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ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA: THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF EARLY SETTLEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY RACE RELATIONS

Abstract

“Hello, brother” were the last words uttered by Haji-Daoud Nabi, an elderly man who opened the doors of a Christchurch mosque in New Zealand in March 2019. Moments later, he was shot down and killed in a brutal terrorist attack carried out by an Australian white supremacist. This recent tragedy captures the increasingly precarious position that Muslims in the West presently occupy that is no longer confined to discursive racialization and verbal abuse, but is now starting to become a life and death challenge, quite literally. The Christchurch mosque attacks occurred in a local and global context of persisting Islamophobia and rising far-right nationalist fringe groups entering the mainstream in Australia and elsewhere. This paper discusses contemporary attitudes towards Islam and Muslim Australians through an examination of the historical context for the settlement of Muslim communities in Australia from the early days of the nineteenth century to the contemporary era, which has seen a more diversified migration from many parts of the Muslim world. The paper discusses the critical factors that shaped this migration and examines the contemporary social experiences of Muslim Australians in a global context of hyper-securitized agendas often connecting Islam and Muslims to extreme violent ideologies.

Keywords: Muslim Migrants, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, Identity Politics, Australia

Introduction

This paper examines the history of Muslim migration to and settlement in Australia, focusing mainly on the experiences of racism and social exclusion that characterised this early period of migration. It must be stated from the outset that

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the focus of this paper is not on the more positive grass-roots initiatives around inter-faith dialogue and broader race-relations, rather on the persistent negative characterisation of a diverse faith community and its religion in public policy and politicised discourse. The paper also examines the effect of such enduring legacy of this early racism and the subsequent racialization of Muslims on their contemporary social experiences. Contrary to popular belief, Muslim migrants started settling in Australia well before Australian federation in 1901. Indeed, early scattered Muslim presence can be traced all the way back to the sixteenth century with the arrival of the Makassar fishermen and Malay pearlers in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.² In the nineteenth century, during the European explorations across the Australian “Red Centre”, migration of between 2,000 and 4,000 Afghan cameleers began.³ However, following the formation of the Australian Federation and the adoption of the “White Australia policy” in 1901, this source of migration significantly decreased and communities such as the Afghans and Syrians started to experience racism, social isolation and labour market discrimination. These early experiences are indicative of discriminatory and racialized practices that have endured and are currently identified as instances of “Islamophobia”.⁴

Notwithstanding this early history of Muslim presence in Australia, Muslim migration and settlement only really gathered pace after World War II when the number of Muslims in Australia increased significantly, from an estimated 2,704 in 1947, to 22,311 in 1971 and 604,240 in 2016.⁵ With the adoption of the Australian multicultural policy in the early 1970s, the early prominence of Turkish migrants began to shift and migrants began to arrive from different Muslim-majority countries from across the Arab world. This increase in Arab migration was due to two main factors. Firstly, there were what can be broadly described as push factors from conflicts affecting some Arabic countries, in particular the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). Secondly, there were clear pull factors attracting migrants to Australia pertaining to Australia introducing and implementing progressive social policies, in particular multiculturalism, as well as more expansionist eco-

2 Nahid Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, Kegan Paul, London, 2004; Amanda Wise, and Jan Ali, *Muslim-Australians and Local Government: The Grassroot Strategies to Improve Relations between Muslim and Non-Muslim Australians*, Centre of Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University, Sydney, 2008; Fethi Mansouri, Muslim Migration to Australia and the Question of Identity and Belonging, *Muslims in the West and the Challenges of Belonging*, Fethi Mansouri, Vince Marotta (eds.), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2012, pp. 13–33.

3 Wafa Omar, Kirsty Allen, *The Muslims in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1996, p. 9; Mansouri F, Percival Wood S, *Identity, Education and Belonging: Arab Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008, p. 9.

4 Gary Bouma, Islamophobia as a Constraint to World Peace: The Case of Australia, *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2011, pp. 433–441; Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the ‘Muslim Question’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170.

