“It’s Just an Attitude That You Feel”:
Inter-ethnic habitus before the Cronulla riots.

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“They play soccer and kick sand all over people, they make rude remarks to women, they intimidate everybody” said Campbell. Girls in bikinis are called sluts and whores, the gangs play loud music and leave rubbish on the beach, local residents say.
Manila Times (Bartlett 2005)

I was in Queensland the week leading up to the Cronulla riots having taken a few days break after a conference to spend some time in the sun before returning to Sydney. The first I heard of the riot was at breakfast in our Maroochydore hotel on the last day of our holiday. I picked up the newspaper and was horrified at the apocalyptic images of drunken surfie boys spewing forth some of the nastiest racism I’ve witnessed in my lifetime.

This was more than just a professional interest for me. I grew up in the ‘Shire’ in the 1970s and 1980s and spent a good portion of my youth on the beach at Cronulla. I left in the early 1990s for a lot of reasons, but mainly because of the sexism and social conservatism that seemed so omnipresent in the Shire. Although I had long since moved out of the area, a number of my family and friends remain living there.

Old friends and family were initially upset when I was quoted in newspapers sharply critical of the racism displayed by the Anglo rioters. Although disapproving of the overt racism, they felt the riots were a result of long suppressed tension which had been brewing for years, yet never officially acknowledged or the causes dealt with. Their view was that ‘politically correct’ academics like me simply denied their very real experiences of anti-social behaviour among young men of Middle-Eastern background which had been occurring at Cronulla over a number of years.
Talking to them about the ‘cause’ of ill-feeling that led to the riot, they seemed to find it difficult to articulate exactly, traversing between observations about everyday discomforts and generalised stereotypes of ‘middle-eastern youth’. Because it links to other work I have been doing in this area, I became increasingly interested in the extent to which they emphasised everyday discomforts experienced in shared spaces such as the beach or park. There were a few themes that emerged most prominently during these conversations; Boisterous soccer played on the beach amidst sun-bakers; Big groups of ‘Leb’ boys who were perceived as rowdy and aggressive; The ‘pack’ style of fighting they perceived ‘Leb boys’ to favour; and casual sexist remarks, ‘looks’ and more serious sexual harassment of young women.

In this paper I focus primarily on the first three themes. I do not deal with the phenomenon of sexual harassment as Judy Lattas’s contribution to this volume applies a sophisticated analysis to the intersections between gender, race and sexual harassment. I argue in this chapter that the escalation from ‘discomfort’ to full scale riot had to do, in part, with a set of intersections between the phenomenological experience of incompatible embodiment and everyday ritual, and larger moral panics and discourses surrounding Islam and Arabic speaking youth.

**Beach Rhythms & Embodied Difference**

“*Its just an attitude that you feel*” is how a talkback radio caller on 2UE tried to explain her discomfort with young men of middle-eastern appearance on Cronulla beach in the years leading up to the riots. Many of the statements from ‘Shire types’ about Middle-Eastern youth employ similar language; evoking embodied notions of ‘feeling’ intimidated, uncomfortable or threatened around young men of middle-eastern appearance. Such accounts are at least as common as first hand experiences of serious or violent anti-social behaviour. However they speak with a level of intensity which suggests these ‘feelings’ need to be taken seriously if we are to understand and try to prevent further racialised conflict. I argue they are attempting to describe unconscious
'feelings’ sometimes associated with differing ‘technique du corps’ (Mauss 1979), or what I have termed ‘interethnic habitus’ (Wise 2005a; Wise 2005b). I explore the idea that differently habituated masculinities and modes of using space can cause some of the discomforts that ‘shire’ types try, but usually fail, to articulate without falling into racist evaluations.

Summer at Cronulla has a subdued, relaxed feel. Tanned bodies spread out along the beach as if in some kind of mass meditation. The voices and movements of others on the beach seem muffled or absorbed by the sand, by the wind, and by the sound of the surf such that one can feel almost alone despite being amidst hundreds of others. Anglo boys seem to cluster in small groups of two or three, sometimes in mixed groups with girls. The surfer boys among them are easy to pick out. You first see them when you drive past the beachside car-parks which stretch from Wanda to North Cronulla. Morning and afternoon lone figures are dotted along the road leaning on the white timber railing assessing the waves as they gaze out to sea. Others are pulling on wetsuits and unloading boards from the roof of their cars, their sun-bleached hair and tanned torsos marking them out as surfers. Long-time surfers are easy to spot with their muscular upper body and angular shape. Many develop a particular gait; even board-less away from the beach they hold their arms in a way that it’s easy to imagine a surfboard tucked under one of them. Surfing is a solitary sport and one which these boys seem to embody in their manner in and out of the water.

