

Introduction

Muslims in Australia, Inclusion and Exclusion

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Muslim presence in Australia forms part of the cultural richness characteristic of the country. The pre-European contacts between indigenous populations with Muslims from the north, the arrival of Afghan Cameleers, and the gradual increase in the number of Muslims from Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Africa, have all contributed to this presence. According to the 2006 Census, 340 401 Muslims constituted 1.7 per cent of the total Australian population: approximately 39 per cent of them were born locally. While this percentage may be smaller compared to other Western liberal democracies, the fact remains that Muslim population has increased dramatically in the last three decades. Between 2001 and 2006, their number increased by 20.9 per cent.¹ Some estimates suggest that the total Muslim population in Australia will exceed one million by 2020.²

Despite the long historical presence, however, the question of Muslim inclusion in the mainstream community remains a live issue. They are often identified as the 'other' with some explicit or implicit references to Muslims not being part of the wider society. The focus on counter-terrorism since September 2001 has further contributed to this tendency of 'othering' Muslims. The presence of oppositional attitudes and practices among some Muslims in Australia affects the majority of the religious community. Data also suggests that Muslims

in Australia experience unequal access to, and participation in, economic spheres with the possibility of this lack of access extending to next generations. The need to understand the causes underlying the 'othering' has resulted in rich scholarly literature in the last decade. However, the literature often views the situation from the standpoint of either Muslims or the mainstream community. There exists, therefore, the need to view the place of Muslims in Australia in a context that takes into account *both* Muslim and non-Muslim dynamics and attitudes as explanations for Muslim experiences.

This volume attempts to provide such understanding by addressing the question of Muslim citizens in Australia from the vantage point of exclusion and inclusion dynamics. It is based on the assumption that minority-majority relations in any community are guided by processes of relative exclusion and inclusion of the minority vis-à-vis the mainstream society. These processes, however, are not unidirectional. Nor are they uni-layered. Instead, exclusion can occur because the minority community chooses to exclude the majority. Differing assessments of the aims, motives and policies of the majority prevalent among the minority also lead to multiple responses within the minority communities. This can contribute to processes of intra-community exclusion with some groups being identified as 'not following the norms' of the minority. The processes of inclusion also operate under similar conditions: groups/agents within the minority and majority communities in a given setting can engage in differing levels of inclusive policies vis-à-vis the 'other'.

Muslims living in Australia, it argues, operate under similar dynamics. They act as both excluders and includers. They are also both excluded and included with the levels of inclusion/exclusion varying with groups and communities. Given the emphasis on Islam and Muslims since the terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequent militant acts in other parts of the world, the processes of exclusion and inclusion have acquired an international dimension. Local dynamics of exclusion/inclusion are being influenced and shaped by developments external to Muslim communities living in the country. They are influenced not only by developments in Muslim majority states but also by developments in other Western liberal states. Understanding these dynamics, it argues, is essential if we are to both avoid militancy and contribute stability and justice for all citizens living in Western democracies, particularly Australia.

With this aim, it asks the following questions:

- What is the context in which Muslims have lived in Western liberal societies in general and Australia in particular while experiencing degrees of exclusion and inclusion in the past?
- How has the context changed since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001?
- Against the backdrop of increasing emphasis on Muslim identities and values, do Muslims perceive an increased sense of exclusion, and why?
- How do Muslims engage in processes of excluding the wider community, or other Muslims living in Australia?
- Is it possible to discern inclusive processes involving both Muslims and/or non-Muslims in Australia?
- What role do women as 'signifiers of difference', Islamic schools, religious study circles and groups, and legal systems play in the exclusion/inclusion dynamics?
- What policies and approaches could reduce the sense of relative exclusion among Muslim citizens in Australia, while simultaneously promoting their inclusion?

The papers included in this volume answer these questions by exploring the role of ideas, attitudes, structures and policies that shape Muslim experiences of inclusion and exclusion. It starts with three chapters that deal with the context in which dynamics of inclusion and exclusion can be understood with reference to Australia. The first chapter by Yasmeen develops a model for understanding the processes through which inclusionary and exclusionary ideas about the 'other' are developed, and their inter-dependability. By discussing findings of research on Muslim identities, it points out that inclusion and exclusion exist as much in the realm of ideas and perceptions as they do in the domain of more observable data. Understanding the role of international and national ideas, the nodes that create or sustain such ideas, and their linkages to experiences of immigration, it suggests, one could appreciate the complexity of understanding inclusion and exclusion.

