



GIRAMONDO PUBLISHING

THE TRIBE

Author's Note

In the year 1970 my family migrated from Lebanon to Australia. I was raised in Australia, in the western suburbs of Sydney, and I went by two names, Michael and Mohammed. Throughout my life I have had to use these names strategically, always negotiating when it might be safe to identify as an Australian and Westerner and when it might be safe to identify as an Arab and Muslim.

After the events of September 11 2001, as well as a number of drive-by shootings and gang rapes in Sydney that were attributed to the offenders' Muslim and Lebanese backgrounds, Arab-Australian Muslim men became the subject of fear, suspicion and ongoing negative media attention. It was suddenly harder for us to get on a plane, find a job, approach a woman or even catch a cab because we had become stereotyped as criminals and terrorists. We were targeted by news reporters looking for a story; police officers looking for a felon; and politicians looking for a political campaign. While there have been periods of rest, recent national incidents such as the Sydney Siege in 2014 and international incidents such as the Paris attacks on Charlie Hebdo in 2015 have reignited the tension between Australia's dominant culture and Australia's Arab and Muslim communities.

These events coincide with the appearance of Australian films, books and television programs which reinforce the limited and simplistic perception of Arab-Australian Muslim men as 'unlawful' and 'ungovernable' and 'un-Australian'. Underbelly, EastWest 101, Cedar Boys, The Combination, Convict, Fat Pizza, Housos, Evil in the Suburbs and Drive-by are just some of the 'artistic' portrayals of Arabs and Muslims from Western Sydney Australia since 9/11. These texts are mostly produced by people not from the Arab-Australian Muslim community and all of them are about the criminal element – about guns and drugs and sexual assaults. The characters are identified as 'Lebanese' and 'Arab' and 'Middle Eastern' interchangeably, and they are referred to as 'Muslim' without any differentiation between Sunni, Shi'ite, Alawite, or the many other Muslims sects that exist in Australia, as though 'Arab' and 'Muslim' is a homogenous breed. As well as the over-representation of Arab-Australian Muslim men in these depictions, there is the under-representation, in fact the complete absence, of Arab-Australian Muslim women in these depictions too.

The Tribe is my attempt to counteract the limited and simplistic representation that the Arab-Australian Muslim community of Western Sydney has received to date, and to offer a broader understanding. It is also an act of self-determination – where marginalised individuals declare the right to tell their own stories in their own way.

Thank you for taking the first steps with me into the world of *The Tribe*. It is the world of a child named Bani Adam, who only concerns himself with mystery and wonder. I pray that you read my story with peace and love and I farewell you in the ancient words of my people, *Salam Alaikum*.