Surfer boys in many ways personify the idealised Anglo body. With a few spatial exceptions (which I’ll speak to later) these surfer bodies are typically emotionally and affectively contained. There are few outwardly expressive gestures. Their speech is clipped and contained, typically speaking with brevity using as few words and syllables as possible. Yep. Righto. Mate. Interactions with other bodies are similarly contained and circumscribed by strict codes of masculinity. Easygoing, chilled out, is how they might be described by some. Cold, stiff and unresponsive, by others. For many ‘Shire types’ such outwardly affective bodies are experienced as an excess of presence. ‘Leb’ bodies,
on the other hand, are stereotypically expressive bodies, connoting all the outwardness implied in the term. Their’s are bodies that move outward, connect with others, and which demonstrate emotions in obvious and embodied ways. Exuberant and boisterous is how they are sometimes described. Sometimes seen as rowdy, or aggressive by others.
Image 1: North Cronulla photo taken in November of 2005
Anglos, especially the young, also present a fairly unified colour-scape of beach clothing. Long pants are rarely worn. Colours tend to the bright, light, and pastel. Black (except for bikinis) is also uncommon. Young men have a uniform of knee length board shorts and particular clothing brands are prominent among young Anglos; Roxy, Billabong, Rip Curl, Quicksilver.

Its quite easy to pick out the ‘Leb’ kids amidst the Anglos. They differ in body size and type, in dress, in bodily disposition, and in group size. The two groups cluster quite differently. Anglo families visiting the beach typically consist of the nuclear family, possibly a grandparent or two. Young friendship groups tend to be smaller in size, commonly with a gender mix. ‘Shire’ boys are often there to surf or ride boogie boards and will typically group in clusters of three or four. The photo (Image 1) taken at North Cronulla on a summer’s day before the riot shows these patterns in stark relief. Amidst crowded clusters of Anglo bikinis and board-shorts are three groups of young men of Middle Eastern appearance. At the back of the sand on the way to the kiosk is a group of about fifteen young men playing what looks to be a boisterous game of soccer. They stand out with their robust size and their haircuts, a few of them sporting the fashionable (among their set) ‘undercut’ style; sides shaved, longer on top. They are nearly all wearing black football shorts which are typically much shorter than board shorts and have elastic waists. One is in jeans, no shirt. Closer to the water is another cluster of boys. They appear to be pre-pubescent or early teens, are chubby and wear black Adidas style shorts. Their father looks on as they play soccer between the mid-section of the sand and the water, close to the flags. They are enjoying themselves, but their number and boisterousness could easily be irritating if they enter the sunbakers zone. There is another point of habituated difference, and this is as much between Anglo-Australians and British or Europeans as it is to do with Anglos and ‘Lebs’. That is, Anglo-Australians don’t ‘do’ things on the beach. Activity takes place in the water. With the exception of young children, the sand zone is for ‘relaxing’.
Soccer on the beach at Cronulla came up again and again in news reports about the ‘causes’ of tension. It emerged in interviews conducted by community and youth workers, in reports to council and in discussions with council employed life guards. Indeed, it was, I believe, what started (I say started, not caused) the initial altercation between the off duty lifesavers and the ‘Leb boys’ in the fortnight prior to the riot. Council life guards informed me that soccer in the crowded section near the flags had become a problem in recent years and often resulted in verbal exchanges when soccer balls or players ran into other beach users. Council employed lifeguards inform me that they had, in previous years attempted to section off an area of the beach for soccer further away from the flags in order to accommodate both soccer players and other beach users. Unfortunately this caused a secondary set of problems. Hot after a vigorous game, the soccer players would swim in the water directly adjoining the sectioned off area, rather than moving back down the beach to swim between the flags. This in turn resulted in tension and regular verbal exchanges when life savers were forced to ask them to move from the where they were swimming, leave the water and return back to swim between the flags.

The soccer I’ve witnessed on the beach is typically quite spontaneous and casual, involving groups of young men of Middle Eastern background ranging from pre-pubescent to late teens. They are typically played in the vicinity of the flag area either on the shore line or at the rear on the dry sand. The games are usually good natured, if a little boisterous. The tension points tend to be when the beach is crowded and when soccer balls go astray; sometimes bouncing into other beach users, or when players get a bit too overexcticd in chasing a ball through the seated crowd, kicking sand up along the way. This behaviour is in turn read as ‘uncivil’ or ‘disrespectful’. Here is a typical comment from an Anglo beach user about exuberant ‘soccer on the beach’;

I have also seen them totally disrespect other people, kicking around a soccer ball in the middle of a packed beach, to the point where a child of no more then 5 years old was hit in the face. They didn’t even care that a child was hurt, as long as they were having fun.
Contributor to SMH Blog 21/12/05 (Steve 2005)
Anglo experiences of ‘Leb’ difference on the beach ranges from low range ‘feeling uncomfortable’ to more intense irritation in situations such as the soccer incident described in the quote above. They do, however, represent a continuum which has its roots in the notion of what has come to be known as ‘habitus’. Related to Mauss’s notion of ‘techniques du corps’, and the corporeal scheme, habitus, as Bourdieu describes it is ‘embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history’, and importantly, it ‘is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 56). Habitus refers, in essence then, to the embodied dispositions that ‘internalise our social location and which orient our actions’, a kind of mastery of the implicit principles of the social world’ (Noble and Watkins 2003: 522). Embodiment of our social location, manifests ‘in our actions, our modes of appearance and through a bodily hexis or bodily bearing – posture, manners, ways of speaking and dressing—for example (Noble and Watkins 2003: 522). This mastery of the social world Bourdieu has termed a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 66). He borrows from Proust to describe this in an evocative way; ‘one might say that arms and legs are full of numb imperatives’. Because of their embodied nature, habitus and hexis have the capacity to induce in us bodily affective responses to inter-subjective encounters with those around us and to our social and material environment more broadly.

