar to the surroundings of the actual proposed school site in Camden, where nearby residents draped Australian flags on their properties. The idea that a Muslim is not only the main protagonist, but also in a senior police position, challenges the existing stigmatisations of Muslims as a detriment to Australian society. Instead, East West 101 offers a different representation of Muslims as people who can be role models and ‘police’ communities, rather than being those who need to be ‘policing’.36 Also, comedian Robyn Butler, one of the creators of an ABC program called The Librarians stated that the Camden controversy inspired her storylines for the series:

> After my nanna died, we were driving home from Newcastle, where she lived, and we heard this story [on the radio] about an Islamic school in Camden. The locals were up in arms, they were being insane, saying things like, ‘They could have anything under those burkas, they could have AK-47s’.

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36 It is worth noting that East West 101 has received mixed responses from Muslim communities in Australia, as Nicholl (2010: 573) argues the ‘challenge to the vilification of Muslims in the show is limited by the production context’.
They were planting pigs’ heads all over the site because it’s meant to bring seven years’ bad luck to Muslims. Listening to this vitriol was so disturbing and infuriating. I was ropeable.

We wrote this into the script of _Librarians 2_. It took a few drafts to stop being so angry (Kalina 2009)

Butler, who plays an Islamophobic character, ‘Frances O’Brien’, asks Muslim visitors to leave their back-packs at the front counter when they enter the library in fear that they might conceal weapons in their bags. O’Brien calls Muslim visitors ‘extremists’ and refers to Arabic as ‘gobbledy-gook’. She becomes alarmed when an Arabic woman, using one of the computers in the library, is looking at a website in Arabic - which O’Brien classifies as a security threat. In the second series of the show, a Muslim (‘Nada Al-Farouk’ played by Nicole Nabout) is temporarily promoted as Head Librarian. The librarians then find a wooden stake with a pig’s head in the return-book chute. Al-Farouk challenges the view of Muslim women as subordinate and oppressed as expressed by some opponents of the proposed Islamic school in Camden. She is an accomplished woman who speaks three languages, has a double degree, is community liaison officer, on the executive of the Islamic Council, and President of the ‘Girls for Future Leaders Association’. By playing an Islamophobic character and creating a Muslim protagonist, Bulter challenges the existing racist stigmatisations of Muslims and generates positive images of Muslim women as empowered, smart and friendly. The storylines that were inspired by the Camden controversy in this television series mocked the anti-Muslim hysteria in Camden and challenged racism.

The anti-racist responses discussed above demonstrate a broader understanding of racism which resonates with the evolution of academic thought on the topic. In these responses and anti-racism actions, these stakeholders implicitly identify what scholars call the ‘new racism’ or ‘cultural racism’ (see Augustinos & Quinn 2003; Balibar 1991; Barker 1981; Dunn _et al._ 2004; Hall 1992:256-8; Lentin 2012) in that they are able to see that skin colour is not the primary signifier of difference or racialised perception in this context. Instead, these responders are aware that racism manifests due to a number of other differentiating factors, including cultural differences, representations of nation and of course, religion. While anti-Muslim opponents either denied racism or restricted definitions of racism (as discussed in the next section), other stakeholders negotiated and expanded definitions of racism.
‘I’m not a racist but...’: Strategies for denying racism

Denial itself is something which needs to be examined. Cohen writes that denial takes place in a way that claims an ‘undesirable situation’ (applied to my particular study – ‘racism’) did not happen, is acceptable, is redefined, or accommodated (Cohen 2001:51-2). Also, the concept of racism has interchangeable moral and political undertones, where the claim that a view is racist denounces the view as ‘immoral and unworthy’ (Miles & Brown 2003:3). Van Dijk (1992) argues that denial is one of the crucial properties of contemporary racism. In responses to the allegations of racism, opponents developed several interconnected strategies of denial. Specifically, the most common strategies (discussed below) included: subtyping ‘good’ Muslims from what they saw as the ‘bad’ majority; defining ‘racism’ as a category of discrimination that is not relevant to religion; marking out local and national borders as exclusive of the school and Muslim people; claiming they were victims of a larger smear campaign against Anglo-Saxons in Australia; and legitimising racist generalisations by drawing on specific examples of the Arab folk devil. These strategies demonstrate a type of localised Islamophobia which plays out in Camden, which is not a single set of ideas that exclusively target Muslims. Rather it is a space where various ideas intersect and are negotiated in the Camden and broader Australian context.

‘I have Muslim friends’: Subtyping and denial

The growing stigmatisation of the town as ‘racist’, as highlighted in the previous chapters, meant that some opponents felt the need to reject first and foremost the idea that they were ‘racists’. Some locals argued they had ‘Muslim friends’ as a tactic of strengthening and providing legitimacy for these positions on the proposal; this was a principal strategy in racism denial:

why must the resident of Camden accept this proposal, just to be seen to be Politically Correct [sic] and not racist. One of my bestfriends [sic] is a Muslim. She has intergrated [sic] into society and is a hardworking and nice person. There [sic] not all like her, if they were there wouldn’t be fear and mistrust in our communities (Letter to Camden Council, received 12 November 2007)
This extract exemplifies the practice of subtyping certain peoples in order to deny racism. Subtyping is a process whereby certain individuals or groups are considered exceptions from a larger deviant group. Such subtyping is a way of negotiating the central dilemma faced by the Camden area, tarnished as a racist community. In the example above, the resident uses her association with such a subtype in order to legitimise her opposition as not racist. In addition to strengthening the defensive rhetoric of denial, subtyping enables the opponent to determine what makes a good Muslim: one who has assimilated into Australian society and is thus of good character. Grounded in this opponent’s construction of Muslims, including her ‘best friend’, is the view that they are from outside of Australia. It also presupposes that those who are subtyping have the moral authority to do so. The process of subtyping ‘good Muslims’ from ‘bad Muslims’ through ‘Muslim friends’ was observable in my interview with Samantha, who also classed Muslims as foreigners:

I am against the school. I am against it, not because I am a racist, I am not a racist. I have personal experiences with that culture and it would not conform or fit in the area. My sister’s ex [partner] was a Lebanese, he was controlling. If their people are all like that, you with all the Allah crap, then there is no point in coming here. I could not stand it. Allah this, Allah that. We don’t need that Allah crap here in Camden. Those people try to control other people, it’s their culture and you don’t see that many in this area. It’s like, how can I say, the Lebanese and their Allah just make too many problems. Don’t get me wrong, I have Muslim friends, but they are normal, they are not like that. I’m not racist, my dad is, if he was doing this interview he would be saying racist things, he’s of a different generation (Samantha, interview, 30 July 2009)