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013, Cultural Diversity in Australia, available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/2071.Omain+features902012-2013>, (accessed 06.06.2019); Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, Religion in Australia, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Religion%20Article~80>, (accessed 07.06.2019).

nomic programs with well-targeted migration schemes to meet workforce demands.⁶ During this period of migration expansion and diversification in Australia, the successive waves of Arab migration were inherently heterogeneous and included a variety of religious beliefs and geographic affiliations, though initially, in particular prior to 1975, most Lebanese migrants who moved to Australia were adherents to the various Christian denominations. However, after the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975, a greater number of Lebanese Muslims started to also migrate to and settle in Australia.⁷ This was followed by other groups such as Egyptians and Syrians and more recently Iraqis, Somalis, and Sudanese, all of which add to the diversity of Muslim communities in Australia.

More recently and as a result of the Australian government placing more importance on skilled labour, the face of Muslim migration has started to change. Data released by the Department of Home Affairs provide a more accurate and interesting view on migrants coming from Arab and Muslim countries as permanent residents. In the financial year 2017–18, the number of permanent migrants from Muslim countries had increased, with a growing number of Pakistani (6,235) and Malaysian (3,205) relocating to Australia as permanent migrants.⁸ Most of these migrants are assumed to be Muslims since, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2013 87.7 per cent of migrants from Pakistan identified themselves as Muslims.⁹ Skilled migrants from Arab and Muslim countries permanently relocating to Australia in the financial year 2014–15 also come from Malaysia (3,205), Indonesia (1,773), Iraq (466) and Syria (313).¹⁰ What can be noticed from these figures is that the Arab component of overall Muslim migration is decreasing as the presence of Muslims originating from Central and West Asian nations increases, particularly those from Pakistan, India and Indonesia.

The Humanitarian Programme has also contributed to a modest increase in Muslim migration to Australia with a significant proportion (58.9 per cent) of visas granted offshore during 2015–16 allocated to applicants from Middle Eastern countries.¹¹ Reflecting recent political and security events in the region, Iraqis received the highest number of visas granted under the Humanitarian Programme

6 Fethi Mansouri, Sally Percival Wood, *Identity, Education and Belonging: Arab Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008, p. 11.

7 Scott Poynting, Victoria Mason, The Resistible Rise of Islamophobia Anti-Muslim Racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001, *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2007, pp. 61–86.

8 Department of Home Affairs, 2017–18 Migration Program Report, available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/report-migration-program-2017-18.pdf>, (accessed 07.06.2019).

9 Craig Overington, Muslim Migration to Australia: The Big Slowdown, available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/muslim-migration-to-australia-the-big-slowdown/news-story/6be73d718d50476f940e30281d885b99>, (accessed 14.05.2019).

10 Department of Home Affairs, 2016–2017 Humanitarian Program Outcomes, available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/humanitarian-program-outcomes-2016-17-at-glance.pdf>, (accessed 14.09.2016).

11 Department of Home Affairs, 2014–2015 Migration Programme, available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/2014-15-Migration-Programme-Report.pdf>, (accessed 13.09.2016).

(4,358) followed by Syrians (4,261) and Afghans (1,952).¹²

Social experiences of Muslim Australians post 9/11

The growth of the Muslim Australian communities and its greater diversity has coincided with significant international conflicts and local political events that led to a visibly increased antagonism towards Islam and Muslims across many Western émigré societies including Australia. September 11 in particular invoked a considerable backlash against Muslim migrants in the West including Muslim Australians,¹³ who became seen as potentially sympathetic to jihadist groups if not outright supporters. The events of September 11 cemented political and media positioning of Islam as a homogeneous and problematic entity that casually incites anti-Western primordial violence.¹⁴ Hysterical and panicked sections of the public in many Western nations started to look at their fellow Muslim citizens and asylum seekers as potential terrorists and untrustworthy individuals ready to strike and carry out “home-grown” terrorist acts.¹⁵ According to the Australian Arabic Council, there was a twenty-fold increase in vilification against Arab and Muslim Australians registered across the country in the three weeks following the events of September 11.¹⁶