The notion of habitus is closely linked to the concept of social fields. Although Bourdieu never really deals with ethnicity and multiethnic societies, it is, I argue, implicit in his scheme the idea that within and cross-cutting other social fields, ethnicities themselves can function as social fields within which hierarchies of position exist, and which nest within an ethnically framed habitus. Habitus, therefore, is bound up with power and with the embodied practice, navigation, classification and sense making of everyday life. Like shopping centres, footpaths and other public places, a crowded beach is a situation of enforced togetherness. However culturally framed norms involving specific rituals and codes for the management and navigation of such situations exist and are framed by our habitus which (re)produces these rituals at the pre-conscious level. Extending the notion
of habitus to the discomforts experienced in the crowded public zone of the beach suggests that certain behaviours are noticed more where the actors involved are differently embodied in terms of general hexis or disposition and where codes and ritual norms are not shared.

In the highly individualised Western context, everyday civility requires that strangers maintain a sense of separateness in crowded places. Rituals for the maintenance of such self-containment in public spaces involve what Goffman calls ‘civil inattention’. Civil inattention refers to those everyday micro-rituals people employ to achieve a sense of staying unknown to one another in public places. Civil inattention represents a ‘competence to refuse relations without creating non-persons’ [my emphasis] (Hirschauer 2005: 41). Goffman describes a typical example of civil inattention taking place on a footpath: ‘After a quick but open glance at a proper distance, the participants’ looks are lowered for each other, and raised again only at the moment of passing…. Gazes should…neither signal a ‘recognition’, promising an openness for contact, nor should they be full of distrust and hatred’ (Goffman 1963:84). Hirschauer describes this as the management of strangeness as a normalised non-relation (2005) designed to maintain a sense of apartness in a context of enforced togetherness.

These rituals for managing situations of enforced togetherness in part explain some of the irritation at soccer on the crowded beach. When young men enter the ‘zone’ of other beach users without signalling in the way Goffman describes or similar, it is experienced by Anglos as an act of incivility. In turn, habitus reminds us of the extent to which such experiences are not rational or conscious rituals, but deeply embodied ones which function at the subconscious level. The discomfort of differing habitus and bodily practices such as those around soccer or ‘rowdy’ or ‘threatening’ Lebanese youth on the beach signal the fact that we actually ‘feel’ bodies ‘out of place’. Rodaway describes such spatial bodily encounters as experienced through our haptic sense system. Our haptic sense system involves our tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive (body in space) senses, it makes the surfaces of our bodies porous, and permeable. Our haptic senses allow us to perceive things like weight, pressure, balance, temperature, vibrations,
presence (Fisher 1997), orientation in space. Through the haptic system we both receive and perceive the environment, at once on the skin and inside our skin and bodies. For these reasons, touch is one of the most intimate and reciprocal of senses, for ‘to touch is always to be touched’ (Montague in Rodaway 1994: 41), and importantly, it can evoke a whole gamut of emotions and associations from desire, caring and love to disgust, revulsion and hate (1994: 41). Western bodies often feel deeply uncomfortable in crowded spaces because their culturally attuned sense of appropriate interpersonal distance is much greater than some other cultures. Body space researchers see personal space as, ‘effectively an extension of the self’s presence in space, and violation of this space by another is felt to be like the violation of the body itself’ (Rodaway 1994: 59). So deeply psychically, habitually and historically engrained is this spatial and bodily order that the disorder can produce a sense of bodily threat and permeability. To this extent, entering a person’s personal space (the contextual no go bubble of space around our bodies) without permission is experienced as permeating one’s very flesh, which accounts for the sense of shock and irritation often felt when the space bubble is penetrated without an accompanying ritual involving an apology or acknowledgement of transgression.

Encounters with soccer playing or ‘rowdy’ youths in crowded spaces such as the beach can produce a distinct sense of dis-ease. Many commentators dismissed Anglo beach users irritated at groups of young men playing soccer in their midst as simply prejudiced against those playing a sport typically associated with ‘ethnics’. However I suspect that irritation with ‘Leb’ soccer players on the beach had as much to do with subconscious expectations about how public spaces such as the beach should be used and shared, about the kinds of bodies one might expect and how they should move and cluster. In the next section I discuss some of the spatial dimensions of how Anglo beach users experience boisterous ‘Leb boys’ on the beach and tie this back to Anglo forms of embodied containment and western individualism. I discuss how this western trajectory of individualised space intersects with patterns of beach use and ritualised spatial behaviour common in such places.
**Towel as Chair: Beach soccer and the individualisation of public space**