There are two groups of Muslims whom Samantha discussed, yet one took precedence as she detailed her experiences with ‘that culture’. Her sister’s former partner is specifically racialised as Lebanese, informing her view that all Muslims are Lebanese. The two categories are interchangeable, as Samantha stated elsewhere during the interview that Muslims should specifically ‘go back to Lebanon’. The other groups of Muslims are her friends who she argued she had positive interactions with. Her negative experiences (based on her sister’s ex-partner) characterise this ‘Muslim’ culture, yet her positive experiences with ‘normal’ Muslim friends are subtyped. It is obvious that her personal experiences with others she considers ‘Muslims’ are selective in shaping her position on the school. There are various ethnic, religious and cultural markers of Muslims, (demonstrating many views of ‘race’) in these views. Interestingly, Samantha marked out her father as a racist because of an assumption about generational differences, stating elsewhere in the interview that her father
refuses to interact with any Muslims. For Samantha, it appears a ‘racist’ is someone whose views are so extreme, that they even refuse to have ‘Muslim’ friends. The superiority assumed in feeling authorised to judge who is a good or bad Muslim is distanced from racism and taken for granted as common sense reasoning.

In a few cases, opponents would subtype Christian Arabs from Muslim Arabs, and felt that by discussing their ‘Christian Arab’ friends in passing, arguments of ‘racism’ could be refuted. Some letters to Council argued that ‘...I have friends who are Muslims mainly Christian Muslims [sic]... I have nothing personal against Muslim’, and ‘I do not have anything against Lebanese people I have friends that are Lebanese, but they are Christian Lebanese not Muslim’ (Letters to Camden Council, received 31/10/2007 and 1/11/2007). The interchangeable nature of ‘Muslim’ with ‘Lebanese’ and ‘Arab’ with ‘Muslim’ in these extracts is highly serviceable in their tasks of denying prejudice or intolerance. The first opponent uses the term ‘Christian Muslims’, which is reminiscent of Pauline Hanson’s statement at her book launch in 2007, arguing that she would welcome some Muslims to Australia, specifically ‘Christian Muslims’ (Packham 2007). She was almost certainly referring to Arab Christians, which exemplifies the ways that anti-Muslim views racialise Muslims as Arabs. Popular definitions of Islamophobia as strictly ‘anti-Muslim’ racism need to accommodate the complexity that is exemplified here.

Other residents who denied racism often felt their denials were corroborated once they had established that they had non-Anglo-Saxon friends. Kate McCulloch, the self-appointed anti-Islam figurehead, rejected accusations of racism and discussed her ‘non-Australian’ friends to legitimate her arguments. After Camden Council officially rejected the school, McCulloch told journalists that Australians should change the existing racial vilification laws to accommodate her views that Muslims should not be in Australia. After a journalist asked whether such a view was racist, she argued ‘racism’ was ‘...just a word. I have many English, Irish, Greek and Italian friends’ (Dart & Creagh 2008). Later, when testifying in the Land and Environment Court, McCulloch again discussed her non-Anglo friends:

I’m no redneck, xenophobic, racist like the media had put towards me. They have always edited everything I have said. They’ve never shown my full story. I just want people that are Muslim to let their women and children go to our schools, learn our way of life, live with our children, learn how happy we can be! We go to football! We have BBQs! I mean there is nothing wrong with our culture!
Why are people coming to Westernised societies and not living our life... Nearly all the Arab states are either living in a war zone or their children and women and men are dying of starvation... Their mothers attending these schools [Islamic schools in the West] pick their children up not mixing with our mothers, the mothers over here. I have friends that are, I’ve got a Turkish friend, I’ve got, I’ve got friends of every nationality and yet sadly I don’t have any Muslim friends. You know why? cause [sic] they’re not allowed to mix with us.

Camden’s self-appointed anti-Muslim figurehead exemplifies how the contested nature of ‘race’ results in contested definitions of ‘racism’. McCulloch spoke about Muslims as though they were a ‘nationality’, then spoke of ‘Arab states’ as though all Arabs are Muslim. McCulloch refers to two particular practices considered uniquely Australian, ‘football’ and ‘barbecues’, both of which she considers as uniquely Australian. Her representations of Australian culture and Westernised societies also frame her protest as an Islam vs. West binary. There are discursive constructions of Muslims as Arabs and non-Western, which are problematised further by her discussion of her Turkish friend. This friend is then McCulloch’s evidence in her denial of accusations of racism. In McCulloch’s mind, nobody who can lay claim to a circle of friends that includes individuals of more than one ‘race’ can be called a racist. Yet despite her long sermon (the longest of all residents who appeared on the DVD shown by Council in the Land and Environment Court) she was ignored by the court but not the mainstream media.

In each of these strategies of denial, the discursive constructions of Muslims as a ‘race’ influence how these opponents reject racism. As cultural diversity in Australia is (supposedly) increasingly accepted, some people approach racism in ways that increasingly complicate it as a phenomenon. They espouse a range of rhetorical strategies to air certain anxieties about Muslims and protest the school. Whether these strategies included claiming the presence of Muslims within their circle of friends, or of friends of different backgrounds, or claiming to accept ‘Christian Muslims’, their common purpose is to deny racism so as to protect their right to be heard in the debate. Furthermore, the literal definitions of Islamophobia as ‘fear of Islam/Muslims’ fails to capture these complexities. Rather, a local Islamophobia takes a particular shape in Camden that is based on shifting constructions of Muslims which can sometimes create absurdities such as Arabs who are not Muslim (‘Christian Muslims’).
‘Islam is not a race’: Racism as ‘old racism’

The processes of subtyping ‘good’ Muslims and ‘bad’ ones, or Christian Arabs and Muslim Arabs, demonstrate the many representations of Muslims as a ‘race’. For some residents, these processes affirm a general view that ‘races’ actually exist among humans. Such a view paves the way for a related strategy of denial: that ‘Islam’ is a religion rather than a ‘race’ of people, and thus objections directed towards Islam cannot correctly be seen as racist. An instance of this was aired on one of the ABC’s Q&A programs, on which invited politicians and other famous personalities discussed Camden Council’s decision to reject the school. In the audience, a candidate for the Australian Protectionist Party and anti-Islam campaigner, Darrin Hodges, suggested that ‘town planning laws’ needed a provision to allow local residents a cultural and social impact statement. Hodges argued that such a provision would enable residents to say ‘we don’t want our suburb invaded by Muslims’. Warren Mundine, chairman of the Australian Labor Party, and Bob Brown, leader of the Australian Greens Party, were on the panel and responded to Hodges:

Mundine: This is a fear, what this gentleman [Hodges] is doing... I think we need to get away from saying ‘this is only a suburb for Muslims, this is only a suburb for Christians, this is only a suburb for white people, this is only a suburb for black people’. I think that is bizarre, it’s not the Australian way. We’ve always mixed, we have always got on well together. I think we need to leave it like that. (audience applauds)

Brown: And I will tell you why, sir. Australian Muslims, like other Australians, love their children. They want them to have a good education. They’re absolutely great citizens of this country and they should have the same rights as everyone else to be at this school (audience applauses)

Hodges: One. Islam is not a race, so it’s not racist to oppose Islam (Q&A 2008).

