

BULLDOG WHISTLING:

CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUNG LEBANESE-AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE FANS

Scott Poynting¹

ABSTRACT

This article traces the course of a series of moral panics over the banding together, group identification and collective action of certain groups of young people – mainly young men – in and around some mass sporting events in New South Wales, Australia, in 2001-4. It could be a story of ‘football hooliganism’, except that the sport is not football (or ‘soccer’, as it is known in Australia), but rugby league. That such ‘collective behaviour’ had been relatively unknown in this sporting milieu in Australia provided the opportunity for the racialized ‘othering’ of those labelled as deviant, in the context of the construction of the ‘Arab Other’ (and later the Muslim Other) as the pre-eminent folk demon of contemporary Australia.

¹ Scott Poynting, School of Humanities, University of Western Sydney

Introduction

This article traces the course of a series of moral panics over the banding together, group identification and collective action of certain groups of young people – mainly young men – in and around some mass sporting events in New South Wales, Australia, in 2001-4. It could be a story of ‘football hooliganism’, except that the sport is not football (or ‘soccer’, as it is known in Australia), but rugby league. That such ‘collective behaviour’ had been relatively unknown in this sporting milieu in Australia provided the opportunity for the racialized ‘othering’ of those labelled as deviant, in the context of the construction of the ‘Arab Other’ (and later the Muslim Other) as the pre-eminent folk demon of contemporary Australia (Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins, 2004).

Young people provide a perennial focus for the public worrying of right-thinking experts and spokespeople about the disintegration of social order which they fear and herald. To the extent that the ‘other’ of cultural or ‘racial’ minorities is susceptible to ‘mainstream’ popular demonization, the youth of such backgrounds, particularly young men, are doubly prone to be cast as folk devils. Such a racialized group of young people, the ‘Bulldog Army’ of rugby league supporters in Sydney’s south-western suburbs, were the subject of the series of minor moral panics over 2001-4 which are the subject of this article.

Specific groups of young people represented as dangerous to social order were the empirical focus of Stan Cohen’s (1972) originary development and deployment of the

concept of moral panic, and numerous such cycles of media labelling of, popular hysteria about, and state reaction – to young people above all – have since been analyzed in this framework. In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al (1978) elaborated the model to elucidate the crisis over ‘mugging’, one in which the particular folk devil had a racialized inflection. The very term ‘mugging’ had been imported to Britain from the United States, where it had been ideologically connected with violent street crime of African Americans; and here the crime was ideologically linked with (mainly young) Black male Britons of Caribbean heritage. Geoffrey Pearson (1983) showed, in his historical treatment of this and a long succession of earlier moral panics, that the imagined type of perpetrator was often constructed as foreign, and the form of crime as imported and un-English. Collins et al (2000) have found similar attributes in Australia in the moral panic over purported criminality of Lebanese immigrant-background youth in Sydney in 1998-9. ‘Soccer hooliganism’, though not unknown in Australia, has usually been seen as a foreign phenomenon, often something imported through immigrant cultures and evincing old ethnic rivalries (Hughson, 1999). It is an interesting irony that, in the racializing of rugby league violence that will be outlined here, the young Lebanese-Australian fans associated with the ‘Bulldog Army’ were criminalized in connection with what has become a typically Australian sport, in their very attempts to adopt the local sports culture in making their own.

Moral panics usually involve the identification by opinion-makers of some supposed malady in the social order, and prescriptions to remedy it, both from experts and circulating in popular common sense. What makes the diagnoses 'ring true' is that they

resonate with people's everyday experiences. Those feeling anxious and insecure about the direction or extent of social change, for example, can identify elements of their worries in the acceleratingly generalised, shared sense of a social ailment. 'Explanations' offered by the 'experts' take up their (often contradictory) concerns, and articulate them in more coherent and scientific-sounding form, feeding them back to the anxious audiences in an accelerating cycle which functions to the extent that it reverberates with popular anxieties. 'Folk devils' are presented as simple, readily available apparent causes of the problem, which is ideologically represented as straightforward and without nuance, and a range of simplistic 'solutions' are accordingly proposed (Poynting et al, 2004: 2-3). While Critcher (2003: 177) has recently argued that the folk devil is not a necessary condition for a moral panic, and Donson et al (2004) have conversely identified the possibility of a moral panic without a folk devil, the particular deviance amplification spiral detailed in the present study centres around a popularly demonized 'racialized other'.

The moral panic over the 'Bulldog Army' took place at the height of a concerted ideological attack on multiculturalism in Australia, in which immigration from supposedly inassimilable cultures had been presented as inimical to national identity and wellbeing. A key element of this ideology was the criminalization of the cultures represented as most different and therefore deviant. Arab (especially the more numerous Lebanese) Australians and Muslim Australians were foremost among these.

