'Being Australian is having some sort of cultural background': the Australian identities of Turkish and Latin-American women

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Abstract

This paper examines the ethnic identifications of 50 second-generation migrant-Australian women and I present a threefold typology to show how their identities were influenced by their Australian nationality. The first type is 'not Australian', which includes 13 women who rejected an Australian identity and instead adopted migrant ethnicities. The second type is 'partly Australian', and this category includes 36 women who adopted hyphenated migrant-Australian ethnic identities. The third type is 'Australian', and it included one woman who rejected her migrant ethnicity in favour of an Australian identity. Australian ideals of gender and freedom, ideas of citizenship and the women's understanding of Anglo-Australian culture influenced the ways in which they negotiated their Australian identities. Beyond these influences, I argue that the participants' understanding of multiculturalism has primarily influenced the social construction of their Australian nationality. As these women saw it, 'being Australian was about having some sort of cultural background' and having an ethnic identity that was a 'mixture' of both migrant and Australian identities was the norm. Being '100 percent Australian' was equaled to losing their connection to their migrant cultures.

Introduction

This paper examines the ethnic identifications of 50 second-generation migrant-Australian women and how this identity is influenced by their Australian nationality. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of ethnicity describes a social group where members share a common culture, a belief about their common ancestry, and a sense of commonality between group members (Jenkins 1997: 10). Nationality refers to a process that includes notions of citizenship, interpretations of national identity and national traditions, a sense of shared history, social norms about 'our way of life', and beliefs about national belonging (Jenkins 1997: 142-147, 159-163). A second-generation migrant is defined in Australian Census statistics as a person with at least one parent who was born overseas (Khoo et al. 2002: iv), but other studies have a broader definition. These studies include overseas-born individuals who came to Australia during their

childhood up to the age of ten years (see for example Butcher and Thomas 2001: 6-7; Vasta 1994: 21-22).

Recent studies on the ethnic identifications of second-generation migrant Australians find that second-generation migrants from various cultural backgrounds tend to adopt hybrid migrant-Australian identities which reflect aspects of both their migrant and Australian cultures (Butcher and Thomas 2001; Noble et al. 1999). These second-generation migrants feel that Australian multicultural policies support their hybrid identifications. At the same time, these studies and others find that the second-generation believes that Australian national identity is still largely dictated by a narrow view of culture, despite our multicultural policies (see also Ang et. al. 2002: 40-48; Zevallos 2003).

For example, in 2001 Melissa Butcher and Mandy Thomas (2001) conducted over 50 in-depth interviews as well as focus groups with second-generation youth from Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds in Western Sydney. While there was diversity in the way the participants perceived their identities, there was a great deal of ambiguity about Australian identity itself, given that most of them conceived it in 'stereotypical' ways (2001: 25). Wider structural forces such as the media limited the extent to which the second-generation felt a sense of belonging to Australian national identity. The researchers note:

> While several young people described Australian culture as being multiculturalism itself, it was a significant finding that many did not have a sense that their own cultural background was valued as being part of what it is to be 'Australian', and that the stereotype of Australian culture as being about 'Anglo' culture was continuing to have a hold over perceptions of national identity (2001: 29).

In this paper, I present a threefold typology that outlines the participants' adoption of their Australian nationality as an ethnic identity. Australian ideals of gender and freedom, ideas of citizenship and the women's understanding of Anglo-Australian culture influenced the ways in which they negotiated their Australian identities. Beyond this, I argue that the women's social construction of their Australian nationality has been primarily influenced by ideals of multiculturalism. As these women saw it, 'being Australian was about having some sort of cultural background' and having an ethnic

identity that was a 'mixture' of both migrant and Australian identities was the norm. Being '100 percent Australian' was equaled to losing their connection to their migrant cultures.

Methodology

The data presented is drawn from a larger qualitative study about the intersections of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and nationality of 25 women from South and Central (or 'Latin') American backgrounds and 25 women from Turkish backgrounds. This paper draws primarily from two key research questions: How do these women construct their ethnicity? What does the women's citizenship mean to them and does this citizenship influence their adoption of an Australian identity? I gathered my sample through the snowball method initiating from student social clubs in Melbourne universities which catered to Turkish and Latin students and one community welfare group. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the women during September 2001 and April 2003. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the participants were given pseudonyms.