While Mundine and Brown did not accuse Hodges specifically of ‘racism’, nor did they indicate that they were specifically for or against an Islamic school in Camden, both implied a personal position against local anti-Muslim xenophobia, as other panellists also did. Yet Hodges still felt the need to deny racism and claim that Muslims are not a distinct ‘race’. Hodges’ view is reliant on strict definitions of racism which overlook how culture, religion and the nation are increasingly substituted for ‘skin colour’ and other biological differences. For Hodges, what is racist (and hence potentially indefensible) is to oppose ‘races’, a position which displays two ideologies which are significant in conceptualising the shape of Islamophobia in Camden. The first presupposes that distinct ‘races’ actually exist even
though it has been repeatedly demonstrated to lack any basis in biology as a category (see Hall 1999: Miles and Brown 2003). The second overlooks the way ‘culture’ and ‘race’ have become interchangeable in the ‘new racism’. Like Stratton, who argues that the ‘new racism’ might be termed ‘culturalism’ (1998:64), Bernasconi (1998:291) writes:

> because an unclarified conception of culture serves as an euphemism for race … the radical difference between ‘culture’ and ‘race’ disappears. When culture serves as a proxy for race, the dynamic character of an interculturalism that is porous across cultures is lost sight of and we are left with cultures as discrete, autonomous units.

### Marking national and local borders against racialised Others

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, opponents often portrayed Camden as an area of both local and national significance. Certain constructions of Muslims as foreigners, un-Australian and non-local collectively racialised all Muslims as outsiders. Opponents used abstract terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘way of life’ in their positions against Muslims and the school. On a local level, residents argued Muslims had no place in Camden’s rural way of life. On a national level, opponents called for a moratorium on Islamic immigration, while others voiced fears that Muslims would not adopt the ‘Australian way of life’. Hage’s discussion on contemporary racism in Australia attends to ways that racism operates as a nationally including and excluding practice. Attitudes that are often understood as ‘racist’, such as a person labelling others as ‘wogs’, or telling them to go back to their own country, illustrate how a ‘racist’ attempts to ‘direct traffic’ within the national space, determining who is included and excluded (Hage 1998:17). As Hage observes, the practice of exclusion allows patriotic nationalists to hold a superior position, perceiving themselves as ‘spatial managers’ who attempt to maintain a ‘homely nation’ (Hage 1998:47). Whether the opponents of the school in Camden waved Australian flags at rallies, or chanted ‘Aussie cheers’; these particular residents formed local and national borders in ways that excluded Muslims.

The practice of positioning objections to the school as a matter of local and national significance was another strategy that critics used to deny racism. Opponents sought to gain support for their objections by insisting that they were acting in the interest of ‘the nation’ and in order to protect ‘Australian values’. For instance, local Christian Democratic Party
candidate, Godwin Goh, pledged that if elected he would move to have the existing anti-racism and anti-discrimination laws changed to restrict the building of Islamic schools and mosques, and further proposed a moratorium on Islamic immigration. Yet Goh disputed that his election platform was ‘racist’ or ‘bigoted’, arguing instead that it was in the interests of the nation:

That word [bigot] means intolerant. We’re not intolerant, we actually love Muslims but we don’t like what they practice and some of their beliefs, because they’re not favourable to our society and community harmony (Kinsella 2007a:10).

Goh’s position on the presence of Islam and Muslims in Camden draws on larger social anxieties about their place in the nation. In Goh’s statement, specific antagonistic constructions of Self and Other were apparent. Camdenites are Aussies, tolerant and peaceful, and Muslims are foreigners, intolerant and threatening. By positioning one as ‘more Australian’ than the other, Goh strategically marked out local and national borders in his denial of racism. Yet there is also an inconsistency of position, as he disavows intolerance at the same time as making assertions which are intolerant of perceived Muslims. Evidently, there are certain stigmas associated with being intolerant or ‘a bigot’, which Goh tried to avoid by arguing that his position was of national and local significance.

Pauline Hanson, the former One Nation leader, was another political candidate who arrived in Camden and then called for a moratorium on Islamic immigration. Three years after Hanson proposed these immigration amendments in her position against the school, she declared she was becoming an immigrant, leaving Australia for the United Kingdom (Nicholls 2010). A British political party, which prohibits non-white membership and has a fiercely anti-immigration stance, welcomed Hanson’s migration (Totaro 2010), though later Hanson abandoned these plans. Meanwhile, in Camden, Kate McCulloch was dubbed by the media as the ‘next Pauline Hanson’ – a title that she proudly welcomed (Murphy 2008), and she ran in the 2010 federal election as the One Nation candidate for the seat of Macarthur, campaigning for a moratorium on Islamic immigration to Australia (Ramachandran 2009), a policy platform that mimicked Hanson’s. The Hanson anti-immigration philosophy still continued in Camden even though the actual face of anti-immigrant political racism was herself planning

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37 Goh was not successful at the election. He subsequently moved out of the area and has indicated he will contest the seat of Baulkham Hills at the next State election.
to migrate. Even though, as documented in media reports, Hanson and McCulloch both denied racism, they evoked the need to protect national identity and borders in ways that discriminate against Muslims. McCulloch later appeared on a current affairs program, 60 Minutes, where she again argued that Australians should halt immigration and reiterated her xenophobic views. McCulloch then joined Pauline Hanson in her bid for a seat in the NSW Legislative Council in 2011. Both were unsuccessful.

**Denials and the ‘racist tag’**

Another related strategy of denial became apparent when protesters argued they were victims of an unfair smear campaign. These protesters would claim they were merely nation-loving folk who were interested in protecting Australia from Muslims. Such forms of denial were undermined when opponents racially vilified Muslims as ‘un-Australian’, then argued that they were unfairly labelled ‘racists’ by others. This was particularly exemplified by radio shock-jock Alan Jones, who discussed the Camden controversy and argued that ‘Australians’ are not ‘racists’. Jones read out, on air, some of the results of a ten year study conducted by Professor Kevin Dunn which were reported upon in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This study exposed NSW to be the most ‘racist state’ in Australia. In the article, Dunn commented on the Camden controversy, and according to his research results, there was nothing unique or different about the Camden area in comparison to other parts of NSW. The article also featured a young hijab-wearing Muslim girl describing an experience of racial discrimination where she was physically assaulted at Town Hall station in Sydney (Price 2008).