Geoffrey Levey delves into one aspect of such ideas: the notion of 'core liberal values' and the 'Muslim Question' that form part of the both international and national context in which Muslim minorities live in Western liberal democracies. He argues that religiosity and

ethnic identification have intensified over the course of the last century, contrary to most expectations. Yet the strategies by which Western democracies have sought to respond to these two forms of cultural identity and their attendant claims have often pressed in opposite directions. Whereas the traditional liberal response has been to privatise and separate religion from politics in the name of the secular state, the newer, multicultural approach has been to publicly support, accommodate and celebrate ethnic diversity.

Significant Muslim immigration to the West in recent times and the nature of Islam as a 'public religion' has served to sharpen this tension between the 'religious' and the 'ethnic' strategies of incorporation and inclusion. The result has been a growing consensus that the Muslim presence challenges both the liberal secular state and the liberal multicultural state. The view abroad among Western governments and publics, *including in Australia*, is that the 'Muslim question' requires an ever more resolute insistence on 'core' liberal values and on the established liberal settlements governing religion and politics, even to the point of discarding policies of multiculturalism for sowing confusion about the appropriate boundaries of the permissible. Levey questions the idea of locating the Muslim Question in opposition to the core liberal values of democracies. By tracing the process through which the 'religious settlements' that underpin liberal democracies in the West have been 'always subject to adjustments and interpretations', he attempts to show that the Muslim question is not 'original'. For him, Muslim presence in liberal democracies, even though not part of the original religious settlements, is not a challenge to the liberal secular state but merely a new stage in the history of liberal religious settlements, and 'a new instalment of a 'principled pragmatism' in responding to new groups and conditions.

Michael Humphrey builds on this theme which questions the prevalent notions of Muslims as the other in the West, with particular reference to Australia. He views the current scrutiny of Islam and Muslims in the West over their 'integration' as a particular instance of the historical tension between immigration policy and the national project. He argues that immigration has always represented a challenge to the ideology of the nation-state as culturally standardising and assimilating. While immigration policy is instrumental it is at the

same time deeply culturally ambivalent. After all, immigrants came as workers but also as bearers of other national and religious identities. The so-called 'problem of Muslim integration' into secular national societies is a post-multicultural revisionism re-imagining the nation-state as culturally singular in the age of globalisation, global cities and transnational citizens. Islam and Muslims have become shared objects of transnational governance, a focus for national and international coordination of security, cultural critique and population management.

Humphrey specifically explores the way Australian Muslims have experienced the questioning of their integration as the growing conditionality of their citizenship in Australia. He examines the way Islam and Muslims have increasingly been constructed as 'other' in Australia despite their active involvement in negotiating their presence. A critical element in this process, he argues, is the politicisation of Islam as a source of political extremism and violence. Positioned on the social and cultural margins Islam and Muslims have been made the test case of cultural compatibility and political loyalty. They have come to symbolise not only the crisis of the national project but also the global risks associated with transnational identities and citizenships.

How do Muslims deal with this 'othering' and what strategies do they adopt as Australian citizens? Anne Aly answers this question with reference to the role of media and political discourses since 9/11. She argues that diasporic Muslim communities in Australia and around the world have become the objects of the fear of terrorism and subjects of scrutiny and suspicion. As such, Australian Muslims have had to negotiate the exclusionary boundaries of nationhood and renegotiate their identity as Australians and as Muslims in order to construct spaces of social inclusion in which they could participate fully as Australian citizens. She underscores the complexity of Muslim responses to the media and political messages about terrorism and the threat to Australia by identifying four thematic categories of the fear of terrorism: fear of physical harm; political fear; fear of losing civil liberties; and feeling insecure. She argues that, far from a fear of an unknown threat or impending doom (as it is often described), the fear of terrorism among Australian Muslims is grounded in real, lived experiences and/or perceptions of

heightened aggression and vilification. In this context, Australian Muslim communities exhibit a 'community victimisation perspective' where feelings of marginalisation and social exclusion from the broader Australian community have heightened insularity and emphasised the role of social networks.

