Introduction

Fethi Mansouri and Vince Marotta

For more than two hundred years, Muslims have been coming into contact with Australia on a regular basis starting with the Indonesian fishermen and the Afghan cameleers and ending with the most recent waves of migrants from Africa and the Middle East.[1] Throughout this period, Muslim Australians have had to endure challenges associated with migrant settlement in general, but also specific cultural adaptation problems resulting from how their ethnicities and in particular their faith was perceived in a predominantly White Christian social milieu. Against this historical background, this book explores the problematic discursive representations of Muslim migrants in Australia—and the West more generally—and the consequent implications such representations may have for intercultural understanding, active citizenship and social inclusion.

Current polarised debates in many western countries including Australia seem to suggest that the current tension surrounding Muslim migrants is essentially linked to the perceived incompatibility of Islam and Islamic values on one hand and with values associated with liberal secular democratic states on the other. Indeed and in the context of the Arab spring, these debates have intensified

as Islamist parties are on the ascendency in the newly formed governments. This Western suspicion towards Islam and Muslim presence was demonstrated in Tunisia following the 23 October 2011 elections which saw the moderate Islamist party Ennahda (Renaissance) claiming the largest share of seats in the Constituent Assembly. The slow reaction of Western governments in particular those of France, the USA and the UK to acknowledge the democratic right of voters in North Africa and Middle East to elect Islamist-based political parties has reinforced pre-existing misconceptions about Orientalist views and attitudes towards Islam. [2]

Muslim Migrants, Religiosity and the State

This Orientalist suspicion and reluctance to engage Muslim identities and Islamist politics is always explained in terms of recent terrorist activities of Muslim extremists living in Western countries. Such acts of violence that shaped popular imaginations include those perpetrated in the USA on September 11, the London bombings of 7 July 2005, and the Bali terrorist attacks of 12 October 2005 all of which have only served to exacerbate this debate in the most simplistic and unhelpful manner. The terms of discussion concerning Islam and Muslims are no longer centred on the global and root causes of such acts of violence or on their local dimensions. Rather, these debates are focusing almost exclusively on Islam as a theology and a basis of political doctrines that is intrinsically fundamentalist and intolerant and as such has an 'apparent' tendency to support and justify terrorism.

Within this changing policy environment and global context, a significant concern in the West relates to how Islam is perceived and represented in public discourses. The predominantly negative media construction of Islam and Muslims in the West raises serious concern for policy makers and human rights advocates alike. This is because research has shown us that most citizens in the West get their knowledge about world issues from accessing mainstream media.[3] These views in turn form public opinions, which are often exploited and reinforced by governments through their exclusionary discourses and policies.

Therefore, how nation states deal with religiosity in general and Muslim migrants in particular is not always easy to predict. In Australia, for example, Section 116 of the Australian Constitution explicitly provides that the Commonwealth shall not legislate to establish any religion, impose any religious observance or prohibit the free exercise of any religion. In the USA, the religious and civilian freedoms of all citizens are guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution. In France, religious symbols, such as the hijab (headscarf), have been banned to protect secularism in French government offices and schools since 2004.[4] The 2004 ban of the hijab and most recently the 2009 inquiry into banning the burqa (veils that cover the entire face) in France on one hand, and the public criticism of President Obama of such laws in June 2009 on the other, indicate the divergent public discourses and policies that nation states have taken vis-à-vis religiosity.[5] Such divergent approaches have significant implications for Muslim social integration, their representations in public discourses and their feelings of attachment to the liberal western polities within which they live.

Multiculturalism at the Crossroads?[6]

It is ironic that we now talk about a supposed crisis of multiculturalism at the very time that Australia's population is growing at a faster pace than most other developed countries with an even more visible level of diversity. This demographic growth and its associated cultural diversity have sparked debates about how well migrants are integrating in Australian society.[7] Elsewhere, the debate is even more polarised and problematised. Indeed, we have heard recently a number of leaders from Europe such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the British Prime Minister David Cameron declare that multiculturalism has failed in their respective countries. In the context of a post 9/11 global order and a rise in security fears compounded by recent economic woes, these comments are in many ways populist reactions to a nervous electorate that is looking for scapegoats. In truth, neither the UK nor Germany in particular had in fact anything like a fully fledged multicultural policy. Germany is a multiethnic country but one that has never really adopted a proactive multiculturalism policy as was the case with Australia. And whilst the UK has had a policy of accommodating cultural diversity it nonetheless stopped short of adopting social and settlement policies to support the cultural aspirations of migrant communities.

Australia's multiculturalism, on the other hand, has managed to lead the way despite its own difficulties at different points in time (e.g. Pauline Hanson; Cronulla riots and the various 'boat people' episodes). Australia's multiculturalism, some would argue, has been able to strike the right balance between emphasising an attachment to Australia the nation with all its local facets and universal values on one hand, and a capacity to retain elements of heritage culture that does not transgress domestic laws on the other. This integration of migrant heritage culture and mainstream values allowed the creation of a vibrant and creative Australian society capable of projecting a confident national identity that is by and large peaceful and harmonious.