All 50 women were Australian citizens and they were aged seventeen to 28 years. Thirty women were Australian-born and the 20 women who were born overseas arrived between the ages of six months and ten years (average age of arrival was six and all women had spent at least half of their lives living in Australia). The participants were heterosexual women who were mostly single, living in their parental home and were studying in higher education on a full-time basis. Many of them lived in the less affluent Western suburbs of Melbourne and their parents worked mostly in working-class occupations. The women generally identified themselves as 'religious'. Most of the Latin women identified as Catholic, and all of the Turkish women identified as Muslim. The sample size and the purposeful and snowballing recruiting methods mean that this study is not representative of the groups interviewed, but the findings presented allow an understanding of the diverse ways in which some well-educated second-generation migrants discuss their ethnic identities in relation to their Australian nationality.

Australian identities

The threefold typology explored in this paper is as follows. The first type is 'not Australian', which includes thirteen women who rejected an Australian identity and instead adopted migrant ethnicities. The second type is 'partly Australian', and this category includes 36 women who adopted hyphenated migrant-Australian ethnic identities. The third type is 'Australian', and it included one woman who rejected her migrant ethnicity in favour of an Australian identity. The typology is specific to the Australian social context: I note that the participants' ethnic identities were subject to change when they travelled overseas to their families' countries-of-origin. (Overseas, the women reported to feeling 'more Australian' than when in Australia.) The following table provides a snapshot of the typology and it shows the numerical difference between the two groups in each type. Below, I describe the typology in detail.

Table 1: Ethnic identities of Latin and Turkish participants

	BIRTHPLACE	**TYPE**		
		NOT-AUSTRALIAN	**PARTLY-AUSTRALIAN**	**AUSTRALIAN**
LATIN	Australia	5	3	0
	Overseas	5	11	1
TURKISH	Australia	2	20	0
	Overseas	1	2	0
	TOTAL	**13**	**36**	**1**

Not-Australian

Thirteen of the 50 participants rejected an Australian identity. The majority of the women in this category were Latin (ten women) and they were mostly Australian-born (seven women). The women in this category rejected an Australian identity primarily due to their inability to identify a distinctive Australian culture. All of them saw

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Australia as 'home' but this did not influence their ethnic identities. While these women conceded that their Australian citizenship might make them legally Australian, they did not personally see their citizenship as a source of ethnic identity. Instead, the traditions that their families have kept up in Australia were seen to influence their ethnic identity. Despite being born in Australia, they have not grown up the 'Australian way', and so they did not see themselves as Australian.

> Claudia *[Latin]*: I've always said this, I've always said: 'I was born in Australia, but I consider myself Uruguayan', because I feel more Uruguayan. Although I've grown up here, I've lived my whole life here, but I consider myself Uruguayan because of the way I was raised, the traditions I already learnt...

The women in this category all emphasised that Australia did not have a *distinctive* culture outside of its values of egalitarianism and freedom, and its multiculturalism (see Zevallos, 2005). Australian cultural values of gender equality were especially important to these women, but this gender ideal was not compelling enough for them to adopt an Australian identity. While these women described Australian culture in terms of its multiculturalism, this multiculturalism was only drawn on to legitimise their ties to their migrant cultures. It did not make them feel Australian.

The women's inability to perceive a clear Australian culture was reflected negatively on 'Anglo' Australians, and in turn, this meant that they distanced themselves from an Australian identity. For example, Matijana was born in Peru and had been living in Australia for sixteen years, ever since she was six years old, but she was dismissive of 'Australians' because she believed most Anglo-Australians do not have a well-defined culture. When I started to ask specific questions about her ethnic identity, she was quick to warn me that she was Peruvian and she said 'I hate it when people say I'm Australian, so don't say it. I hate it'. I asked her why she felt this way and she answered:

> Because if you look at the Australian public in general, they're such – ugh! They're such bums. They've got no culture, for starters. Not all of them, that's a generalisation, because I know some and they're really, really, nice but in general [pause] of course I'd never say this to them! In general they have no culture, no respect for others. Oh, I can't say it in English! Like, *no tienen ni por venir* [they haven't got anything to look forward to], do you

know what I mean? Like, I don't want to be associated with that. Sorry, that's why I hate it.