In the same year, 2001, the Australian Government started to undertake a number of punitive measures towards asylum seekers that further heightened the negative representation of Muslim migrants coming from Middle Eastern and other Muslim-majority countries. The climax for the discursive “onslaught” was reached during the so-called “Tampa” and “children overboard” incidents that took place within Australian territorial waters and where the character and morality of Muslim refugees were questioned by government officials and large sections of the mainstream media. The Tampa affair gained dramatic media prominence in Australia and internationally just prior to the 2001 federal election when a Norwegian cargo vessel MV Tampa rescued refugees from a sinking boat and attempted to sail to Australian shores only to be denied entry by the then Howard government. The ‘children overboard’ incident brought the tragic story

12 Department of Home Affairs, 2016-2017 Humanitarian Program Outcomes, available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/humanitarian-program-outcomes-2016-17-at-glance.pdf>, (accessed 14.09.2016).

13 Amelia Johns, Fethi Mansouri, Michel Lobo, *Religiosity, Citizenship and Belonging: The Everyday Experiences of Young Australian Muslims*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 171–190; Fethi Mansouri, Sally Percival Wood, *Identity, Education and Belonging: Arab Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008; Fethi Mansouri, *Australia and the Middle East: A Front-Line Relationship*, Palgrave Macmillan, Second Edition, London, New York, I B Tauris, 2011.

14 Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, *Grounding Religiosity in Urban Space: Insights from Multicultural Melbourne*, *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 47, No.3, 2016, pp. 295–310; Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2004.

15 Fethi Mansouri, Vince Marotta (eds.), *Muslims in the West and the Challenges of Belonging*, 2012, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2012; Ghassan Hage, *Arab-Australian Belonging After September 2011*, *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, Ghassan Hage (ed.), Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 243.

16 Australian Arabic Council, *Racial Vilification Against Arabic and Muslim Australians in Light of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks in the United States*, available at: <http://www.aac.org.au/report4/>, (accessed 10.07.2019).

of SIEV X boat and its 353 men, women and children who drowned while attempting to reach Australian shores to seek asylum. Following these incidents¹⁷, the Government introduced substantial legislative changes, making it more difficult for asylum seekers of Arab and Muslim backgrounds to reach Australia and gain refugee status.¹⁸ Indeed, these two incidents were used by the government as a “central motif” of their 2001 election, which aimed to define the Australian national identity against a Muslim “Arab Other”,¹⁹ characterized as undesirable migrants and asylum applicants. In such a polarized and paranoid social environment, Australian politicians often associated asylum seekers with global terror networks, encouraging an Australian exclusivist nationalism that portrayed non-Anglo Australians, especially Arab and Muslim Australians as not worthy of being members of the Australian community.²⁰ The groundwork for these racialized exclusionary discourses was already established in early European settlement with the subjugation of Indigenous populations, as well as in the conception of Federation itself in 1901 with Australia as an exclusively White nation.

Certainly, Muslim communities in Australia faced considerable hostility and xenophobia during and following 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Australia’s participation escalated anti-Muslim sentiments with increased public scrutiny of Muslim Australians’ political allegiance and national attachment. But developments in Australia have also been affected by more recent international events that placed further strain on race relations in relation to Islam and Muslim Australians.

In recent years, the Middle East has been affected by numerous intra-state and inter-state conflicts that have contributed to the further deterioration of the image of Islam and Muslims in Australia. The ongoing tensions in Iraq and in Afghanistan were followed by a number of conflicts and civil unrests associated with the 2011 Arab uprisings that led to the Syrian civil war, the Libyan civil war, the Yemeni conflict (since 2015), and the current Sudanese uprisings (2018–19). These conflicts have led to increased migration from these areas, often resulting in increased perceived threat to national security. This further damaged the public perception of Muslim citizens living in Western countries, including Australia, often characterizing them as incapable of embracing democracy, modernity and human rights.