More recently, Australia has witnessed a renewed emphasis on multiculturalism as a conduit towards social inclusion and active citizenship. The new Australian policy on multiculturalism Australia's multicultural policy 'embraces our shared values and cultural traditions. It also allows those who choose to call Australia home the right to practise and share in their cultural traditions and languages within the law and free from discrimination'.[8] This new emphasis on inclusion and active citizenship is especially critical given that there are many new and complex challenges to the sustainability of Australian multiculturalism. These challenges are manifesting themselves in various contemporary debates that are impacting on popular perceptions of diversity and difference.

This paradoxical policy situation regarding multiculturalism and the ways in which Islam and Muslims are publicly represented are discussed in various chapters within this book. Our book, therefore, is divided into three thematic sections which capture the heterogeneity of the Muslim experience and identity within western societies, the social, economic and political conditions of Muslims in the west, and their level of belonging and exclusion.

The Book Structure and Themes

Part 1 on belonging and identity includes papers, which examine the problematic nature of Muslim incorporation and the negotiation and multiplicity of Muslim identities in the west. Mansouri's chapter provides a historical context to Muslim incorporation, which highlights the need to move beyond the simplistic understandings of the

relationship between integration, social inclusion and difference. Mansouri argues that the current discourse on Muslim Australians has been framed in the context of local threats to national security and social cohesion as symbolised by the 'boat people' crisis, the problem of 'Lebanese gangs' and the much mediatised war on 'global terrorism'. The empirical insights from recent research show that these new discursive realities cannot be overcome by means of a strictly civic citizenship approach.[9] Jakubowicz, Chafic and Collins' contribution on the social inclusion of young Australian Muslims draws on a social ecological approach and the idea of cultural capital to shed light on the fluid and hybrid nature of an 'Australian Islamic identity'. Their research found that although most young Muslims are 'socially integrated' and self-identify as 'Australian', this is diminished by feelings of marginalisation, displacement and discrimination. Thus belonging to an 'Australian community' brings with it paradoxes and tensions which are usually hidden behind public discourses on social cohesion and social inclusion. Onnudottir, Possamai and Turner's chapter demonstrates that Muslim identity and the feelings of belonging are related to the intersectionality of race, culture and religion. They investigate the extent to which the indigenous population in Australia and New Zealand have converted to Islam and provide a sociological explanation for such conversions. The authors argue that the rate of conversions may be linked to the greater interaction that indigenous people have with other marginal populations like Muslims. The experience of social, political and economic exclusion provides the conditions for these groups to find connections and commonalities that were previously absent. The chapter contends that for the indigenous groups, Islamic values and beliefs may provide a psychological outlet for the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves in Western modern societies.

Part 2 on Muslims and challenges of social inclusion explores the extent to which liberal societies and their policies of multiculturalism can address the religious and social needs of Muslim communities. Gendera, Pe-Pua and Katz's discussion on the experience of social belonging within Muslim families in two communities explores the theme of social inclusion through the idea of social capital. The authors demonstrate the complex nature of social belonging or 'bonding social capital' for Muslims, both within their

own religious community and within the broader host society. The internal gender, cultural, generational and linguistic differences within the Muslim community make it difficult to maintain a sense of belonging to one's religious group. The chapter challenges the representations of Muslims as having low levels of cross-cultural interaction or 'bridging social capital' and asserts that if certain barriers are overcome—with the assistance of the host community—Australian Muslims find their social interaction with host members generally positive. The theme of building bridges across cultures reappears in Lobo and Mansouri's chapter. Their study centres on how community leaders within a Victorian local council make meaningful connections across cultures. Both Muslim and non-Muslim leaders reconstruct an 'Australian way of life' through moments of openness. This 'openness' allows for a new sense of belonging to emerge which the authors argue blurs the distinction between Islam and 'western' values. The final chapter in this section by Farquharson and Sohrabi-Haghighat adds a new perspective to discussions of social inclusion by investigating the discursive integration of Muslims in Australia. Through a content analysis of Australian newspaper articles on Islam and Muslims they demonstrate that the print media not only supports the global and Orientalist discourse on Islam as fundamentalist, barbaric, violent, but continues to represent Muslims as a threatening other. This, according to the authors, alienates Australian Muslims and undermines their ability and desire to be socially connected when they are exposed to stories which depicts them as incompatible with so-called western values and beliefs.