Rituals and practices of civility in crowded places are also made manifest in the very design of places and the spatial management of public places. I suggest that the placement of towels on the beach and culturally imbued patterns and rules of ambulation around them tells us a whole lot about how Anglos unconsciously produce and ‘feel’ freedom on the beach.
Sydney’s beaches can get crowded on weekends and holidays during the summer months. Despite the crowds, there is a certain rhythm and spatial orderliness about the beach. People tend to ambulate at a certain pace, and children playing are often reprimanded if they bother others in the vicinity. When the beach is not too crowded, sunbakers keep as large a distance as possible between themselves and other groups. When it is crowded, the distance between where people ‘set up camp’ is much closer, but there is rarely less than about three metres between groups of towels. The space for playing and running about is normally along the firm wet sand at the shoreline. Care is taken not to kick or shake sand on other sunbakers. If there is a wind, those packing up to leave will take care to shake their towel down-wind from neighbouring sunbakers to avoid blowing sand on them. Moving between towels, beach users avoid stepping within the space of other ‘campsites’ as stepping on another’s towel is considered an act of infringement upon another’s private space and therefore should be avoided. These are socialised practices which have to be learnt. Indeed, Anglo children are trained in these practices from a very young age.

Frivolity is confined to certain sanctioned spaces; in the water, on the firm sand at the shoreline, in the ‘no mans land’ of the dry sand which borders the grass as you leave the beach (if its not crowded), and in the green zone parks which border the beach. These rules apply especially so for activities which involve fast movement, flying objects, and running about.

“We sat down on a picnic blanket and they kept kicking balls at us!”
Caller to 2GB Talkback Radio who called to support the protest/riot. She is relating her grievances about ‘middle eastern youth’ on the beach.

Movement between towels in the crowded mid-section of the sand is usually confined to children playing near to their parents. Adult movement through this mid-section zone would normally only involve walking to and from the water, leaving the beach, or walking to or from the changing rooms or kiosk.
I suggest that the spatial arrangement of clusters of beach towels on Cronulla beach can, following Sennett, be read as ‘comfy chairs’. Sennett talks about the convergence of notions of freedom with the development of orderly public space and makes a series of arguments about how this produces bodies closed to difference and averse to ‘social touching’. The layout and rituals attached beach towels represent the material manifestation of bodies trying to be private and self contained in a public space. Towel sites and the invisible bubble of ‘personal space’ which surround them circumscribe the boundaries of public sociality amidst the beach crowd.

Richard Sennett has argued that certain forms of self-containment emerged in Europe and the West more generally from the 19th century onwards concurrent with an increasing quest for ‘individualised comfort’ in the material and social world. This individualisation of bodies was in turn increasingly spatialised and began to impact upon the design and use of public space. He uses the evolution of the ‘comfy chair’ as a material manifestation of the increasing ‘containment’ of bodies and the coterminous regulation of space. Eighteenth century chairs were ‘social chairs’. They were typically without arms or only very low arms. They were formal looking compared to today’s lounge chair appearing closer to something like the contemporary dining chair. They had padded backs sloped so that you could lean into them, while the back left the head free to move unobstructed so as not to ‘disarrange the hair’. The design of the chair, especially the lack of or low arms, allowed freedom of movement of the body which allowed the occupant to talk easily to people all around (Sennett 1994: 340). By the nineteenth century, a version of the ‘comfy chair’ familiar to us today as a lounge chair had evolved to popularity. Following innovations in upholstery it sat low and the occupant would sink into it experiencing a feeling of being enveloped, engulfing the body which was no longer able to move about in the socially interactive way of earlier chairs. Bodies in these chairs become immobilised (ibid 341-2). Sennett argues that these chairs reflect a sense of comfort as associated with bodily removal from the social. This increasing association of bodily containment moves to the street where increasingly ‘people began to treat as their
right not to be spoken to by strangers, to treat the speech of strangers as a violation’ (343). Sennett argues that ‘urban spaces take form largely from the ways people experience their own bodies’ (370). This manifests in urban design where increasingly (most manifest in post revolutionary Paris) unobstructed movement was treated as freedom.

I propose that the spatial arrangement of towels and campsites on the beach, and the ‘space bubbles’ and codes of spatial movement around them can be read as akin to the ‘comfy chairs’ to which Sennett refers. That is, they represent material manifestations of how Anglo beach users ‘feel’ and reproduce a sense of freedom in spatially individualised terms. That is, despite the crowded space of the beach, the layout and ‘shared’ codes of organisation which help to sustain unobstructed movement, and rituals which ‘manage’ the civil non-relation with other beach users assist to maintain the myth of ‘freedom’ and a sense of ‘aloneness in a crowd’, which in turn produces a feeling of relaxation and comfort on the beach. The beach has come to personify freedom in the Australian imaginary. Photos of Australian beach scenes in tourism and promotional literature are nearly always empty of or contain only a few scattered people. Indeed, researching photographs of Cronulla beach it was very difficult to find a single photograph featuring a typical summer’s day crowd at the beach. In this sense, rituals such as civil inattention can be seen as means of maintaining the myth of aloneness and a sense of freedom at the beach.