Method

The data used in the following analysis consist principally of mainstream English-language media extracts – mainly from the press, with some from the electronic media –

both commercial and government-funded; and those with national, state and local audiences – over the period March 2001 to October 2004. The author searched over this period for all articles in Australian national and New South Wales (and some interstate) newspapers which had references to the ‘Bulldog Army’, or ‘rugby league’ and ‘riots’, supplemented by a sampling of electronic media – including talk-back radio – over the period. These were collated to identify established patterns in ideological themes, especially those related to racialization, and to trace the ‘amplification spiral’ in the developing moral panic.

The raising of the Bulldog Army

The bulldog is a well-known symbol of Britishness, but among rugby league football fans in Sydney it signals Lebaneseness. The Sydney Bulldogs rugby league team, based in the Canterbury-Bankstown area with a large Arabic-speaking immigrant population, has been adopted by many young Lebanese Australians as ‘their’ team, to the great dismay of some Australians of the dominant ‘Anglo-Celtic’ culture, who lament the loss of their ‘family’ game. This immigrant (including second and third generation) appropriation of a traditionally ‘Australian’ sport, and then being backlashed for doing so, encapsulates in the sporting field many of the contradictions recently seen in the struggles over national cultural capital (Hage, 1998).

Sports writer Mike Gibson (22/10/00: 66) noted how few of the non-English speaking background migrants to Australia had taken to rugby league, most maintaining the interest in soccer prevalent in their homelands. ‘The Lebanese were different,’ he

observed: 'Newcomers from Lebanon became as passionate about the game as those working-class Australians whose efforts had spawned it early last century'. Australian-born Darren Maroon, whose father came from Lebanon and his mother from Ireland, captained the 'Cedars', the 'Lebanese' World Cup rugby league team in 2000. Half of the players were Australian-born. Maroon played for South Sydney in the forwards for nine years, and also played for Easts and Manly. 'The Lebanese were following the [South Sydney] Rabbitohs long before they started following Canterbury,' he recalls (Gibson, 22/10/00: 66). As early as the 1890s, a Lebanese community had developed in the inner-south Sydney suburb of Redfern, where chain migration had stemmed from Lebanese Christians from the Beqaa Valley (Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar, 2000). Maroon's grandfather headed straight from the ship to Redfern, he told Gibson (22/10/00: 66).

Hazem El-Masri, the Bulldogs' wing, was born in Tripoli and migrated as a child with his parents to Australia, where they came to live in the Canterbury area. When he first arrived at age 10, he played soccer, but, 'growing up around Belmore, like most Lebanese kids, I found myself getting along to cheer for the Dogs. ... I was like every other young kid in the district. Belmore Sports Ground was our Mecca. All I wanted to do was to play for Canterbury' (Gibson, 22/10/00: 66).

Hilal Dannaoui, son of immigrants from Lebanon who lives in Greenacre in Sydney's south west, was praised in the *Sun-Herald* (Sygall, 6/10/02: p.93) for his mastery of cricket. It took a while to be accepted by his Canterbury-Bankstown team-mates, and he is often called a 'wog', but it was a deliberate strategy to distance himself from stereotypes of Lebanese-background young men. Before he dedicated himself to cricket,

he spent a number of years playing rugby league, and used to play with Hazem El Masri's brother (Sygall, 6/10/02: p.93).

Such is the admiration for El Masri and the local Lebanese community support for the game and their team these days, that a group of five schoolgirls from Al Noori Muslim Primary School in Greenacre could be photographed in the weekend *Sydney Morning Herald* in their team's blue and white colours — loose-fitting blue tracksuit and white *hijab* — playing rugby league. Teacher Ms Wafa Saboune explained that parents' initial opposition had been overcome, and that, thanks to El Masri's status as a Muslim role model, they were now encouraging their daughters to participate. 'Parents and kids can relate to a Muslim like him playing rugby league and they want to get involved in that sport themselves', she said. 'It is an Australian game. That is where they are born and raised' (Bradley, 25-26/8/01: 5). Not to be outdone in pun or photo, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a similar story the following March, with four girls (in *hijab*, of course) from the nearby Noor al Houda Islamic College at Bankstown photographed at rugby league footy training: 'It's not a passing interest in class front row' (Morris, 27/3/01: 9).

In between these two positive articles, with their approbatory depiction of cultural integration and adoption of rugby league by the Canterbury-Bankstown Lebanese communities, there had been a virulent moral panic about the supposed delinquency and unAustralianness of (especially young, male) Bulldogs supporters. It was not the first time.

A folk devil is constructed

In mid-1997, media headlines raged for a week about a 'riot' which had occurred at Belmore Sports Ground during a Canterbury rugby league match. Pockets of spectator violence had broken out late in the game, during an altercation over a controversial refereeing decision. The police and security guards had typically over-reacted, 'aggressively wielding batons' and sending police dogs and officers on horseback into the crowd. There were even several reports of a policeman pointing a firearm (de Freitas, 1998). 'Everyone was against the police because they were so brutal', recounted a youth witness quoted by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (de Freitas, 1998).