The emergence of violent extremism internationally has also had domestic implications both discursively and in terms of policy and practice. Within Australia, terror attacks such as the Sydney Café Siege in 2014 and the Melbourne

17 David Marr, Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory: How a Government Lied its Way to Political Triumph*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2003.

18 Michael Leach, *Disturbing Practices: Dehumanizing Asylum Seekers in the Refugee “Crisis” in Australia, 2001–2002*, *Refuge*, Volume 21, No. 3, 2003, pp. 25–33.

19 Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul Tabar, Jock Collins, *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*, Institute of Criminology, Sydney, 2004, p. 63.

20 Michael Leach, *Disturbing Practices: Dehumanizing Asylum Seekers in the Refugee “Crisis” in Australia, 2001–2002*, *Refuge*, Volume 21, No. 3, 2003, pp. 29.

Bourke Street attack in 2018 damaged even further the already negative perception of Islam and Muslim communities. The political rhetoric and the media speculations about the events characterized them incorrectly as reflective of a deep theological schism and socio-political antagonism between Islam and the supposedly secular West.²¹ Furthermore, and since the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) and affiliated jihadi groups, concerns around the recruitment of a small number of Australian Muslims as “foreign fighters” have also been exploited by some political leaders to promote new anti-terror policies.²² The emergence of IS has added a worrying dimension to the already vexed relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

Disturbingly, when Muslim migrants were the victims of terrorist attacks, as in Christchurch on 15 March 2019, an unprecedented surge in online far-right extremism²³ across the globe applauding the attack on the two mosques was seen.²⁴ This perhaps reflects more systematic circulating Islamophobic narratives around “invading” and “multiplying” Muslims who pose an existential threat to Western societies. A most recent illustrative example of this comes from the 2019 Australia federal election campaign, when then far-right senator Fraser Anning posted a meme (image with captions) made by one of his team members to Facebook. The meme read, “If you want a Muslim for a neighbour, just vote Labour” with a visibly Muslim family with 11 children juxtapositioned against a visibly Anglo-Celtic family of three children holding the Australian flag.²⁵ The meme emulated a racist (UK) Tory party slogan of 1964 in the seat of Smethwick, “If you desire a coloured [sometimes the n-word was used] for your neighbour, vote Labour”.²⁶ As discussed below, the image of the undesirable Muslim neighbour is a powerful image for driving public attitudes towards all things Islam.

The rise of far right ideologies is the result of a plethora of factors including a weakening of the welfare state, the spread of fake news via new information and communication technologies and the amplifying nature of social media. Nevertheless, and more worryingly, the discrimination of racialized groups in political processes is also the direct product of fragmented and ethically deficient political leadership that fails to stamp out such xenophobic tendencies before they are normalized, legitimized and disseminated further. Muslim migrants have undoubtedly been the most visible target of such ideologies both discursively but also physically, as seen in the recent terrorist attacks in Christchurch.

21 Megan Levy, Lisa Visenten, *The Siege Ends, Two Hostages, Gunman Dead*, *The Age*, 2014, Melbourne.

22 Amelia Johns, Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, *Religiosity, Citizenship and Belonging: The Everyday Experiences of Young Australian Muslims*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 171–190.

23 Mario Peucker, Debra Smith, *The Far Right in Contemporary Australia*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.

24 Nick O'Malley, 'Unprecedented' Surge of Online Extremism after Christchurch, available at: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/unprecedented-surge-of-online-extremism-after-christchurch-20190420-p51fss.html> (accessed 29.04.2019).

25 Nick Baker, *Outrage as Fraser Anning Uses Image of Grieving Muslim Family on Facebook Post*, available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/outrage-as-fraser-anning-uses-image-of-grieving-muslim-family-on-facebook-post>, (accessed 16.05.2019).

26 Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2016.

