Although the ‘White Australia policy’ was officially rejected over 40 years ago, this thesis argues that it continues to influence notions of belonging in Australia today. While racial exclusion from the national community was once achieved through discretionary mechanisms embedded in migration laws and policy, today, it is achieved through Australian citizenship laws and policy.

This thesis critically examines the package of law reforms introduced in 2007, which subsequently became the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* (Cth) (‘ACA’). It explores the extent to which Australian citizenship law enables or limits culturally diverse expressions of belonging in a liberal, multicultural and democratic nation. The thesis is underpinned by a critical race theory approach, which understands the relationship between law and culture as mutually constitutive. That is, it sees the law as not only reflecting social norms but participating in their production and reinforcement. The thesis draws out ways that Australian citizenship laws mobilise narratives of belonging which construct a racialised Australian national imaginary.

Using a range of interdisciplinary approaches (including legal analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis and critical legal geography), the thesis identifies and analyses narratives about belonging circulating in three significant fields of public discourse; legal, political and media discourse. It argues that these public discourses articulate the meaning of the legal status of citizenship through racially exclusionary narratives about Australian values and an ‘Australian way of life’.

The thesis argues that Australian citizenship law is an increasingly important site used to produce and sustain a racially exclusionary national imaginary. It analyses how narratives about Australian citizenship status are increasingly articulated in opposition to migrants generally, but the Muslim Other in particular. These racialised narratives of belonging are conveyed through decisions made under the ACA. Having identified how the law mobilises narratives which produce and sustain a White national imaginary, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity is used to identify some possible citizenship counter-narratives.
It concludes that, contrary to official statements, Australian citizenship status does not facilitate an inclusive notion of national belonging. Instead, it is a mechanism that produces and sustains a White national imaginary.