Drawing together the threads from Goffman, Bourdieu and Rodaway, soccer and similar modes of embodied, expressive and boisterous behaviour by ‘Leb boys’, I suggest disease or dis-comfort exists for a number of reasons. First, from the sense of disjuncture around ethnically different forms of habitus, and associated unconscious expectations of what should happen within the social field of the beach space. Together, these rituals, rhythms and embodied codes of movement through public space discussed here can be seen as a means of producing a sense of ontological certainty, a subconscious sense of expectation and confidence at the orderly flow of the world. Noble terms this ‘comfort’
(Noble 2005) which is related to Giddens’ notion of ontological security but is rather more social, sensual and affective, and ‘grounded in the routines and spaces of daily existence’ (Noble 2005: 113). He characterises ‘comfort’ as involving a ‘background mood of well-being, trust and confidence’ and the ‘fit’ we experience in relation to the space we inhabit and the practices we perform’ (Noble 2005:114). Second, boisterousness such as soccer on the beach which permeates the personal space of Anglo beach users is experienced as threatening or at least irritating. Without the ritual of civil inattention, this permeation is experienced as an act of almost aggressive incivility, that the boys involved ‘have not recognised me as a person’. Third, as Rodaway showed habitus is so tied up with bodily affect, a group of boys running into someone’s towel can be felt as threatening in an embodied sense. In the context of aroused affects, feeling intimidated or uncomfortable as a result of mild displacement from ones comfort zone can in turn create a sense of embodied empathy with rumours, reports and sightings of more serious anti-social behaviour among ‘Leb boys’. ‘I feel it must be true’. This in turn leaves open as set of affects much more receptive to reinforcement by larger discourses and moral panics about middle eastern youth.

One of the more common moral panics surrounds the supposed excessively violent nature of some ‘Leb boys’. In the next section I explore this in the context of what I term comparative masculinities and how this translates into differential modes, codes and spaces of fighting.

**Fighting the good fight: on differential codes and spaces of conflict**

As signalled in the previous section, one of the justifications for the riot made by Shire youth and shock jocks alike was the apparent attack on two off duty teenage life savers on Cronulla beach the week before. As with any such situation there are conflicting reports about who and how many were involved, and what started the fight to begin with. It was subsequently reported in various news outlets following a media release put out by the NSW Police Service reporting the incident. The fight was characterised by the rioters
and the popular press as the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’, and as just another example in a long string of incidents involving group violence and young men of middle-eastern background. The following is a first hand account of what happened that day.

Two Life guards and another guy were talking. when a group of lebos overheard them say “those fucken lebos”.. or something along those lines..
So of course.. what do you expect them to do? Nothing? So they start talking to the guy... then one of the life guards said “you don’t belong here”.. or something

So they smashed him.. then the guy who was talking with the lifeguard... was saying please stop.. and tried stopping it.. but by then they were pissed.. and bashed him too...

A group of Aussies on the beach got involved maybe 10-20... so 5 leb cars came down.. to smash the Aussies who jumped in... then.....

I’d like to highlight in this quote both the racist remarks which sparked the fight and the reported group fighting and explore these two themes in the sections which follow. I want to suggest that Anglo and ‘Leb’ boys emphasise different notions of respect and loyalty and have different and sometimes incompatible moral codes of fighting and I argue that these articulate with the performance of culturally defined masculinities. One of the comments that came up again and again among the ‘shire types’ were perceptions about ‘immoral’ codes of fighting favoured by ‘lebs’. They were disdainful towards what they viewed as an unmanly form of unbalanced fighting where several ‘Lebs’ would join in to fight a single Anglo. Group fighting, revenge attacks and the use of weapons are similarly common threads. The following post to a bulletin board following the 2005 riots is typical ‘Anglo’ view of ‘Leb’ fighting styles.

...everytime we try to have a little party (we being 16) with a group of friends a group of 20yr old lebanese always rock up and gate crash...this then leads to fights but you can never fight a leb they are dirty filthy cheating bartsards they carry around knives and if you do next week they come back with 20 of their couzins to get their revenge.

(Brent 2005)
Here I want to explore what might underpin this level of animosity towards how ‘Lebs fight’. On the face of it, fighting in any form can be seen as a site of excess beyond ordered social codes. In fact fighting actually involves a strict set of moral codes for most groups and should not be viewed as divorced from social norms, but firmly related to and framed by them and by their socio-historical context. For example, men of Anglo-Celtic background often reference the ‘digger’ ideal, characterised by the lone, brave, yet fair soldier, typically of authentic working class or country stock. Interestingly, in recent times what was a classed discourse has increasingly become an ethnicised one. For Anglos, the ‘fair fight’ is an important frame of reference. Fair fights are ‘even fights’. An even fight is numerically matched, ‘one on one’, and physically matched in terms of combatant size and weapons used. The bare fist fight is seen as the ‘fairest’ fight, whereas fights involving weapons are seen as somehow cheating, weak or unmanly. Most importantly, a combatant with a weapon should never fight one without. Physical matching also refers to body size; a big bloke shouldn’t fight someone much smaller, men should not fight women, nor should one fight someone much older or younger. In terms of their participation, ‘mates’ should stand around in support, but should not join in unless the other side increases its numbers.