Adis Duderija continues the theme of Muslims as active agents in the inclusion/exclusion dynamics by focusing on identity construction. He examines how the context of being a new immigrant minority religious group affects Western Muslims' identity construction and links it to the processes of (perceived self-) exclusion or inclusion vis-à-vis the broader society. He presents a discursive framework which allows for a conceptual linking between the processes of Western Muslims' identity *constructions* and their social *orientations* towards the broader society. Drawing upon the published literature and his personal experiences, he argues that both inclusionary and exclusionary attitudes are present among Muslim youth towards the mainstream Australian society. Islamic schools, Muslim Students Associations and formal/informal groups emerge as the sites where these attitudes can be witnessed.

Jan Ashik Ali's chapter on *Tablighi Jama'at* reinforces the theme of Muslims as agents who make choices in response to the pressures of immigration, and search for identity in a different environment. Validating the special place assigned to knowledge of Islam as a factor in shaping Muslim identities, Ali discusses the role played by *Tablighi Jama'at* in Australia. Based on his personal observations and participation in the activities of the *Jama'at*, which originated in British India of the 1920s, he argues that membership of the *Jama'at* provide spaces to disillusioned or dis-empowered immigrant and second-generation Muslims where they can experience self-validation. The connection to Allah gives them the support they often need while dealing with issues that crop up in their daily lives. Essentially, Ali argues, what multicultural Australia promises its members but fails to deliver, particularly to those Muslims from the lowest strata of the social hierarchy, the *Tablighi Jama'at* succeeds. However, he acknowledges the intra-Muslim exclusionary attitudes linked to groups that focus on religious identities as the primary marker: members of the *Tablighi Jama'at*, in his opinion, forge an identity that binds them together but at the same time prompts them to distinguish themselves from 'other' Muslims.

Jeremy Northcote and Suzy Casimiro explore responses of Muslim communities to the phenomenon of being 'othered' without taking into account the intra-community differences in values and practices. Based on the idea that Muslims receive this discourse of 'othering' differently in line with their educational, professional and personal situations, they explore the experiences of Muslim refugee women. They argue that Muslim refugees, however, do not experience exclusion foremost in media discourse, but in the cycle of isolation that prevents them from meaningful participation in Australian society. The core needs of Muslim refugee women, such as English-speaking ability, education, safety, employment, housing and health, interact with secondary and peripheral needs. But their lives are also shaped by wider factors that impose a system of constraints on Muslim refugee women. This results in *mutually reinforcing cycles of isolation*: their identities as Muslims, from certain ethnic backgrounds, and opportunities and services play a role in them being excluded from participation in the mainstream Australian community. This occurs despite the system of opportunities that exist to ease their settlement in Australia. The cycle, in their view, can be broken through activism on part of the government by providing greater spaces of interaction between Muslim refugee women and the wider community.

Barbara Giles provides a counterpoint to approaching the question of Muslim refugee women as recipient of the benefits flowing from governmental activism. Through discussion of educational choices made by Somali refugee women for their children, she presents a complex picture of Muslim women both engaging and excluding the mainstream communities in Australia. The need to ensure that children retain their Islamic identity underpins their decisions to send children to Islamic schools. But the choices are not set in stone with some families opting for state schools, and even mixing and matching the choice of educational institutions in view of the needs of the educational and social needs of their children. Islamic schools, therefore, become only one of the main nodes of information accessed by Somali refugee women for their children. Keen to keep the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion fluid, they also engage members of the mainstream communities to teach their children English. The 'excluded' remain both agents of exclusion and also become includers with reference to their educational choices for children.

Hanifa Deen and Jamila Hussain position the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in relation to law. In her discussion of the legal case involving the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and Catch the Fire Ministries Inc (CTF) in the first decade of the new millennium, Deen explores the issue of laws in protecting citizens from religious vilification. She provides a detailed discussion of the circumstances in which the Islamic Council of Victoria filed the law suit, and the response by the CTF, against the backdrop of anti-Muslim feelings in Western liberal democracies. Although the case was finally decided out of court after two different rulings, she points out the need for legislations that could protect Muslims, and other religious minorities, from being 'othered and vilified' until such time that societal members learn to accept difference. Legislation, in her opinion, is the essential route to educating communities in the dangers of othering fellow citizens.