Muslim Australians and the rise of xenophobia

Conflicts and terrorist events have clearly had an impact on the perception of Islam and Muslim Australians, with research showing that negative attitudes towards Muslim and Arab Australians reached alarmingly high levels.²⁷ Indeed, many recent studies²⁸ and inquiries into public attitudes towards Muslims, such as the *Islamophobia in Australia* (2017) report, found that there has been a significant rise in levels of intolerance towards Muslims across institutional and interpersonal fields. The *Islamophobia* report in particular exposed the gendered nature of this problem, with women, especially those wearing head-coverings, bearing the brunt of Islamophobic attacks. Of the perpetrators, 98 per cent were identified by the reporters of these attacks as ethnically Anglo-Celtic and were three times more likely to be male. While attackers were most likely to be lone men, the targets were more likely to be lone Muslim women. Furthermore, in 75 per cent of the reported incidents, half of which occurred in public spaces, no one intervened.²⁹ Muslim women are targeted more frequently than men³⁰ for two major reasons. Firstly, those who wear the *hijab*, or headscarf, are more visibly and physically identifiable with Islam³¹. Muslim women report widespread abuse, removal by others of their headscarves, verbal and physical assault, being spat on, receiving hate mails and many other similarly abusive acts.³² Secondly, Muslim women are viewed by some other Australians as complicit in their own oppression by a patriarchal religious and cultural order, deemed inferior, backwards, barbarian and incompatible with that of the morally superior and technologically more-advanced “West”.

Research on the everyday experiences of practising Muslims in Australia provides more contextual accounts of the challenges faced by individuals whose religiosity is more visible to the public in particular for Muslim women. Indeed, many female participants in recent studies³³ indicated that wearing the headscarf (the *hijab*) for example had been hijacked and re-signified in mainstream media landscapes as a symbol of patriarchal control and oppression of Muslim

27 Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2017*, ACJC Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Melbourne, 2017; Derya Iner (ed.), *Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016*, Charles Sturt University, Sydney, 2017; Kevin Dunn, Racism in Australia: Findings of a Survey on Racist Attitudes and Experiences of Racism, available at: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41761/4/dunn_paper.pdf, (accessed 06.05.2019).

28 Fethi Mansouri, Matteo Vergani, Intercultural Contact, Knowledge of Islam, and Prejudice Against Muslims in Australia, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 66, 2018, pp. 85–94.

29 Derya Iner (ed.), *Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016*, Charles Sturt University, Sydney, 2017.

30 Ibidem.

31 Ibidem; Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2004.

32 Mariam Veiszadeh, Islamophobia has Become Normal. Our Challenge Now is Dismantling it Without Doing Dore Damage, available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/islamophobia-has-become-normal-our-challenge-now-is-dismantling-it-without-doing-more-damage-20160807-gqn52d.html>, (accessed 07.05.2019).

33 Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Grounding Religiosity in Urban Space: Insights from Multicultural Melbourne, *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 47, No.3, 2016, pp. 295–310.

women. In these situations, the tendency to treat the body as a contested site of religiosity robs Muslim women of their agency as this quote from an Australian Muslim woman, age 32 and born in Melbourne shows:

You are embodiment of what your faith is, and people have perceptions of what that means [...] women are an object that everyone talks about. So everyone has an opinion about Muslim women, except, apparently, Muslim women themselves. So you do have that [...] from the government and the media to the general people in the public, and I guess even Muslim men. So everyone almost treats the Muslim woman as an entity, which can also be very problematic.

The above excerpt and other similar findings reflect much of the debate around Muslim religious beliefs and practices often performed in accordance with an Islamic code of ethics and laws known as *Sharia* which largely relates to personal, family and financial matters. Yet, participants in the study reported above also reported how the word '*Sharia*' itself was fuelling Islamophobic discourses and practices as explained by this Australian Muslim man in his mid-twenties born in Melbourne:

I think there's misconception amongst many non-Muslims in Australia in that the country is becoming Islamic because the population of Muslims is growing. It is actually nonsense to me. It doesn't really make sense because there is very limited participation [of Muslims] in parliament. So if we're looking at that level if someone sits there and is educated and knows exactly what's going on there's no chance of anything happening on Sharia or anything like that, absolutely no chance of that happening.