Of course Anglo men are not all ‘orderly’ and well mannered, they haven’t always (nor do they always now) ‘fight fairly’. As I show in the following section, there are numerous reports of anti-social behaviour as serious as anything committed by ‘Leb boys’. Nonetheless, notions of ‘the good fight’, the ‘moral fight’ can and do differ quite distinctly across cultures and across social contexts. As Collins, Noble et al’s work has shown (Collins, Noble et al. 2000) among young men from Arabic speaking background there is no more moral cause to fight than to support your mate if he is being attacked. This is exemplified in a quote from their study; ‘At school if anyone called me a wog, they wouldn’t be speaking to me alone’ (Ghassan), which, the authors argue, was seen by their young male Lebanese research participants as quite different from their Anglo counterparts, who were perceived as lacking mateship due to their reluctance to join a
fight in support of their mates: ‘Like Aussies, they don’t stick up for each other’ (Mohammed) (Poynting, Noble et al. 1999).

Poynting & Noble’s work also emphasises the extent to which the ‘wounds’ of racism impact, how this pain sometimes creates a sense of defensiveness which can result in violence, as we saw in the fight with the lifesavers. The pain of such wounding is poignantly described below.

EIAD DIYAB: We knew always there was racism, but we never knew it was to this extent. I mean, all your life you’ve been - you’ve been raised to be Australian. I mean, you carry the Australian flag. When you go to sports events and all that, you’re happy to be Australian and all that. And all of sudden people reject you. “Go home!” They shout your names. Like, “Go home, you Middle Eastern Lebs,” or whatever. “Go home.” I mean, that’s a shock to us. “Go home.” I mean, like, you get cut inside your heart, you know. Like you feel like you’re not part of society no more. [my emphasis] (Jackson 2006)

This quote from Eiad Diyab, a young man interviewed in 2006 by ABC TV, is an extraordinarily evocative description of the almost physical pain of racism. His feeling of utter displacement is palpable when he talks about how it feels like to be told you don’t belong. As Collins, Noble et al have shown, the deep wounding of racism can create a disposition of violent and group oriented defensiveness among alienated young men and evolves from a sense of protest masculinity (Connell 1995) often stemming from experiences of everyday racism.

In this section, though, I want to unpack the idea that ‘Lebs’ are ‘more violent’ than Anglos. I argue that, in addition to certain codes of fighting, there are in fact sanctioned places for aggression and fighting, and that Anglo spaces tend to be separated from the everyday, rather than absent altogether. One sanctioned ‘space of violence’ for Anglos is the pub and similar contexts of high interaction and where alcohol is consumed. Tomsen (1997) undertook extensive ethnographic research in several drinking venues in and around Newcastle to explore cultures of drinking related violence and masculinity. He argues that there is little support for a direct cause-effect relationship between alcohol and violence. Instead, he suggests that drinking related violence is a result of a number of
intersecting factors. First, much drinking related violence takes place in situations of intense interaction especially among young males. Second, acts of drunken disorder and low level violence are often experienced as a pleasurable and valued social activity by the men participating. Third, fights are often deliberately begun for the most trivial of offences and are characterised by escalating confrontation over social, and particularly male, honour (p94) and are often highly meaningful for the young men involved in terms of protecting their masculine identity and honour. Fights would typically occur around trivial issues such as ‘cheating at a game of pool, approaches made to girlfriends, squabbles over bumping and spilt drinks’ (p94). Overall, many of the violent encounters seemed to result from young men taking ‘exaggerated offence at some minor act of nuisance behaviour’ (p95). However the most common violent encounters witnessed by Tomsen during his ethnographic research involved encounters with figures of authority, particularly door staff and bouncers and often involved refusal of entry or ejection from premises by staff. The more extreme of these encounters can be read as expression of what Connell (1995) has termed ‘protest masculinity’. Drinking time and associated rowdy behaviour, loudness, swearing, arguments and fights are viewed as a ‘time out’ period of ‘social licence and release from conventional constraints (Cavan quoted in Tomsen 1997:96 and Tomsen 1997:97) and often involves a general sense of delight in the resulting ‘pandemonium’ and disorder.

What is striking about Tomsen’s study of working class Anglo pub violence in Australia is the similarity with the parameters of ‘Leb’ fighting; principally emanating from forms of protest masculinity. Where do ‘Leb boys’ typically fight? In situations of intense interaction. What ‘sets them off’? Situations which involve the defence of male honour, especially involving girls and figures of authority. Fighting for both young Anglo and ‘Leb’ males is also, importantly, a kind of sport, often experienced as part of an enjoyable social outing. Fighting for Leb boys can also be seen as ‘time out’ from restraints imposed within a strict parental and cultural context. What is different however, is the social spaces and sanctioned forms of fighting.
For Anglos, fighting most often occurs in situations such as the pub or channelled into safe zones such as the sporting field. This ‘sectioning off’ of fighting into specialised domains is no historical accident. Elias (2000) argues that since the fifteenth century, Western civilisations have seen a gradual separation and repression of the affects, and gives special attention to the modulation of affects related to aggression. He argues that “it is well known how violent manners were in the fifteenth century, with what brutality passions were assuaged” (in Elias 2000: 168). This occurred for a variety of reasons, but had most to do with a shift towards more centralised forms of power from smaller units of towns and villages under a feudal system. As central authority (at its apex under the system of nation states) grows people are forced live in relative peace with each other because of their increasing interdependence, and a physical power is increasingly monopolised by central authorities. The pleasure of violence remains but is increasingly channelled into specialised spaces and times. He gives the example of the rise of boxing, and later organised sport such as football as evidence of this channelling of violence into sanctioned spaces, and increasingly affects and emotions associated with violence are channelled from direct participation to spectating. In this way, ‘belligerence and aggression’ find socially permitted expression…and are expressed especially in ‘spectating’ in the imaginary identification with a small number of combatants to whom moderate and precisely regulated scope is granted for the release of such affects’ (Elias 170).