The police overreaction was followed by the media's. The commercial media linked the causes of the disturbance to the multicultural festival sponsored by the Canterbury club in conjunction with the game (de Freitas, 1998; Hughson, 1998, 2001). Both the *Telegraph* and the *Herald* exaggerated the presence and the significance of a few Lebanese national flags among the others in the crowd. 'At least 70 officers from 12 patrols and security guards fought battles with spectators, many of them waving Lebanese flags' (*Daily Telegraph* 3/6/97, cited in de Freitas.) 'Eyewitness reports, too, claim that some of the brawlers were waving Lebanese flags' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4/6/97, cited in de Freitas). The *Herald* worried in an editorial that this flag-waving may have 'long-term implications' in 'the prospect that the brawl might have been caused by a clash of racial rather than club loyalties' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, cited in de Freitas, 1998). Tabloids and talkback radio attacked and blamed multiculturalism, though the Rugby League

club's investigation refuted the suggested connections between the violence and the multicultural festival, and this judgement was shared by the police (de Freitas, 1998).

Yet the ideology which prevailed was that 'football riots' were an unAustralian phenomenon, and must have been brought from overseas. In an earlier period, there had been official worrying that the display of flags and national symbols (other than Australian ones, which are not 'ethnic') had led to endemic inter-ethnic fights at the soccer, and this had led to the banning of ethnic team names, banners, flags and the like in Australian soccer competitions (Hughson, 1999).

The media-propagated images of Lebanese youth out of control in Canterbury-Bankstown remained in the public mind over the following years. The moral panic ensuing from the manslaughter of teenager Edward Lee in Punchbowl during a street brawl in 1998 maintained and augmented these images, exacerbated by a repressive police campaign targetting Lebanese-background youth, which led to gunshots being fired at Lakemba police station (Collins et al, 2000). As with the reportage of the 'Belmore riot', metaphors of war abounded (Noble and Poynting, 2003), along with the notion of violence of foreign origin being imported. Thus the ideological elements were available and circulating, and the media were well primed, when further disturbances arose among young Bulldogs fans in early 2001.

The Bulldog Army moral panic from 2001

At the beginning of March, just as the 2001 season was getting under way, there were complaints about ‘intimidating behaviour’ of Bulldogs supporters on trains returning from an away game against the Newcastle Knights (Peterson, 12/3/01: 7). The events were popularly interpreted in the light of, and may even have been prompted by, a concerted moral panic about ‘ethnic youth gangs’ centred on the Canterbury-Bankstown area, around August 2000 (Poynting et al, 2004). The lack of explicit mention in the tabloids of the particular ethnic background imputed to the wayward Bulldogs fans can perhaps be explained by the anxiety of the club officials to avoid the bad publicity over ethnic tensions ‘that almost killed soccer in this country’ (Gibson, 1997). Police would have been equally keen to hose down what they undoubtedly saw as ethnic violence, and, with club officials, comprised the most accessible and the main informants for reporters on the event (de Freitas, 1998). In any case, in reporting a minor skirmish of the following week (two days later furiously beaten up on the front page of the same tabloid), *Telegraph* journalist Anthony Peterson (12/3/01:7) reported, ‘There was only one fight at the Sydney Showground on Saturday night – between [sic] an intoxicated spectator who called another fan a “wog”’.

Sports reporter Peter Frilingos on page one of the *Telegraph* gave emphasis to his briefing by a National Rugby League (NRL) official, rather than the Bulldogs source, and told quite a different story about the same game. ‘Last Saturday, Bulldogs and Northern Eagles fans were terrorised by 60 hooligans in Bulldogs colours both at the Showground and on their way home’ (Frilingos, 14/3/01:1). Here we see inflated numbers, inflated damage (the NRL were seeking compensation from the Bulldogs club) and extravagant

language – nothing less than ‘terrorism’ was involved. Moreover, the delinquent Bulldogs fans were not genuine Rugby League fans, but ‘hooligans in Bulldogs colours’. They were put in their place by an email from Kay Gardoll on the Bulldogs club’s official website: ‘go watch soccer or another sport’ (cited by Bissett, 19/3/01:10).

The media demonization continued. A fortnight later, in an article occupying most of page three and subheaded ‘Hundreds of fans flee game violence’, we learn in the fine print that the Brisbane Broncos winger was inciting the Bulldogs fans with hand gestures (it didn’t help that he had scored two disputed tries and the Bulldogs were losing), the ‘violence’ amounted to throwing rubbish on the field, and ‘at least one family’ left the ground early, swearing never to come back (Sofios and Adams, 31/3/01:3). The accompanying photograph and its caption showed an Anglo-Celtic named man leaving with his two redheaded toddler daughters in his arms, purportedly retreating from the throwing of (clearly shown plastic soft-drink) bottles in the other direction, onto the field. NRL executive David Moffett was quoted as saying, ‘The crowd was giving [winger] Wendell [Sailor] a hurry-up but it was good natured and I don’t think it did any harm. I didn’t see too much wrong with the banter from either side’ (Sofios and Adams, 31/3/01:3). Police also advised that no major incidents had been reported.