Without even examining the findings of *Challenging Racism: The Anti-Racism Research Project* (2008), Jones immediately argued that specifically Anglo Saxons were victims of both racism and the ‘racist tag’.:

> The easiest way to silence some poor unsuspecting citizen from saying anything is by calling him [sic] a racist. Mind you, it’s never racist when dreadful things are said about Anglo-Saxons, but that’s another story.... The report found that a high rate of migration concentrated in Sydney meant a higher rate of encounters with different cultures. Well, most Australians would say that’s no bad thing. But when they find that these people don’t respect Australia -its customs, its flag, its way of life - when they choose not to work or fail to assimilate, then it’s not racist to say what the hell are you doing here? ...

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38 The contents of the report, as published in a journal article, contradicted the observations of Alan Jones. According to the study, areas of cultural diversity were places where racism was frequent. As a result, racisms are ‘everyday’ to the point where they are becoming a normalised practice  (Dunn et al. 2009:8).
And then good old Camden is immediately mentioned. Because people at Camden object to an Islamic school when hardly any Muslims live in the area, or people at Bass Hill turn up on Saturday to protest against the construction of a 1200-student complex, a Muslim college, on former Bass High School land, then they’re racist.... That’s not racism. That’s called defending your own patch (emphasis added) (Jones 2008).

It is important to review how Jones presented his ideas of racism in a particularly populist tone. Jones argues racism is something not practised by ‘Australians’, yet is unfairly blamed on Anglo-Saxons. There are important characterisations of ‘Australians’, particularly as Anglo-Saxon, whom Jones discussed in relation to broader ideas about national customs, flag and ‘way of life’. He presented the Camden controversy as a situation where locals were objecting to the school only because of the lack of Muslims in the area, rather than for the many reasons outlined in this dissertation. Jones’ rhetoric positioned the Other as the lazy, disrespectful, unassimilated non-Anglo migrant. These racialised descriptors, with their various connotations, worked in a way that narrated ‘racism’ as an unfair label wielded to silence fears over the welfare of the nation. Here, ‘racism’ is popularly defined to exclude ideas of the new racism and the ways ‘culture’ and ‘nation’ are increasingly being substituted for ‘race’.

At times when local residents attempted to preserve Camden’s ‘culture’ by excluding Muslims, they argued that they were unfairly labelled ‘racist’. These positions paralleled the ways critics attempted to preserve ‘Australian culture’. One resident, Ryan Bell, who set up and administered an anti-school group on facebook.com, appeared on television expressing such concerns. On the group’s wall, Bell posted that Muslim families would not integrate into the local area because they are ‘people that are Islamic’. On ABC’s Q&A program, Bell spoke of the Council’s decision to reject the school:

I’m from Camden, where recently the proposed Islamic school was knocked back. I just wanna [sic] know if you think it’s fair if people are so quick to put the racist tag and attach it to our opposition to the school. Is it a particular race we oppose here, or is it something like the impact that this school will bring upon Camden and the possible influence it will have on the Camden culture? (emphasis added) (Q&A 2008).

Bell’s question indicated that he positioned himself as a victim of what he saw as an unfair label. In the same sentence, Bell argued it was not ‘racist’ to preserve the Camden ‘culture’
by excluding a particular social group based on their ‘religious’ background. He took a similar line to shock-jock Alan Jones, arguing that the ‘racist tag’ was unfairly applied to residents who wanted to exclude Muslims from Camden – because they were ‘Muslims’.

Furthermore, Goh, Hanson, McCulloch, Jones and Bell demonstrate how Islamophobia moves between the local and the national contexts. In these rhetorical strategies, the local landscape, whether it is Camden or Cronulla, becomes embedded in narratives of opposition. For example, McCulloch evokes the rural character of the town in her opposition to the school:

Sure we are racist if you call it racist not accepting a community that also happens to bear, they’ve got terrorists amongst them, Okay? We can’t say they haven’t, they have! If we let them in here, they want to be here because they can go and hide in all their country little farmhouses! (Neighbour 2008).

McCulloch argues that Muslims are terrorists and fears that they will misuse the rural nature of Camden by hiding in farm houses, but also, strangely, moves to reject descriptions of her rhetoric as racist. Similar strategies operate in other local contexts. With respect to the Cronulla riots, for example, it was the territory of the beach, its character and the lifestyle it was perceived to support, that was seen to be under threat (as discussed in the previous chapter).

**Camden’s Arab folk devil and the denial of racism**

The previous discussions on the denial of racism have a common thread in that there are certain representations of Muslims which cast them as a threat to Australians (seeing the two groups as mutually exclusive). The ways Goh, Hanson, McCulloch, Jones and Bell represent Muslims are central to their rejection of the school. Building on these discussions and the previous chapter’s argument about Camden’s Arab folk devil, this section interrogates how these representations that form the folk devil appear in the discourses of denial. One opponent at the 2008 Council meeting to vote on the development proposal demonstrated how a mild reference to folk devils is a strategy of denying racism: ‘Nothin’ [sic] racist, just - just all the crime and stuff that the other foreign people bring into the town’ (Santow 2008).
In this short statement alone, the opponent exhibits a process of Othering, a strategy that is used, as Miles and Brown (2003) argue, to justify extreme measures undertaken against the relevant group. In their discussion, Miles and Brown (2003:36) show how Othering was manifested in the European colonisation of Africa, where the ‘representations of the African as Other [became] increasingly interwoven with justifications for, as well as opposition to, the enslavement of Africans in the Americas’. In Camden, such representations of deviant Muslims worked to legitimate and rationalise local hostilities against the school. In the case of the aforementioned resident, the representations of Muslims as both ‘foreigners’ and ‘criminals’ legitimate their exclusion from Camden, and forms a defensive strategy against allegations of racism.

Particular moral panics (Collins et al. 2000) discussed in Chapter Five regarding Lebanese gangs and drive-by shootings were strategically discussed by opponents in their denial of racism. The second letter published in the *Camden Advertiser* regarding the proposal featured such claims. Gina Bennett of Camden wrote that she was not a racist, yet ‘young Islamic people’ were more likely to commit ‘violence’ and ‘drive-by shootings’ as was the case in Lakemba (Bennett 2007:2). Published in the same edition of the newspaper, R. Stewart wrote that the school held a hidden agenda: to bring an influx of Muslims who ‘hate our way of life’, though Stewart did not go into detail regarding how that hatred is manifested. Stewart then admitted, ‘I will probably be called a racist but it is not racism, it is fear of the unknown’ (Stewart 2007:6).