Tomsen’s description of sanctioned aggression in drinking spaces represents one western trajectory for the modification of aggressive affects. Elias helps us understand on the one hand the natural impulse towards aggression particularly among young men, but on the other how arbitrary the ‘special’ spaces are that evolve to safely channel this aggression. Tomsen’s work is particularly meaningful in relation to one of the most common arguments about the Cronulla riots; that ‘Anglo’ fighting is somehow not as bad as the open aggression of ‘Lebs’ which often takes place in daylight hours in public spaces and typically does not involve alcohol. Indeed, Prime Minister John Howard argued at the time that the Anglos involved in the riot were not necessarily racist and that it was
primarily a result of them ‘having had too much to drink’ and being worked up by the crowd - as though that somehow excused their behaviour (AAP 2005). In what appears to be a serious set of double standards, the ‘alcohol was to blame’ argument was used for Anglos to explain away anti-social behaviour, whereas petty aggressive behaviour by ‘Lebs’ on the beach in the years leading up to the riots was read as evidence of a widespread incivility amongst an entire ethnic group. The Anglo notion of the ‘special sanctioned space’ such as the pub or occasions involving alcohol allows this slight of hand to take place. There is, however, a long history of Anglo violence in Cronulla, as I show in the next section.

Disappearing Bodies: the case of the invisible Islanders.

All Out War Against Bodgies (Observer 12 December 1957)
Louts Brawl in Streets (18 July 1962)
Youth Mobs Defy Law in Wave of Terror (7 November 1962)
‘Surfies’ Go on Rampage (29 May 1963)
Police Blitz on Hoodlums at Cronulla (9 October 1963)
Cronulla on Alert on Beach Louts (29 October 1969)
Police Make Swoop on Caringbah-Cronulla (10 November 1971)
Suburb under Siege: Quiet Cronulla or Just Waiting to Erupt? (22 February 1984)
Cronulla’s Weekend of Shame (14 February 1984)
Reign of Terror by Drunken Hooligans (26 June 1985)
Mounted Police Patrol Cronulla Beach (15 November 1990)
Police Crackdown: Gang Violence on the Beaches of Cronulla (7 October 1993)
Beach Crime Wave (31 October 1994)
Mayor’s Firm on Her [Cronulla] ‘Bronx’ Slur (1 November 1994)
MP Calls for More Police (25/1/2000)
Gang’ Brawls worry Cronulla Restaurateurs (4 April 2000)
Hotheads a Danger to Summer Fun (24 October 2000)
Public Anger Rises; MP Calls Rally on Crime (8 March 2001)
Violence at Cronulla: Brawl and a 30cm Knife (9 October 2001)
Task Force Help: New Elite Squad Ready for Summer at Cronulla (4 December 2001)
Hoon Gates: Boom Lowered at the Beach (8 August 2002)
Drunk Kids blamed for Australia Day Battle (1/2/2005)
These are all headlines from the Sutherland Shire’s local paper the ‘St George & Sutherland Shire Leader’ of stories reporting violence and serious anti-social behaviour in Cronulla from the mid 1950s until the early 2000s. What is interesting about the reporting during this period is how certain kinds of bodies ‘appear’ and ‘disappear’ over this time, and in turn, how these disappearing acts intersect with dominant moral panics of the time.

It is revealing the extent to which anti-social behaviour by young people has been a consistent presence in Cronulla from the 1950s onwards. With a couple of exceptions, until the early 2000s, the anti-social behaviour was committed by perpetrators without a named ethnicity. Where a descriptor beyond ‘lout’ or ‘hoodlum’ was used, it tended to be a youth sub-cultural tag. In the late 1950s this was ‘bodgies’ and coincided with a broader societal panic about bodgies (Moore 2004) while in the 1960s the reporting tended to focus on hoodlum ‘surfies’, again, coinciding with a wider moral panic about hippies and other counter-cultural movements of the time. All the way through these reports though, is a consistent theme of alcohol related violence, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. This was most apparent in the reporting the reporting during the 1980s and 1990s.