The troubles continued into the following month. At a drawn game between the Bulldogs and their old western Sydney rivals, Parramatta, six people were arrested when soft-drink containers were thrown, at Parramatta Stadium. A police commissioner again emphasised the foreignness of the problem: ‘God help us if we have to go down the path of overseas

countries with police in riot gear and using water cannons to control sporting crowds' (Gilmore, Prichard and Leggatt, 22/4/01:6-7). Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reporter David Mark made a similar observation, more explicitly, 'Australians pride themselves on having competitive sporting culture without the violence that besets many overseas sports' (*PM*, 23/4/01). Again there was the assertion that the troublesome Bulldogs supporters were not genuine rugby league aficionados. The Parramatta police local area commander was quoted as commenting,

I'm not so sure that these people are genuine Bulldog fans. The wider community come to the football to enjoy the game, and enjoy it as a social event. I don't think these minority of people are coming to the football for that purpose, I think they're basically coming to the football to provoke incidents ... (PM, 23/4/01).

This remark, made on national radio, was carefully coded, but the loaded terms 'wider community' and 'minority' convey a certain message. The punters on web pages and talkback radio did not need to be so circumspect. *Herald* columnist Paul Sheehan (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12/5/01) observed 'a clearly racial dimension to the widespread belief within [rugby] league, amplified on talkback radio, that the "Bulldog army" supporting the Canterbury club is filled with violence-prone Lebanese hoons'.

On Anzac Day, *Telegraph* cartoonist Warren Brown (25/4/01:29) underlined the unAustralianness of the 'Bulldog army' by summoning the ghosts of that Aussie icon, the World War 1 digger, to look sadly upon a rowdy Bulldogs fan being hauled off by a policeman, and ask, 'We gave our lives for great-grandchildren like *that*?' Again the 'true fans', with Anglo-Celtic names like Rodgers and Kelly, were given space to 'fight back' in a special *Telegraph* letters column (25/4/01: 79). Richard Kelly, of the western New South Wales country town Dubbo, reprised the 'terrorising' theme, in contrasting those

he characterised as animals with genuine supporters of the team: ‘Bulldogs fans don’t hunt in packs, terrorise innocent people or bring the club into any kind of disrepute’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 25/4/01: 79).

Bulldogs’ chairman Barry Nelson indicated to the *Telegraph* his club’s efforts at community relations, in hiring ‘Lebanese security guards to mingle with supporters to identify and eject known troublemakers’ (Salleh, 24/4/01: p.5). He added that the club had ‘worked closely with the Lebanese newspaper *El-Telegraph*, appealing to parents in the Arabic-speaking community to supervise youths believed to be behind the recent violence’ (Salleh, 24/4/01: p.5). In addition to these measures, the Bulldogs club’s board resolved to ensure ‘Muslim community leaders attend each game to maintain crowd control’ (Beikoff, 26/4/01a: 56). The club echoed the language of the police in their recent high-profile, ethnically targeted campaigns against youth in the area, by announcing a policy of ‘zero tolerance’ (Beikoff, 26/4/01a: 56, 26/4/01b: 3). It sought to impose on-the-spot fines of \$500 ‘under the strictest crowd behaviour rules of any sport and any sports venue in the country’ (Beikoff, 26/4/01a: 56). It pressured the state government to reinstate special powers introduced during the 2000 Olympics with the stated aim of protecting against terrorists, allowing security staff to stop and search and to remove any person from Olympic Park and other designated areas, including the Sydney Showground venue. Further, the Bulldogs club announced a ban on all flags at its grounds, except for official National Rugby League (NRL) flags and, of course, the Australian flag (Beikoff, 26/4/01a: 56).

Lebanese-Australian boxer, Nader Hamdan, ranked sixth in the International Boxing Federation (and therefore something of a role model) told reporter Paul Kent on the *Telegraph's* sports pages, 'It is being handled all wrong'. 'The Lebanese community feels victimised after recent crowd violence involving the Canterbury Bulldogs', recorded Kent. Said Hamdan, 'The community has been singled out as being like that, but we're not like that' (Kent, 28/4/01: 123). He judged that the media attention and the tough-guy police and security response were exacerbating the problem, and that the much-publicised corrective measures would be counterproductive. The following day, one of the organisers of the Bulldogs' supporters' group which call themselves the 'Bulldog Army' (analogously to the English cricket fans' 'Barmy Army') told the tabloid *Sun-Herald* that they would defy the ban on their banner: 'We have done nothing wrong' (Gilmore, 29/4/01: 9). The *Sun-Herald* reported the 15-year-old Basham Krayem as telling them the Bulldog Army 'drew heavily from the Australian-born children of Lebanese, Greek and Italian migrants, living in the Bankstown, Yagoona and Punchbowl areas' (Gilmore, 29/4/01: 9). Meanwhile, it was announced that sniffer dogs would be used to vet fans for flares or firecrackers at the forthcoming Bulldogs home game (*Sun-Herald*, 29/4/01: 9).

