

## **Integration, Tolerance and Belonging in Multicultural Australia**

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### **Abstract**

The lives of young people from refugee backgrounds are surrounded by various binary discourses: as refugees they are perceived as survivors and as victims; as young people they are perceived as both vulnerable and in need of protection, and as dangerous, and in need of correction (Ngo 2010). This paper explores the processes of identity making undertaken by predominantly Sudanese and Karen young people from refugee backgrounds, living in Brisbane, Australia. Based on fieldwork carried out from 2009 to 2010, I explore the cultural and racial identity politics engaged by young people as they construct and perform identities based on hybridized and essentialised representations of self. In particular, I look at the ways young people in this social field chose friends and create spaces for interactions, and the ways which, in doing so, they construct and deconstruct categories of skin colour and creatively represent and engage experiences of racism. These processes of youth identity making are revealing, especially as they relate to globalisation and social change, as young people in particular are “shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structure and meanings” (Wulff 1995: 10). For young people from refugee backgrounds, who are simultaneously constructing local, national and diasporic identities in the context of having undergone forced migration this is particularly evident. The engagement of these young people from refugee backgrounds, whose cultural identities are in constant flux, with race, culture and ethnicity, speaks to these broader issues in Australia today.