Hussain presents a case against assuming that Shari'a law has no place in the Australian society. She explores the similarities and differences between modern Australian family law and Islamic (Shari'a) family law and seeks to identify areas which are currently compatible and other areas where differences which appear on the surface to be irreconcilable might nevertheless be minimised or overcome by minor changes in the law so as to accommodate the beliefs, not only of Muslims but of other minorities in Australia's increasingly multicultural society. Her examination of laws relating to divorce and alternative dispute resolution in both systems to see if any reconciliation is possible, and discussion of developments in similar Western countries such as Britain and Canada with religious minorities leads her to argue for some accommodation for Shari'a law. The accommodation is not to replace the legal codes operating in Australia but is discussed in terms that reduce the inadvertent exclusion of Muslim women from the space open to all citizens. Hussain's discussion implies that some form of accommodation would set Muslim women free who are hostages to 'limping marriages'. This could end their involuntary exclusion from the family sphere and grant them the right to live normal lives as full citizens.

Danielle Celermajer, Fethi Mansouri and William Maley suggest approaches to promote Muslim inclusion with reference to societal and governmental levels. Celermajer revisits liberal and democratic discourses as the basis of Western democracies. Guided

by a commitment to address the oppositional dynamics that pits Muslims against the other, as well as religious faith communities vis-à-vis secularists, she suggests broadening 'understanding of the development of trust (both of government and between citizens) beyond individualistic processes'. Interfaith dialogues present one such opportunity where different faith communities can build networks of trust. But she also argues that the current limited understandings of liberal foundations of democracies also need to be broadened to 'include religious discourses'. The value of such broadening of the spaces, for her, is essential not as a step to reducing the existing exclusion of Muslims through a specific reading of democratic discourse, but is also essential for other faith communities who may be located outside the parameters of democratic conversations purely due to their belief systems.

Mansouri carries the theme of discourses of 'closed national citizenship' premised upon a certain notion of liberal democracies and the tendency to view those considered outside the majority sphere as destructive and subversive. He is specifically concerned with the place assigned to Muslims in the post-9/11 era in such discourses and their implications for everyday lives of citizens. The empirical findings of a study that looked into the role of local governance in the management of multicultural spaces in Australia provide insight into how Muslims are perceived and interacted with at local governmental levels. By uncovering the social construction of local spaces as locales of inclusion and exclusions, he provides us with ideas that need to be avoided if all citizens are to participate in the multicultural project of the country. Although he does not specifically argue along the lines suggested by Antonin Wagner, the value of the data also extends to understanding how residential citizenship grows out of the dynamics and experiences of inclusion and exclusion at local levels.³

Maley places the responsibility of tackling the discourses of exclusion on the governments. He highlights the risks of using liberal values to create 'a model of political life that is far from being liberal' with reference to the 2007 experience in Australia of a young Muslim from India, Dr Mohamed Haneef, and to events in the electorate of Lindsay on the eve of the 2007 election. That the Howard Government was prepared to cast doubts on Dr Haneef's innocence and that some in the Liberal party networks were willing to use the fear of

other for political purposes guides him into arguing for a more nuanced form of engaging Muslims. He cautions the government against placing excessive demands on moderate Muslims to participate in the project of making Australia safe, while also raising awareness of the alienating dynamics unleashed by treating citizenship of young Muslim Australians as conditional and requiring verification.

What do these ideas mean in an era where the excesses of the War on terror and their implications for Muslim identities are appreciated more than was the case during the Bush–Howard administrations? The concluding chapter provides some suggestions within the context of the Social Inclusion agenda adopted by the Rudd Labor Government.

Notes

- 1 Samina Yasmeen, *Understanding Muslim identities: from perceived relative exclusion to inclusion*, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australian Commonwealth Government and the Office of Multicultural Interests, Government of Western Australia, 2008.
- 2 Robert Bryant, 'What will Australia look like in 2020?', 13 July 2009, Smart Company, www.smartcompany.com.au/economy/20090713-what-will-australia-look-like-in-2020-2.html (viewed 27 September 2009).
- 3 Antonin Wagner, 'Citizenship through education. A comment on social exclusion in Europe: some conceptual issues', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, vol. 17, 2008, pp. 93–7.