Having been on the front pages of the Sydney dailies on 24 and 25 April (*Daily Telegraph*, 24/4/01:1; *Scala*, 25/4/01:1; *Walter and Cornford*, 25/4/01:1), the Bulldog Army story did not return to page one until May, and then the angle was the measures put in place to prevent a resurgence of the supposed hooliganism among Bulldogs supporters (Beikoff, 11/5/01: 1; 12/5/01:1). Nevertheless, it did make the headlines that there were

no riots after a Bulldogs game, this being attributed to the intensive policing (Walter, 12-13/5/01: 75).

The following year saw scandals involving the Bulldogs club in the headlines, but for two different reasons which did not involve its youthful fans. The first concerned the club's breaching of the NRL salary cap rules, governing how much money may be paid by each team to its players. The revelations of the Bulldogs' illegally exceeding this limit saw them penalised by the subtraction of sufficient competition points to demote them from championship contenders to last-place 'wooden spooners' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 31/8-1/9/02: 6). This doubtless reinforced the Bulldogs fans' sense of being victimised, especially since certain well-heeled clubs from wealthy suburbs were reputed (though not proven) to have long engaged in the same practices. The second concerned an ill-fated \$900 million development joint venture between the Bulldogs and Liverpool City Council to build a sporting, leisure and gambling complex, 'Oasis' (Davies and McClymont, 31/8-1/9/02: 6). It was alleged (though never proven) that the state Fisheries minister, Labor Party 'numbers man' Eddie Obeid, had offered Bulldogs Leagues Club President, Gary McIntyre, to secure the necessary Crown land for the development and alleviate any licensing problems for the lucrative poker machines, in return for a million dollar donation to his party (Davies and McClymont, 30/8/02: 1). While the Independent Commission Against Corruption eventually found that there was no corrupt conduct by any of the parties involved, Mr Obeid was ousted from Cabinet in a reshuffle in March 2003. The Oasis affair cannot have enhanced either his reputation or the Bulldogs'.

The years 2001 and 2002 were also marked by media hysteria about so-called 'ethnic gang rapes' in Bankstown and nearby western Sydney suburbs, and the various trials of the accused who happened to be of Lebanese background and Muslim background (Poynting et al, 2004: 116-152). This became linked in racist discourse to the supposed deviance of Middle Eastern asylum seekers, about whom the federal government opportunistically fomented a moral panic in the 2001 election campaign, which successfully delivered them re-election. The election was marked by the government's strategy of 'dog-whistling', a surreptitious intrusion of race politics which had been successful in the previous federal election. The notion of 'dog-whistling' involves sending a particularly sharp message which calls clearly to those intended, and goes unheard by the rest of the population, like a high-pitched dog whistle audible to the canine but not the human ear. Its use in this case was intended on one level to retain the 'ethnic vote' and that of the small-l liberals among the middle strata, who hear only the apparent reasonableness of the actual words being used. Examples include the slogans that it's not racist to have a debate about immigration (in the 1997 election), or it's not racist to limit asylum-seekers (in the 2001 poll). On the other level, it sends a signal that calls to the disaffected minority which had reacted to their marginalisation and insecurity with xenophobia, and turned to the anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism One Nation party. Thus the strategy sends different messages to each cohort on distinct wavelengths, as it were. In the event, the dog whistle worked for the government in the 2001 federal election, in the context of a moral panic over the Middle-Eastern 'queue-jumpers' rescued by the Norwegian ship *Tampa* off Western Australia in August, and the fear and insecurity induced by the airborne terrorist attacks of September 11 in the USA. Above

all, the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 and in Bali on 12 October 2002 were followed by demonization of Muslim communities in Australia as in the USA and other allied countries, and the Lebanese immigrant communities around Canterbury-Bankstown in Sydney were especially targeted (Poynting et al, 2004). Thus in the minor moral panic about the Bulldog Army, dog-whistling became Bulldog-whistling.

Particularly after September 11, the folk devils of the ongoing complaints about Bulldogs supporters became more 'Muslim' than 'Lebanese' in the tales that continued to circulate. One caller to Alan Jones's notorious 2GB commercial talkback radio program was allowed to air the following diatribe in July 2002:

I have got an opinion on the Muslim problem. ... They can call it what they like but it's the Muslim problem. On Friday night I'm going to go and see the Roosters play Canterbury. I take my grandson, this is to the football, but I won't be talking him on Friday night and that's a disgrace. And the reason that I won't be taking him is because there's every chance that some lunatic in a blue and white jumper of Mediterranean appearance is going to cause trouble (quoted in Anti-Discrimination Board, 2003: 63).

Again, in 2004, during a discussion about the Bulldogs on his 2GB program, Alan Jones made a comment about the Canterbury-Bankstown area being a problem generally. A caller replied that it was not the area but rather the Lebanese in the area who were deviant. Jones responded that it was not all the Lebanese, not the Christian Lebanese, but the Muslim Lebanese who were the problem (Jones, 30/3/04)¹. By this time there was another full-scale moral panic about Bulldogs supporters under way, the last instance that will be reported on here. Before discussing this, however, we need some background about the latest scandal to beset the Bulldogs, though this did not incriminate the long-suffering team supporters any more than the salary capping or the Oasis affair.