The third part of the book considers the representation and contestation over Muslim identity within the public realm. The wearing of the Islamic veil in public captures the anxieties and fears amongst certain sections of the host community over the presence of difference. The Islamic veil has been the catalyst for racist and exclusionary practices because it has been constructed as incompatible with secular and western social and political values. Skrbis and Chiment's work in this area is pivotal in understanding the west's response to the veil and why banning or restricting the wearing of the veil can be counterproductive. Skrbis and Chiment's chapter illustrates that the veil has come to symbolise the collective fears and

anxieties of host societies such as France and Australia and regulating the veil does not lead to the promised land of 'social cohesion', but to greater fragmentation and isolation on the part of ethnic and religious groups. The authors' comparative analysis illustrates that there are differences in the representation of and reaction to Muslims. France's republican tradition and the assimilationist undercurrent of French citizenship can partly explain the banning of religious dress and symbols within public institutions. On the other hand, in Australia talk of banning or restricting the wearing of the veil has been couched in terms of women's rights and issues to do with national security. The authors conclude that such exclusionary practices are paradoxical because they undermine the very solidarity and cohesion that they are working towards by making difference more rather than less viable. This leads to greater alienation and fragmentation of those very groups which the nation state wants to include.

These paradoxical outcomes are further highlighted in the study by Peucker and Akbarzadeh. Drawing on empirical work conducted in Europe and Australia they demonstrate the 'vicious cycle' of stereotyping, exclusion and alienation that Muslims in the west experience. Through a detailed investigation of key reports and research on attitudes to Muslims and immigration within Europe and Australia they identify key similarities and divergences between countries. Although there were some contradictory trends, the authors conclude that the general pattern in both Australia and Europe is one of discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes towards Muslims and Islam; these negative attitudes are further inflamed by biased media reports and anti-Muslim rhetoric by politicians. The significance of this chapter is that it explores the consequences of these attitudes on the behaviour and self-identity of Muslims in the west. Peucker and Akbarzadeh emphasize that there is a close correlation between discrimination towards Muslims and feelings of alienation, involvement in violent acts and self-segregation on the part of Muslims. The authors conclude that multiculturalism still has an important role to play in not only undermining the misrepresentations, exclusion and discrimination of Muslims in the public sphere, but also in providing the social and cultural conditions in which respect for religious diversity can occur, where recognition of

cultural identity can thrive and where Muslim voices can be heard in key political institutions.

The final chapter in this section shows how these negative stereotypical attitudes reappear within an educational context. Ata's study shows the difficulties of removing these stereotypes amongst secondary school students in Australia, especially those educational institutions that have a Christian background. The paradoxical situation than surrounds the banning of the veil is also present within the anti-racism discourse within Australia's educational system. For example, while it promotes cultural harmony this rhetoric is not reflected in the responses by students. Ata concludes that prejudice towards Muslims will not necessarily disappear by providing students with greater knowledge of Islam; rather knowledge in itself is not the answer, it needs to be complemented by the creation of an inclusive environment within the school.

The book engages with three interrelated core themes namely, belonging, representation, and identity. It explores these themes not only in the context of Muslim Australians, but provides some comparative analysis of Muslims within specific European countries and New Zealand. This comparative framework whilst exhibiting country-specific issues affecting Muslims in the West, as in the case with France's aggressive approach towards secularism and migrant assimilation, nevertheless highlight new common global trends that seem to interlock and have their point of departure the problematic visibility of Islam and Muslims in Western predominantly Christian societies. Current discussions about Muslim migrants in the West seem to always start and end with an emphasis on negative and often controversial issues. It is hoped that this book offers not only rigorous accounts of current difficulties, but also new thinking and deeper understanding about race relations and intercultural engagement in multicultural societies.

Notes

1   Saeed, A and S,. Akbarzadeh, 2001, 'Muslim Communities in Australia', UNSW Press: Sydney.
2   Said, E 1978, 'Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient', Penguin Books, London. And E Said, 1981, 'Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World', Vintage Books, USA.
3   F Mansouri, S Kenny and C Strong, *Promoting Intercultural Understanding in Australia: An Evaluation of Local Government Initiatives in Victoria*, Deakin University, Geelong, 2007.
4   JR Bowen, 'Recognising Islam in France after 9/11', Journal *of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2009, pp. 439–52.
5   E Bleich, 'Muslims and the state in the post-9/11 West: Introduction', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2009, pp.353–60; JR Bowen, 'Recognising Islam in France after 9/11', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2009, pp. 439–52; C Jopke, 'Is Religion the Problem? Review Symposium', *Ethnicities*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2009, pp. 560–66.
6   For further details on debates about multiculturalism, see Mansouri, Fethi (2011) 'Creating an Inclusive National Australian Identity', *Australian Mosaic*, no. 27, pp. 32–34, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), Canberra, ACT.
7   Hartwich, OM, 'Selection, Migration and Integration: Why Multiculturalism Works in Australia (And Fails in Europe), Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) Policy Monographs, NSW, 2011
8   Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), 2011, *The people of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy*, DIAC, Canberra, p 2.
9   F Mansouri, S Kenny and C Strong, 2007.