A consistently dominant theme, however, was the ‘outsider’ status of the hooligans involved. Until the late 1990s the hooligans were only named as ‘not from around here’ only occasionally. As far back as 1962, the local paper made a point of reporting the fact that arrested hoodlums were from ‘Earlwood’ … ‘congregating in their cars outside a coffee shop’ (Anon 1962). However these were ‘Anglo’ outsiders – working class ‘westies’. In the 1990s, ‘outsiders’ began to take on an ethnicity. Initially these were simply people ‘coming in on the train’, then they began to be named as ‘gangs’ of Pacific Islanders fighting with ‘gangs’ of Middle Eastern youths. From the 2000s the reporting increasingly focused on Middle Eastern youths – and being an ‘outsider’ or ‘not from around here’ eventually came to mean not being an Anglo. It is also not surprising that the escalation of ‘naming’ coincided with wider national and international moral panics.
about Middle Easterns. Islanders, meanwhile, gradually disappear from the reports altogether. Despite this increased focus on ethicised outsider status there remained a consistent reporting of alcohol driven anti-social behaviour on Friday and Saturday nights. However these reports rarely mention either ethnicity or the fact that the young people involved are mostly ‘locals’. This occurs as recently as Australia Day 2005 when up to 2000 drunken local teens were involved in a series of brawls in Dunningham Park after a local outdoor Opera event (Leto 2005). There are ongoing reports of fighting outside the ‘Northies’ pub, vandalism in the mall, blood splattered ATMs and so forth.

I would like to reflect back briefly to the notion of interethnic habitus to ask why is it that certain bodies become more present to us at certain moments in time. Habitus, of course, is not simply a given. Although Bourdieu never really deals with race and inter-ethnicity in his wide ranging work, he never lets us forget that habitus embodies relations of power. This perspective helps us to explain how it is that certain kinds of bodies become more ‘present’ in certain contexts and under certain socio-political circumstances. Bourdieu quotes Sartre thus: “Words wreck havoc…when they find a name for what had up to then been lived namelessly” (Bourdieu 1990b: 170)

I argued earlier that bodies which are experienced as ‘matter out of place’ in spatial and ritual terms can become ‘Panic bodies’ (Kroker and Kroker in Lupton 1999) especially when they permeate the personal space and fail to engage rituals of non-recognition in the context of shared urban zones. I want to argue that layered on top of taken for granted urban rituals are discourses which make certain bodies more visible in public space. In other words, the experiences of discomfort are real, and do have to do with differently habituated bodies and expectations surrounding how they should behave in certain kinds of places. But these experiences are made more intense when they intersect with current moral panics about particular social groups; in this case young men of middle eastern appearance. What I am describing, then, is a continuum of discomfort where Anglos who have had ‘petty’ discomforts involving minor ritual transgressions (soccer on the beach, boisterousness which invades personal space etc), who have not had a lot of contact with
cultural diversity, and who are surrounded by negative discourses, are more likely to be vulnerable to moral panics. While most beach users have not directly experienced serious anti-social behaviour of a violent nature, when they hear about such behaviour in the press or through the rumour mill the reported behaviour ‘feels’ real or at least distinctly possible.

**Conclusion**

The Anglo rioters at Cronulla on December 11 clearly had some fantasy that their actions could free their beach of the discomforting strangers. Having been taught a lesson about appropriate codes on ‘our’ beach, those Lebs who did come back in following summers would know they had better behave themselves. Past beach practices would no longer be tolerated. However, whatever the fantasies of the white majority of the shire, the desire to cleanse the area of uncomfortable difference is a dangerous, and ultimately ineffective quest for freedom.

Sennett (1994:371-2) argues that ‘without significant experiences of self-displacement social differences gradually harden because interest in the Other withers’. He muses about the possibilities for modern rituals – not rituals that seek to erase or cleanse, but rituals that turn the body outwards. These are ‘rituals which…[do not] destroy the dominant order, but which create a more complex life for the bodies in the dominant order sought to rule in its own image’. As he says, ‘for without a disturbed sense of ourselves, what will prompt most of us… to turn outward toward each other, to experience the Other’? In this light, Anglos in the shire need to resist an overly paranoid impulse for a sense of comfort based in order and singularity. Those involved in developing interventions need to be wary of expecting too much of strategies which seek to Anglicise middle-eastern bodies, such as the training program for Muslim lifesavers which took place in the summer of 2006/7. Such initiatives can and do have positive effects and should not necessarily be avoided altogether. However organisers need to be critically aware that such interventions should place as much emphasis on making Anglo
(lifesavers in this case) bodies more open to cultural difference, rather than simply training ‘lebs’ to behave ‘more like us’. Community based interventions which operate at the level of everyday practice are more important than ever, but must always run in parallel with programs designed to intervene in larger scale discourses and moral panics. And most importantly, they need to engage the hearts and minds of both sides in these conflict.
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1 I use terms such as ‘Middle-eastern youth’, ‘Leb boys’ etc to reflect colloquial usage and keep them in scare quotes to signal this. They are of course deeply problematic descriptors from an academic, sociological point of view.

2 ‘Shire Types’ is one colloquial term often used to describe Anglo, working and lower middle class ‘types’ who are seen as typical of the Sutherland Shire. The term connotes a certain inward looking ‘white bread’ suburban outlook and set of taste cultures.

3 I use quotes around the word ‘feeling’ not as scare quotes to indicate falsity or to question the reality of these experiences, but to signal the embodied nature of ‘feeling’ intimidated or uncomfortable.

4 A couple of the earlier pieces are from the *Leader’s* predecessor, the *Observer*. 