Early in 2004, the media were reverberating with reports about an alleged group sexual assault involving six of the Bulldogs team, perpetrated on a 20-year-old woman in the Coffs Harbour hotel where the team was staying. Ultimately, the case could not be proven, and could not go to trial, but it was widely reported that team members were regularly involved in incidents of drunken group sex involving male bonding and virtually ritualised degradation of women. It is clear that this reprehensible practice was endemic among elite men's sporting teams; over about a year there were similar reports involving three codes of football across several states, and all involving allegations of rape. Uniquely in the case of the Bulldogs, however, the popular opprobrium over the Coffs Harbour case attached to the team's supporters. Moreover, when twenty-three of the players complied with the order to provide DNA samples to investigating police, Hazem El Mazri was reported to be offended by the direction, and refused. He was not present when the alleged offences occurred, and was not a suspect, according to police (Davies, 10/3/04). In fact, none of those alleged to be involved were Lebanese or Muslim.

As sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz commented:

Over the last few months, Australia has been rocked by sex scandals in rugby league and to some extent in Australian football. In the case of the Sydney Bulldogs team, all of whom were under suspicion for behaving in grossly sexist ways, most of whom were not Muslim – in fact all except one were not Muslim – the only person who was deemed to be totally without any suspicion was the Muslim member. He was the one that the police recognised from the outset was unlikely to engage in rape, unlikely to get drunk, unlikely to behave in socially unacceptable ways (Insight, 1/6/04).

Despite this, there was widespread criticism of El Mazri's supposed lack of cooperation, and an ideological switching of the condemnation to the Canterbury-Bankstown Muslim communities.

It needs to be borne in mind that since 2001 there had been a serious upsurge in racial vilification and violence against Muslims, from verbal abuse and spitting, to serious assault and arson, with attacks often sexualized and targeted at women and girls, and involving many incidents of women's hijab being torn off in public places (Poynting and Noble, 2004). Buried in the fine print in one of the early tabloid articles about the most recent Bulldogs crowd violence, in 2004, was a key contributing cause of the 'riot'. 'Bulldogs sources claim a group of Canterbury supporters were urinated on by a Roosters fan from an upstairs balcony at Aussie Stadium, while a 14-year-old Muslim girl had a veil ripped off by a Rooster fan' (Hawse and Bell, 2004: 58; see also Peterson, 30/3/04: 11). This astounding claim was corroborated by sources in the local Lebanese community. James Emmanouil, 'a Bulldogs supporter for more than 20 years', wrote, in a letter to the *Telegraph* (30/3/04: 19): 'Walking through the stadium with my girlfriend, before, during and after the game, I was spat at, had beer thrown at me from the upper tier and was called a rapist. My girlfriend was also harassed in an unspeakable manner ... all by Roosters supporters' [original ellipsis].

This was not the whole story, of course. Demoralised by the gang rape accusations and the associated disunity between the team and officials, the Bulldogs were defeated 35 to nil by their Eastern suburbs rivals (*AM*, 27/3/04). As in the earlier affrays, bottles were thrown onto the field; this time the game was interrupted for a minute. The headline blame, of course, was attached solely to the Bulldogs crowd. 'SHAME ON YOU', raged the *Telegraph's* frontpage headline, with the page one story entirely in terms of Bulldogs fans attacking Roosters supporters (Chesterton and Peterson, 27/3/04: 1). Again there was

the angle of the two little girls terrorised by the melee. One again there was the imagery of Bulldogs supporters as animals, who ‘should be corralled in a barbed wire cage at one end of the field to ensure general public safety’ (Chesterton, 27/3/04: 4). (This notion was particularly resonant at a time when pictures of Middle Eastern asylum seekers, just so caged, were still prominent in the public mind.) They were ‘devoid of humanity and even common decency’. The Bulldogs fans were once more not genuine followers, but merely ‘dressed in Bulldogs colours’. The well-worn stereotype of criminality was invoked, with the Roosters vs Bulldogs match being characterised as ‘the Chooks versus the Crooks’ (Chesterton, 27/3/04: 4).

The weekend tabloid, the *Sun-Herald*, recycled with relish the proven recipe about the toddlers so traumatised by the fracas as never to return to the game they loved (Duff, Lawson and Kidman, (28/3/04: 9), the half-page colour photo showing blue-eyed, light-haired, fair-skinned kids with a Celtic surname. Yet from there, the cycle of media outrage wound down, as eventually they invariably do.