These opponents exemplify the paradoxical practice of Othering Muslims as criminals and invaders, in order to deny that their views are racist. Bennett suggested she was not a ‘racist’ because she had a ‘migrant’ background, and then proceeded to criminalise ‘Islamic youths’. Stewart denied racism and argued his position was based on ‘fear’ of Islamic invaders who hate the Camden and Australian lifestyle. In both positions, as in the data obtained in general, there are certain conceptions of Muslims which are employed to categorise Muslims as a threat. It is unclear whether Bennett perhaps mistook Arabs for Muslims in her discussions of Greenacre and Lakemba—certainly a possibility, given that the lead figure among those who stood trial for the drive-by shooting of Lakemba Police Station was the Christian Lebanese-Australian Michael Kanaan. Stewart positioned ‘Australians’ and ‘Camdenites’ against Muslims, but it was unclear whether Stewart described Muslims as a religious group or a homogeneous nationality.
The general threat in these discourses, as discussed in the previous sections, is the criminal and threatening characteristics that opponents use to mark out ‘Muslims’. This work of Othering (Miles & Brown 2003) provides a framework through which residents can deny racism. Through these characterisations, denial sets in by criminalising those who intend to participate in the school’s activities. Embedded in these discussions is the actual magnitude of the development application itself, as Chapter Four argued that opponents would exaggerate the impact of the school. These locals communicated their fears over the numbers of Muslims in Camden as though they were talking about Muslim populations in Australia, as epitomised in this letter to Council: ‘...the Islamic community is getting too big in Australia!’ (letter to Camden Council, received 22/12/2008). In reality, the Islamic community makes up less than 2% of the entire population, yet opponents would display what Appadurai refers to as ‘fear of small numbers’. Appadurai argues there is a puzzling fear towards powerless minorities who become common ‘objects of fear and of rage’ (2006:49). Questioning why a powerful majority would fear a powerless minority, Appadurai argues that minorities are attributed ‘predatory identities’:

One of these pairs or sets of identities often turns predatory by mobilizing an understanding of itself as a threatened majority. This kind of mobilization is the key step in turning a benign social identity into a predatory identity (2006:51).

In contrast to those who saw Muslims as overrepresented, some residents argued that no Muslims lived in Camden, as a sign at the second rally read: ‘CAMDEN MUSLIMS = ZERO’ (Stefanovic 2007). Others argued that there were not enough Muslims in Camden to warrant a school. Local state MP, Charlie Lynn, drew attention to the number of Muslims in Camden in a radio interview:

CHARLIE LYNN: This is an attempt by social engineers to inflict culture shock, if you like, on Camden. There are currently, I think around 100 Islamic families in Camden, and they want to build the school for 1,200, plus 200 teachers. Now, this is just being imposed on us without any discussion at all (emphasis added) (Iggulden 2007)

There are in fact 402 locals in Camden that marked ‘Islam’ as their religion in 2006 (Camden Council Community Profile 2010a). Lynn narrated the school as a ‘culture shock’ which
implies that he sees the proposal as culturally dissimilar with Camden (also see Lynn 2009). The shock is also delivered because a group considered a minority in Australian society as ‘imposing’ itself on Camden.

A comparison with other development applications concerning Islamic schools, mosques or prayer centres, demonstrates how a ‘fear of small numbers’ manifests itself in Camden. For instance, in Cairns (the site of an eight-year mosque controversy), the local Imam said that there were 35-40 Islamic families in the area and another 60 in far north Queensland (approximately 100km away from the proposed site). It was calculated that there were 350 Muslims in the Cairns district (Davis 2010), which has a similar number of Muslims as residing in Camden. There are selective concerns which see Muslims as a threat in one particular context. In Camden, opponents talked of the Muslim minority to argue that an Islamic educational institution was not warranted. In Cairns, very few opponents would assert that this was the case. In other episodes regarding proposed mosques, some opponents preferred that Muslims would remain an invisible minority. In the 1983 Bass Hill Mosque saga, a local candidate had campaigned for a ‘Mosque Free Zone’ in response to the proposal, copying political campaigns from the left at the time regarding ‘Nuclear Free Zones’, or the state government’s efforts at the time to encourage trains, buses and other public places as ‘Smoke Free Zones’ (Humphreys 1989b:15-6).

‘Race’ and racism: Two features of Islamophobia in Camden

The intersecting and multi-layering narratives of racism at play within the campaigns against the school and the multiple denial strategies are apparent in the way Islamophobia manifests itself in Camden. In analysing these narratives, we are able to gain insight into the distinct relationship between ‘race’, racism and a type of local Islamophobia that is situated in Camden. Evidently, Islamophobia is based on unstable and fluid imaginings of Muslims and Arabs more broadly and the several ways people define ‘racism’, which may be based solely on skin colour or may extend to ideas of culture. The expressions of ‘racism’ have ranged from non-verbal gestures of waving Australian flags at protests, to comments by politicians that vilify Muslims as terrorists and rapists. Situated in the Camden context, Islamophobia has presented a set of entangled discourses that move beyond the idea that it is about anti-Muslim racism. This chapter has highlighted the way certain representations of Muslims (and
the ways they have been represented as Others) have been mobilised in the negotiations and
denials of racism. Contemporary considerations of Islamophobia as a concept need to
acknowledge that relationships between ‘race’ and racism are situated in particular contexts.

The larger Australian and global contexts are significant in understanding how Islamophobia
in Camden has a particular shape that is not restricted to anti-Muslim sentiment. In 2004, the
Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC, now known as the Australian
Human Rights Commission) released its Isma (Arabic word for ‘Listen’) report, which
detailed the experiences of Arabs and Muslims in Australia in the aftermath of the September
11 2001 attacks. Dr. William Jonas, the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner at the
time, wrote in the foreword to the report that terms such as ‘terrorist’, ‘dirty Arab’,
murderer’, ‘bloody Muslim’, ‘raghead’, ‘Bin Laden’, ‘illegal immigrant’ and ‘black c...t’
were common labels and profanities that people used against Arab and Muslim Australians
after the 2001 attacks in the United States (HREOC 2004). These parallel Poynting et al.’s
(2004) observations of the shapes of the Arab Other. These authors trace the development of
the contemporary fears over Arabs and Muslims, of which the descriptor ‘of Middle Eastern
appearance’ was significant. Since then, the popular narrations of this Other have included
the term ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islamic’. In a similar vein, Gottschalk and Greenberg’s (2008)
investigation into popular cartoons depicting Muslims and Islam published in the United
States is relevant here. These authors examined the typical caricatures in these cartoons
which represent Muslim men. They argue the Islamophobic depictions of Muslims typically
consist of ‘the beard and moustache, kaffiyeh or turban, and brown skin’ (Gottschalk &
Greenberg 2008:67; also see Ata 2010). The stereotype is activated with a set of biological
(e.g. brown skin) and cultural markers (e.g. kaffiyeh or turban).