For these women, to reject an Australian identity was to reject Anglo-Australians. Adopting a not-Australian identity signalled their difference from Anglo-Australians, whom they saw as lacking any cultural identity.

Partly-Australian

Almost three quarters of the sample held a partly-Australian identity; that is, 36 of the 50 women held migrant identities alongside an Australian identity. This group was predominantly Turkish (22 women) and Australian-born (23, of whom 20 were Turkish). Some of these women described their identities as being 'in the middle' or 'in between' their migrant and national identities. The women also described that they were Australian because they have an 'Australian side', an 'Australian touch' or an 'Australian part' to themselves. For example, Esmeray *[Turkish]* said: 'I don't think I could ever live there [in Turkey] forever and not come back coz I'm *partly Australian* and that's the thing' [my emphasis]. Notably, the eleven women who had gone to live in their families' country-of-origin during their childhoods were represented in this category. The fact that these women had spent considerable time living overseas had not led to a rejection of an Australian identity. Additionally, thirteen of the nineteen women who were born overseas in the total sample thought of themselves as partly-Australian, and so living in another country for the first formative years of life had not led to a rejection of an Australian identity in the majority of these cases.

There were two major influences on the Latin and Turkish women's partly-Australian identities: ideals of gender and multiculturalism. The first and most significant of these is Australian cultural ideals of gender. Being Australian enabled them to escape the fate of the 'typical Latin/Turkish girl': they did not have to simply get married and be subordinate to their husbands' demands.   As they saw it, Australian culture encouraged women to seek out gender equality. The women's Australian citizenship gives them great benefits and 'freedoms' that they would not have in their families' country-of-origin. These 36 women highly valued their life opportunities and social mobility as

women, which they believed was possible only due to their Australian upbringing, and for this reason, they adopted an Australian identity.

> Kumru *[Turkish]*: Australia's a place where you're free to do anything you want to do. You've got the ability to do it, which is why I love Australia so much. You want an education; you go ahead and do. You want to work; get your foot in the door. An Australian might be someone who gives 100 percent to everything.

The second influence affecting the women's partly-Australian identities was their understanding of Australian multiculturalism. As the women described it, Australian national identity was about being 'different', and multiculturalism gave support to their partly-Australian identity.

> Asuman *[Turkish]*: When I say [there's] 'cultural richness' here, I think Aboriginal culture is Australian history, then you've got its recent culture that is more multicultural than anything. It's okay to be Turkish in Australia, it's okay to talk about your Turkish culture as an Australian. You don't have to think, 'Oh my God, this is not Australian to say!' Being Australian is having some sort of cultural background. A lot of Australians have a mixture – I mean whether they've come from England or Ireland, then you've got Europeans who came out at the same time as my parents to earn money, so it's emerged like that. I don't think it can change.

At the same time though, these women did not see a distinctive Australian culture outside of its multiculturalism. For example, when I asked Wendy *[Latin]* to describe Australian cultural traditions she said:

> Whilst I am happy to live here, and if I went overseas I'd probably be like 'Yes, I am from Australia' or whatever, I don't really understand what I'm subscribing to [giggles]. [Thinks] Traditions? What else? I don't know... There's not even a lot that comes to mind in terms of traditions.

In their understanding, the multicultural Australian identity was premised upon the celebration and maintenance of migrant cultural practices, and the women only supported multiculturalism so long as there was no complete assimilation. Take Moira's comments below, where she talks of how happy she was to be an Australian, so long as she could still be Salvadoran:

> *Do you feel that people have to be born in Australia in order to think of themselves as Australian?*

> Moira *[Latin]*: No, I don't think so. That's not the case; but I think to be able to call yourself Australian you have to be and act more like an Australian [stops]. Because I think like so many people from my background, I do think more as a Salvadoran would, not as an Australian would. So for me, to be 100 per cent Australian would be to give up all of my culture. I don't know; that's the way I see it.