There was a story in August about police officers officially moonlighting in uniform for \$26 to \$30 per hour to provide extra security at rugby league matches, with a colour photo showing their blue and white uniforms neatly matching those of the (orderly seated) Bulldogs supporters (Kidman, 1/8/04: 44). There was a letter to the *Telegraph* later that month from D. Scott (10/8/04) from the opposition Cowboys Supporters Group complaining about the bad language of Bulldogs fans. The letter re-told the story of the small children whose game was spoilt. There was a single-column *Telegraph* ‘exclusive’

in September revealing that Bulldogs fans would be urged by the club to sign a 'code of conduct' (Ritchie, 16/9/04: 3). There were a couple of column inches the following week in each of the Sydney dailies about a firecracker being let off at the Bulldogs' game against the Melbourne Storm at Aussie Stadium (*Daily Telegraph*, 20/9/04: 3; *Sydney Morning Herald* 23/9/04: 44). There were, however, no riots.

Police warned fans that there would be extra security at the grand final, in which the Bulldogs were to play the Roosters (*Sunday Telegraph*, 3/10/04: 5). The Bulldogs won that match and that year's premiership. *The Australian* attributed the celebrations being 'remarkably free of violence' to the Bulldogs being 'muzzled'. Nevertheless, there were hints of deviance in the observations about 'doof doof' music, roaring cars, loud horns (McNicholl, 5/10/04). The police commented on the notable lack of violence, and said that 'there had been few incidents at the Telstra, where 82,000 enthusiastic fans watched the game' (McNicholl, 5/10/04).

In Stan Cohen's famous formula, the spiralling condition of moral panic either winds down or breaks down: it either 'disappears, submerges, or deteriorates and becomes more visible' (1987: p.9). In the case which has been presented here, the particular panic over the Bulldog Army has abated, but there is an abiding generalized sense of a crisis of moral order in the 'debate' over immigration and multiculturalism, and an ongoing salience of the Arab or Muslim Other as the pre-eminent folk devil in contemporary Australia.

The reading of the stories events presented here bespeaks an underlying reality about social life in Australia today, and arguably in similar societies. The powerfully recurring theme about the 'mainstream' culture's 'families', 'our' kith and kin, being driven out of, or endangered at, 'our' game by uncivilised interlopers prone to crime and violence has been told, over the same period, about 'our' neighbourhoods, 'our' cities, 'our' nation. Our borders have been infiltrated by the dangerous other in the same way our sports and our sportsgrounds have. The same story is being told on other islands, other continents, other hemispheres.

Endnotes

1. The author would like to thank Selda Dagistanli for her summary of this program.

References

- AM* (27/3/04) 'Brawl breaks out at Bulldogs match', *AM*, ABC Radio, 27 March, <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2004/s1075110.htm>
- Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales (2003) *Race for the Headlines: Racism and media discourse*. Sydney: Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales
- Beikoff, K. (26/4/01a) 'War on hooligans', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 April, p.56.
- Beikoff, K. (26/4/01b) '\$500 bite on hooligans', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 April, p.3.
- Beikoff, K. (11/5/01) 'Fans last shout: League louts' final warning to behave', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May, p.1.
- Beikoff, K. (12/5/01) 'Sobering blow for league fans', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 May, p.1
- Bissett, K. (19/3/01) 'Fans praised for courtesy', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March, p.10.
- Bradley, M. (25-26/8/01) 'Bulldog's bash-and-dash puts girls into a league of their own', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25-26 August, p.5.
- Brown, W. (25/4/01) 'We gave our lives for great-grandchildren like *that?*' [cartoon], *Daily Telegraph*, 25 April, p.29.
- Chesterton, R. (27/3/04) 'Throw the book at Bulldogs', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 March, p.4.
- Chesterton, R. and Peterson, A. (27/3/04) 'SHAME ON YOU', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 March, p.1.
- Cohen, S. (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.
- Collins, J., Noble, G., Poynting, S. and Tabar, P. (2000) *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime: Youth, Ethnicity and Crime* Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Cope, B. and Kalantzis, M. (2000) *A Place in the Sun: Re-creating the Australian way of Life* Sydney: Harper Collins.
- Critcher, C. (2003) *Moral Panics and the Media* Open University Press: Buckingham.

Daily Telegraph (24/4/01) 'Bulldogs facing night game ban' [banner], *Daily Telegraph*, 24 April, p.1.

Daily Telegraph (25/4/01) 'The Bulldog Army: the true fans fight back' [letters], *Daily Telegraph*, 25 April, p.79.

Daily Telegraph (30/3/04) 'Blow whistle on rogue fans' [letters], *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March, p.19.

Daily Telegraph (20/9/04) 'Bulldogs to act over cracker', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September, p.3.

Davies, A. And McClymont, K. (30/8/01) 'ALP push for Oasis cash: Obeid accused', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August, p.1

Davies, A. And McClymont, K. (31/8-1/9/01) 'It's absurd: Obeid denies he sought \$1m from Oasis', *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 August-1 November, p.6.