In this context, Islamophobia has two interlocking qualities. The first is that Islamophobia in
Camden includes forms of fear, hate, hostility, violence and discrimination which foreground
the very unstable constructions of ‘race’. For instance, in the 2004 HREOC report, various
descriptors of Arabs and Muslims are entangled in the derogatory labels that people apply to
Arabs and Muslims. These include: stereotypes regarding deviant behaviours (‘terrorist’,
murderer’, ‘illegal immigrant’); regional, ethnic, and cultural pejoratives (‘dirty Arab’);
religious and cultural pejoratives (‘bloody Muslim’); pejorative references to traditional,
religious or cultural clothing (‘kaffiyeh’, ‘turban’, ‘raghead’); derogatory references to skin
colour and biology or genetics, and appearances (‘beard’, ‘moustache’, ‘brown skin’, ‘black
c..t’); and less articulate descriptors that associate Arabs/Muslims with public enemies (Bin Laden). Such varied descriptions of Muslims are also obvious in the Camden controversy, making it difficult to disentangle anti-Muslim prejudice from that against other minorities. The entanglement of ‘race’ descriptors with certain behaviours is a significant part of Islamophobia.

The category of ‘race’ is problematic, particularly as scholars nowadays deem ‘race’ not to constitute a proper object of scientific study (as discussed in Chapter Two). Yet Rana observes that ‘racialised’ descriptors of Muslims and Islam are at play in a way that articulates how Muslims ‘look’, in relation to what is happening in the world today. As a result, Rana argues:

> current practices of racial profiling in the War on Terror perpetuate a logic that demands the ability to define what a Muslim looks like from appearance to visual cues. This is not based purely on superficial cultural markers such as religious practice, clothing, language and identification... the figure of the Muslim is one that has been historically racialised through popular forms of racial assignment based on a relationship of biological and cultural ideas... (Rana 2007:149)

In Camden, definitions of a Muslim ‘race’ as they were articulated throughout the controversy demonstrate a relationship beyond biological and cultural ideas, one where several entangled descriptors seem to be at play. As a result, the target of Islamophobia moves beyond ‘Muslim’ as a religious category and takes a particular form that is non-rural, non-Australian, non-local and the antithesis of the Camdenite identity today.

The second feature of a local Islamophobia in Camden lies in the mutable relationship between ‘racism’ and Islamophobia There are general shifts in academia on racism which are captured by Rana’s (2007) discussion of the problematic relationship between Islamophobia, ‘race’ and racism (these are worth quoting here in full):

> [M]any of the arguments for the use of Islamophobia are based on the disarticulation of the concepts of race and racism, citing it as a form of cultural prejudice and religion-based discrimination. In many ways this debate over Islamophobia as racism mirrors the debates over the utility of the race concept in the shift from biological racism to cultural racism. It was mostly in the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, heavily influenced by concessionary multiculturalism, that the concepts of culture and ethnicity seemed to replace race and racism as tools of analysing difference and identity, oftentimes displacing mobilizations for social justice. In this post-racial argument, race is a debunked concept premised on
the faulty biological notion of scientific racism, and Islamophobia is not racism since religion is considered a social practice. Islam as a religion, then, is translated as cultural practice, and Islamophobia is the result of a belief in Islam’s cultural/religious inferiority (Rana 2007:149).

Rana’s discussion of the relationship between racism and Islamophobia draws attention to the ways ‘culture’ has increasingly replaced ‘biological’ and ‘skin colour’ notions of race. These are reflective of what academics term the ‘new racism’ (Dunn et al. 2004; Barker 1981). Yet there is debate over whether the term ‘Islamophobia’ is adequate for capturing anti-Muslim racism today, whether it takes the forms of ‘new’ or ‘old’. Poynting and Mason (2007) (as discussed in Chapter Two) take an approach of defining Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism and the continuation of anti-Arab and anti-Asian racism. These observations are made in the context where the authors take Australia and the United Kingdom as case studies to find that different racial signifiers are used to map out Muslims as ‘Arab’ in one context and ‘Asian’ in another. In the Australian context, ‘Arab’ and ‘Lebanese’ are signifiers of Islam, whereas in the United Kingdom, Asian communities, namely Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi groups, are signifiers of ‘Muslim’. Halliday (1999) argues Islamophobia has more to do with political power than ‘belief’. For instance, ‘the British term “Paki” can, in a racist attack by white youth, as easily denote a Hindu, a Sikh or a Christian from Tamil Nadu as a Muslim’ (Halliday 1999:899). Consequently, Halliday argues against the term Islamophobia, seeing it as failing to capture the fact that non-Muslims can be victims of anti-Muslim sentiment. To the contrary, this dissertation argues that Islamophobia as a concept or term is useful in mapping out the relationships between ‘race’, culture and religion as they manifest in the racism expressed during the Camden controversy.

As is evident in the Camden context, the general ways that people represent Muslims and Islam does not always match up to the reality of Australian Muslim communities. Given that Islamophobia is contextually based, and negotiated through various entangled racial signifiers and behaviours, it is not always overtly a form of ‘racism’. Rather, Islamophobia can be embedded in arguments about cultural difference, criminalised others and national/local identity and borders. For this reason, the academic conceptualisation of Islamophobia should acknowledge the increasingly complicated debates that intersect various fields beyond ‘race’ and racism. As a term, concept, descriptor and phenomenon, Islamophobia emerges more from the ways people position themselves on Islam in a constantly changing world, than from any inherent aspect of Islam or Muslims themselves.
Conclusion

The proposal for an Islamic school in Camden generated a saga which lasted for almost two years. On 14 March 2012, the *Camden Advertiser* reported that the Qur’anic Society is now selling the six-hectare site. As already mentioned, there is a small residence on the land which the Council report rejecting the school described as ‘the existing dwelling’ built in the 1890s, noting the concerns of some locals that the school would obstruct access to this piece of ‘heritage’. Camden Council applauded the Qur’anic Society for incorporating the dwelling within their architectural designs for the school. The real-estate agent selling the property has now described this house (featuring three bedrooms, two bathrooms, three fireplaces and high ceilings) as a ‘renovator’s dream’ (*Camden Advertiser* 2012). In the context of the Camden controversy, such a label is rather ironic. Now that the Islamic school proposal has died, there are no more voices raised in defence of this piece of heritage. There has been no local opposition to the idea that this property could be renovated, impacting its heritage.

While it might appear to be a fairly trivial point to begin my conclusion with such news, it illustrates the disproportionate and unfair social reactions that target Muslims today. It is remarkable that an application for a moderate Islamic school could inspire a reaction on such a scale. No other development application in Camden has seen an outburst of anything resembling the reactions against the school. Not even the proposal for another Catholic school has sparked such reactions (Stallitano & Bowie 2008). Thus far, the letters pages of the *Camden Advertiser* have not referred to the possibility of a ‘Catholic invasion’, locals have not organised rallies, or used the Australian flag as an item of protest against Catholicism. Further, no local has claimed that the headscarves worn by nuns are ‘divisive’ and oppressive or capable of hiding weapons or bombs, nor have local politicians campaigned for a moratorium on Catholic immigration. Public opposition to a McDonalds restaurant in Camden’s main street that played out only months before the school controversy was minor by comparison to the response to the Islamic school.