The multicultural Australian identity had its limitations, as the women in this category described it. The women in this category were, after all, only *partly* Australian; being 100 percent Australian was seen as the surrender of their migrant ethnicities, and this was not something they were prepared to do.

Australian

Xiomara was the only woman in the entire sample of 50 participants who thought of herself as exclusively Australian. There was one major influence on Xiomara's Australian identity: ideals of gender. Xiomara thought of herself as Australian even though she was born in Chile and had lived there for the first eight years of her life. Xiomara's birthplace was not important to her sense of ethnicity, but her Australian citizenship was important. Her parents had always planned to return to live in Chile, but they eventually gave up on this idea. Xiomara however, had long decided her life was in Australia. She said:

> Even if I went back [to Chile], I would always plan to go back to Australia anyway. I decided really early that I was Australian not Chilean... As soon as I turned eighteen I wanted to become an Australian citizen as soon as I could.

Xiomara saw herself as Australian and not Chilean because she felt estranged from Chilean culture. Xiomara rejected her Chilean ethnicity even though she spoke positively about Chilean traditions (food, language, music, festivity, and the value of family), and said she wanted to continue these country-of-origin practices when she had children. Despite the warmth she displayed about these Chilean traditions, she felt equally positive towards Anglo-Australian culture and values. This sets her apart from the other women I interviewed, all of whom spoke mostly negatively of Anglo-Australian culture, apart from its egalitarianism.

Xiomara was ambivalent about her country-of-origin ethnicity because of her gender experiences in her family of origin, her Chilean community, and going on a five-month trip to Chile in her late teens with her then boyfriend. This holiday was the catalyst for Xiomara's rejection of Chilean culture. In Chile, Xiomara's relatives had 'traditional opinions' regarding gender, and these were epitomised by the belief that, 'girls shouldn't do this and girls shouldn't do that… [but] I came from a culture at that time when I was allowed to do anything'. Xiomara said that because she was Australian, 'I just felt like I didn't connect with anybody over there, nobody understood what I did'. Her gender ideals clashed with the people she encountered whilst travelling around Chile. She said:

> I was expected to do everything for [my boyfriend] in every place that I went to [including hotels]… I kept thinking to myself, 'If I had to live in this environment I'd go nuts!' I pretty much – what's the word? *Cachetada* [slap on the face], push away, I just pushed that culture away. In my mind I just didn't want to be a part of it anymore. When I came back I was like [whistles with relief] *thank God*, you know? I hated it.

Xiomara felt empowered in the Australian context: in Australia, being a woman was not an obstacle. She had a tertiary degree, a professional career, and a sense that she had done much better than most other Chilean women because she had taken advantage of her life opportunities in Australia. When I asked her about the disadvantages of being a woman she said, 'In Chile it was a big disadvantage. When I was in Chile, I hated being a woman over there. I wished constantly that I was a guy. I love being a woman here in Australia'.

The women with not-Australian identities rejected Australian culture as a way of rejecting Anglo-Australians, and the women with partly-Australian identities did not think of themselves as '100 percent Australian' because that would be symbolic of rejecting their migrant identities. For Xiomara, rejecting her migrant ethnicity symbolised her rejection of the gender inequality in Chilean culture. She felt some connection to Chilean traditions, but ultimately, she 'pushed away' Chilean culture and her Chilean ethnicity due to Chilean constructions of femininity and masculinity.

Conclusion

The participants' social construction of their Australian nationality has been influenced by ideals of multiculturalism. Although the not-Australian women rejected their Australian identity as a way of rejecting Anglo-Australian culture, the partly-Australian women saw all Australians as having 'some sort of cultural background', so there was no need to reject this identity. This attitude made it ideal to be Australian, because all Australians were a 'mixture'. Multiculturalism offers an avenue for these women to feel connected to the nation in a way that wider Australian culture did not, because they did not understand Australian culture very well. It was clear, however, that Australian values of egalitarianism were pivotal to them adopting an Australian identity, especially due to their gender opportunities. As one woman said, 'I love being a woman here in Australia'.

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