Davies, L. (10/3/04) 'Bulldog witnessed alleged gang rape: police', *Age*, 10 March
<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/03/09/1078594360966.html>

de Freitas, F. (1998) 'The "Belmore Riot": Ethnic violence or media beat-up', *Reportage*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, republished at
http://journalism.uts.edu.au/archive/lakemba/lak_belmore.html

Donson, F., Chesters, G., Welsh, I. and Tickle, A. (2004) 'Rebels with a Cause, Folk Devils without a Panic: Press jingoism, policing tactics and anti-capitalist protest in London and Prague', *Internet Journal of Criminology*
<http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Donson%20et%20al%20%20Folkdevils.pdf>

Duff, E., Lawson, A. and Kidman, J. (28/3/04) 'How the dogs ended Jack and Sarah's love of football', *Sun-Herald*, 28 March, p.9.

Frilingos, P. (14/3/01) 'Unruly dogs fans face life ban', *Daily Telegraph* 14 March, p.1.

Gibson, M. (4/6/97) in the *Daily Telegraph*, cited in de Freitas (1998).

Gibson, M. (22/10/00) 'Pride of Lebanon: A bunch of mates with a dream', *Sunday Telegraph*, 22 October, p. 66.

Gilmore, H. (29/4/01) 'The Bulldog army defies ban on war cry banner', *Sun-Herald*, 29 April, p.9.

Gilmore, H., Prichard, G. And Leggatt, J. (22/4/01) 'Bulldog army in disgrace again', *Sun-Herald*, 22 April, pp.6-7.

- Hage, G. (1998) *White Nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B. (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.
- Hawse, A. And Bell, C. (28/3/04) 'Dogs could lose points', *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 March, p.58.
- Hughson, J. (1998) 'The "Battle of Belmore": Multiculturalism comes to the Rugby League', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, April/May, 26-29.
- Hughson, J. (1999) 'The Boys in blue and the Bad Blue Boys: a case study of interactive relations between the police and ethnic youth in Western Sydney', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 34, 2, May.
- Hughson, J. (2001) Interview by Amanda Smith, 'Dealing with Violence', *The Sports Factor*, Radio National, 4 May.
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/sportsf/stories/s289047.htm>
- Insight* (1/6/04) 'Killing multiculturalism', *Insight*, SBS Television, 1 June
<http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/trans.php?transid=669>
- Jones, A. (30/3/04) Alan Jones Program, Radio 2GB.
- Kent, P. (28/4/01) 'Learning a lesson in respect', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April, p.123.
- Kidman, J. (1/8/04) 'Rent-a-cop: boys in blue for hire to stay out of the red', *Sun-Herald*, 1 August, p. 44.
- Marsh, J. (12/9/98) 'Quong Tart, not your average Aussie hero', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September, p.17.
- McNicholl, D.D. (5/10/04) 'Bulldogs muzzle celebrations', *Australian*, 5 October.
- Morris, R. (27/3/02) 'It's not a passing interest in class front row', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 March, p.9.
- Noble, G. and Poynting, S. (2003) 'Acts of War: military metaphors in the representation of Lebanese youth gangs' *Media International Australia: Culture and Politics*, 106, February, pp.110-123.
- Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*. London: Macmillan.
- Peterson, A. (12/3/01) 'Fans trash train after footy game: Bulldogs told to explain', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March, p.7.

- Peterson, A. (30/3/04) 'Hunt for a dirty dozen', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March, p.11.
- PM* (23/4/01) 'Footy violence may lead to fan segregation', *PM*, 23 April.
<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/s281623.htm>
- Poynting, S. and Noble, G. (2004) 'Living with Racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001'. Report to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April. Published at:
http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/research/index.html
- Poynting, S., Noble, G., Tabar, P. and Collins, J. (2004) *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*. Sydney: Institute of Criminology.
- Ritchie, D. (16/9/04) 'Fans to sign on code of conduct', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 September, p.3.
- Salleh, L. (24/4/01) 'Dog day afternoon', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 April, p.5.
- Scala, M. (25/4/01) 'Violent league fans to face life ban', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 April, p.1.
- Sheehan, P. (12/5/01) 'Pitch battles', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May.
- Sofios, S. and Adams, T. (31/3/01) 'Beware of the Dog: Hundreds of fans flee game violence', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 March, p.3.
- Sunday Telegraph* (3/10/04) 'Police warn fans', *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 October, p.5.
- Sun-Herald* (29/4/01) 'Sniffer dogs await fans', *Sun-Herald* 29 April, p.9.
- Sydney Morning Herald* (23/9/04) 'Bang goes fan's chance to follow the Dogs', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September, p.44.
- Sydney Morning Herald* (31/8-1/9/02) 'A dog's tale: the story so far', *Sydney Morning Herald* 31 August-1 November, p.6.
- Sygal, D. (6/10/02) 'Middle East to middle stump', *Sun-Herald*, 6 October, p.93.
- Walter, B. (12-13/5/01) 'Bulldogs' bite kept on the park', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12-13 May, p.75.
- Walter, B and Cornford, P. (24/4/01) 'What to do with the Bulldog Army: sentence them to life on the leash', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April, pp.1,4.