So why were such concerns (and many others) raised specifically against an Islamic school? A concise response is that opponents shared a ‘fear of change’, a recurrent aspect in the discourses of resident (or ‘nimby’ - ‘not in my backyard’) protest. The two main social fears of those involved in predicting the shapes of these changes were that of wretched change and
the invasion of the Other. This dissertation has discussed the fears of wretched change in relation to the local Camden context as a ‘white town’ on the fringe of culturally diverse, suburbanised Sydney’s West. Also, this dissertation has discussed the Other in relation to what I term the Arab folk devil, a multilayered, constantly changing set of criminalised representations that opponents attributed to people who identify (or are mistakenly identified) as Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern. In both these conceptions of changes, mild and overt references of ‘race’ are significant in grounding the many positions taken against the school. Whether in dealing with the Other, in voicing concerns about the environmental changes predicted from the school, or about the possible disruptions to an oasis of white heritage, critics presented a number of multilayered narratives of Arabs, Muslims and themselves. This thesis has analysed these many narratives to gain insight into the distinct relationship between ‘race’, racism and the specific shape of Islamophobia that plays out in the Camden controversy.

Chapter One outlined the chronology of the Camden controversy. I attempted to detail a balanced story regarding the actions of both supporters and opponents. However, as the controversy was largely dominated by the protesters, there was a need to focus on their actions, which were ongoing as I conducted my research from the initial reports on the first protest in November 2007, until the final day in the Land and Environment Court, when the barrister for the Council, Chris Shaw, stated it was necessary to raise issues of ‘race’ and religion because Camden ‘council was required to give a full assessment of the matters before the court and to bring to the court's attention the issues that the public felt were important’ (Bowie 2009f). While people's positions on the school were heavily embedded in discourses pertaining to ‘race,’ it was clear that the notion of ‘race’ was a red herring.

Chapter Two contextualised and conceptualised the ways ‘race’ plays out in the Camden controversy. The concept ‘Islamophobia’ helps us to chart these processes. The context for Islamophobia here lies in the historical and contemporary relationships between Muslims and non-Muslim Australians. While Islamic contact with Australia predates the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, little is recorded of the relationships between Aboriginal peoples of North Australia and the Muslim Macassan fishermen. According to Kabir (2005) and Dunn (1999), there were amicable relationships between the Macassans and the Aborigines which were based on trade and marriage. After 1788, Muslim migrants, whether they arrived as convicts or free settlers, experienced difficulties establishing mosques (Kabir 2005). Since the official
discarding of the ‘White Australia’ policy almost 50 years ago, Muslim immigration has increased rapidly, as have Muslims’ stories of opposition to their efforts to establish Islamic prayer centres, mosques and Islamic schools across Australia. This is the backdrop of the Camden controversy.

The conceptual foundations of ‘race’, drawn from Stuart Hall’s (1999) discussion of ‘race’ as the floating signifier, were used in mapping out contemporary Islamophobia and issues of ‘race’ in Camden. Opponents of the proposed school held many perceptions of Muslim people: as a distinct ‘race’ of people, or as a group of working class people ready to manipulate and invade the middle class whiteness of the Camden area. Opponents also conflated Muslims with notions of the non-local, the dark-skinned, the religious fundamentalist, the terrorist, the rapist, the urban dweller, the ghettoiser and the un-Australian. These perceptions are situated in a number of spatial contexts, including that of the local Camden area, the (highly patterned) greater Sydney city, the broader national landscape and the global context which has seen an increase in Islamophobia in the Western world.

This dissertation examined the local narratives of Camden’s history and heritage consistently raised by opponents of the school. Chapter Three argued that ideas of ‘race’ insidiously and overtly foreground these popular narrations of Camden’s past, which are Anglo-centric and neglect the significance of the traditional owners. Protesters refer to these stories of prosperous white agricultural settlement in their cases against the school, particularly as they claimed the development would obstruct their efforts to conserve Camden’s farming heritage. This chapter identified that heritage has various meanings. It is a floating signifier and locals invoke these meanings in their campaigns for conservation. Ultimately, Chapter Three showed how Camden’s local heritage, far from providing moral validation for protest against the development, is actually a highly partial and constructed vision fabricated for a racist cause.

The racially-based rhetoric against the school was further apparent in the ways the opponents predicted Camden’s future if an Islamic school were to be built in the town. In Chapter Four, I argued that ‘race’ is entwined within Camden’s identity as a place situated on the fringes of a heavily urbanised, culturally heterogeneous city. Ideas of ‘race’ were central to the arguments that Camden would turn into ‘another Bankstown’ or a ‘little Lakemba’. Two
main themes are apparent in these arguments that explicitly draw on ideas of ‘race’. The first relates to the imagined future of the Camden area, and the second to opponents’ fears that the infiltration of the Muslim ‘race’ will lead to the eventual destruction of the Camden community. Some locals aired their anxieties at the prospect of Camden’s transformation from rural to suburban in their opposition to the school. It was revealed that the imagined predictions of invasive and wretched change significantly formed the ghetto dystopian imaginary of Camden’s future. Several ideas informed this ‘ghetto’, including fears of ‘white’ minority status in Camden, the loss of public safety, over-population and high density, signage and economic takeover, and the presence of a mosque as the ultimate signifier of cultural invasion.

The Arab folk devil is a useful conceptual term in mapping the way ‘race’ coincides with the criminalisation of Muslims, Arabs and Middle Eastern people. Chapter Five examined the specific representations that formed the shapes of this folk devil in Camden. I argued that in the Camden context, the Arab folk devil takes on a particularly racialised character that is specific to Camden but draws on pre-existing constructions which collectively contribute to the antagonistic reactions towards the Islamic school. This folk devil evolved from previous moral panics and controversies, including the Sydney gang rapes of 2000 and 2002, the Lakemba drive-by shooting of 1998, the September 11th attacks of 2001, the Bali bombings of 2002, the Cronulla riot of 2005, the uncovered meat controversy and the recent Durack (Queensland) national anthem controversy. Along with many belittling stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, some of these events resonated with opponents, influencing the unstable constructions of Camden’s Arab folk devil. The reactions in Camden are part of a broader socio-cultural context while at the same time assuming a very local character.

Across the empirical data, opponents consistently mark out ‘race’ both explicitly and implicitly. The final chapter tied these discourses together by examining the relationships between ‘race’ and racism in Camden. Chapter Six argued that there is a strong but malleable relationship between racism, ‘race’ and a particular type of Islamophobia which is situated in the context of the school saga. A local Islamophobia in Camden is not a single set of ideas that particularly target Muslims, rather it is a space of contestation where many discourses are negotiated in the Camden and broader Australian context. As residents of a town with a newly tarnished reputation as a ‘racist area’, many opponents found themselves in situations where they would both deny the charge of racism and then voice derogatory racial
This dissertation is made up of a set of interconnected investigations that are examined in detail, in all six chapters. They uncovered the rhetorical constructions by the proposal’s opponents of the Arab and Muslim Other and of themselves as peaceful, white and rural though their narrations of Camden’s local heritage. Also, this thesis examined how opponents commonly envisioned Camden’s future with an Islamic school, which were linked to the familiar and widespread constructions of the Arab folk devil. All of these discourses affirmed the malleable relationships between ‘race’, racism and the Islamophobia that played out in the controversy. The Camden controversy is a case study reflecting the most recent and prevalent discourses regarding Arabs and Muslims in Australia. With an exhaustive list of moral panics concerning Arabs and Muslims over the past decade, there was a need for a study that examined whether the public attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims have changed. The Camden controversy has suggested that little has changed in terms of hostility, yet the characterisations of Others, and of the threats they pose, have certainly changed. What I have done here is to venture onto a terrain which others find uncomfortable – that of ‘race’ and racism. This was achieved by conducting fieldwork, archival and historical research, as well as engaging with relevant socio-cultural theories and concepts. An unavoidable paradox of this thesis is that it investigates ‘race’, scientifically disproven concept, but one which people still talk of as a real category (also see Lentin 2005; 2012). This dissertation has affirmed that ‘race’ continues to shape the ways people make sense of their identity and the world around them.

**Future Research**

Future research should focus on the public creations of racial Others and their functions in contemporary societies. In the context of the Islamic school in Camden, the created Other is a hybrid Arab and Muslim figure, with several layers of characteristics. Opponents portrayed the Others as terrorists, rapists, sexual predators, anti-Christian fundamentalists, un-Australian criminals, and violators of Camden’s rural identity and heritage. Ideas of ‘race’ grounded these constructions, which, as this dissertation argued, are situated in the local Camden context as a white rural town on the fringe of a culturally diverse city, and the post-
9/11 broader Australian context in which anti-Arab and anti-Muslim public sentiment has dramatically increased.

The creation of a category of ‘Otherness’ (see Hudson 2006), and the racism against social and ethnic minorities are quite common within the Australian context. Academics have documented that Indigenous peoples, whose presence in Australia predates European settlement by over 60,000 years, continue to experience extreme forms of racial vilification in historical and contemporary Australia (see Attwood & Arnold 1992; Attwood 1989; Broome 2001; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2008; Cowlishaw & Morris 1997; Cowlishaw 2004; Cowlishaw 2006; Dudgeon 2008; Elder 2007; Halloran 2007; Hodge & Mishra 1991; Langton 1993; Mickler 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Paradies 2005; Pedersen & Barlow 2008; Pedersen et al. 2005). Perhaps it is no surprise that those considered to be recent immigrants after European settlement experience racial vilification given that it is common in Australia. Even in recent times, there is ample evidence that minorities have been categorised as Others. In challenging the idea that Australia was built on egalitarian values, Thompson (1997) demonstrated the Otherness of the Irish in early colonial Australia. In light of the Camden controversy, Frances (2011) wrote of Kate McCulloch’s ‘ironic’ opposition, given her presumably Irish Catholic heritage. Frances compared the traditional Otherness of Irish Catholics and Muslims today:

McCulloch also accused Australia’s Muslim leaders of saying nothing while mothers and children are used as suicide bombers. Not surprisingly, she was also outspoken on the need to curb Muslim immigration and for Muslims to assimilate to a ‘Western’ way of life. I have focussed on Kate McCulloch because it strikes me as especially ironic that one of the most vocal opponents of this proposed Muslim school should be an Australian Catholic, and judging by her name, of Irish descent. Ironic, because for most of the 220 years since the British first colonized Australia, it has been Irish Catholics who have attracted this kind of attack on their schools, their value systems, their lifestyles, their culture and their political loyalties (Frances 2011:443).

Many of those who challenged the school proposal would most likely have had Irish forebears but few appeared conscious that in an earlier era such people were vilified in much the same way as people of Middle Eastern background are today. Frances (2011) cited Sir Henry Parkes, one of the Australia’s prominent colonial politicians, who expressed his view of the Irish in a way that prefigured the popular rhetoric of political stakeholders, particular One Nation, Australia United Party, Australian Protectionist Party, Australia First Party and
the Christian Democratic Party, which all campaigned against the school (Kinsella 2007b:9; Q&A 2008; Kinsella 2007a:10; Bowie 2007d:11). In a speech in 1872, Parkes argued:

I protest against Irishmen coming here and bringing their national grievances to disturb this land of ours … to distract the working of our political institutions, by acting together in separate organised masses, not entering the reason of our politics, nor judging public questions on their merits, but blindly obeying the dictation of others as ignorant as themselves … Until Irishmen learn to be Australian colonists – until they learn to tolerate free discussion – until they understand the uses of liberty, they must not be surprised if people regard their presence as something not very desirable (O’Farrell 2000:113, cited in Frances 2011:446)

Frances (2011:447) argues the Otherness of Irish Catholics has been ‘upstaged by new waves of migrants from more exotic locations and cultures than Ireland: initially from northern European countries such as Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Germany and the Netherlands, then the Mediterranean Greeks and Italians, followed by Turks, then Asians from Vietnam, China, India, as well as the Pacific Islands and the Middle East’. Yet it is unwise to extrapolate future trends from this research, to try to predict who might form the next generation of Others.

I have detailed the evolution of Islamophobia but whether the Camden controversy is the final chapter of this Arab Other is as yet unclear. Will Arab and Muslim Australians eventually be assimilated as have other ethnic groups have, and condemn the next target of moral panics and social exclusion? Will they be considered mainstream with the Camden controversy a derided memory, and viewed in the same way that people look back at the earlier vilification of the Irish Catholic communities? Is this the beginning of yet another decade of moral panics that will focus on Muslim people rather than ‘Arabs’? Will the opponents look back on their efforts with pride, or will the next generation of locals regard the Camden controversy as a blemish on local history? These are questions that will be addressed by a future generation of researchers.
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### Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Self-identification (ethnicity)</th>
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1 According to the guidelines of the University of Western Sydney’s Ethics Committee for this doctoral project, the researcher was required to omit any details that would enable the reader to identify a participant. Given that Camden is a small community and all the interviews took place with people that lived and worked in Camden, I omitted details regarding the participant’s occupation and the location of their home in Camden.