Both examples above highlight misconceptions around the status of women in Islam and the hysterical misunderstanding of *Sharia* laws in the everyday lives of ordinary Muslims often leading to simplistic and in many cases reductionist statements about Islam and Muslims. Many commentators have made direct connections between political events and racist attacks against Muslim Australians³⁴. This problematization is the result of a banal conflation of religion and politics, and the reductionist ethnicization of Islam that depicts it as a homogeneous entity mostly associated with terrorists targeting Western countries. The negative characterisation of Islam and Muslims seems also to reflect a deficiency in relational empathy and a lack of understanding of Islam as a theology and as a lived and practised faith.

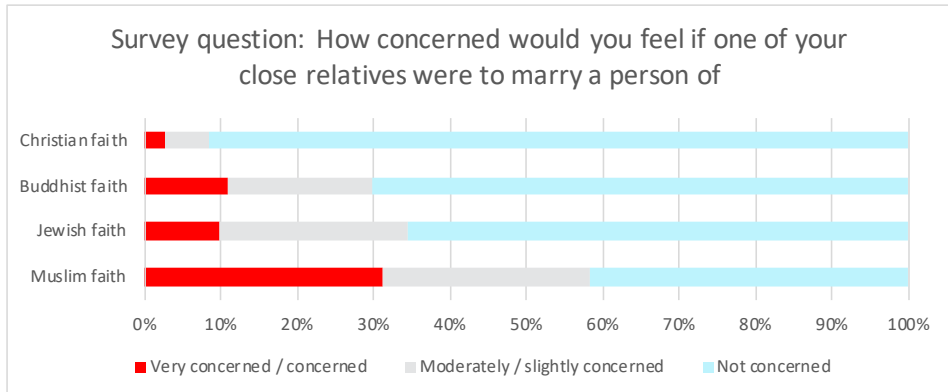
Indeed, a recent empirical study into the relationship between different forms of knowledge of Islam and prejudice against Muslims in Australia confirms this analysis, with respondents who display the most prejudice against Muslims also those who know the least about Islam in terms of factual knowledge, and have less contact with Muslims³⁵. The study consisted of a national online sur-

34 Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the 'Muslim Question', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170; Muniba Saleem, Sara Prot, Craig Anderson, Anthony Lemieux, Exposure to Muslims in Media and Support for Public Policies Harming Muslims, *Communication Research*, Vol. 44, No. 6, 2015, pp. 1–29.

35 Fethi Mansouri, Matteo Vergani, Intercultural Contact, Knowledge of Islam, and Prejudice Against Muslims in Australia, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 66, 2018, pp. 85–94.

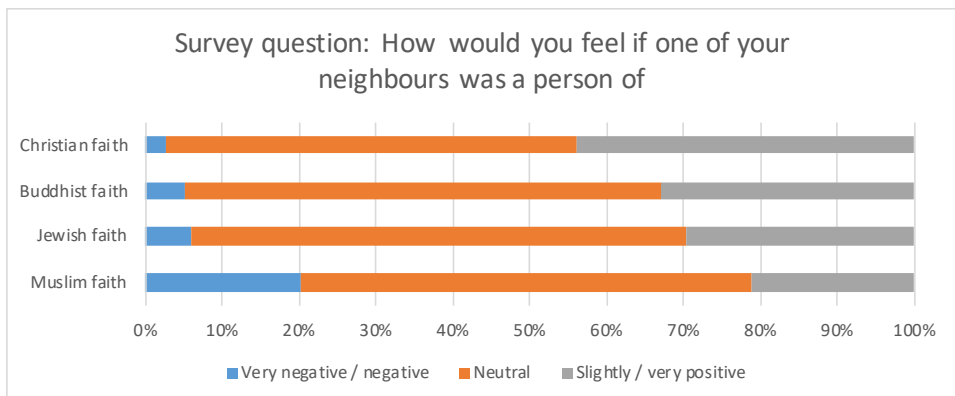
vey of a random sample of Australians (N=1004) and was implemented through the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. In order to examine public attitudes towards Muslims and how these are affected by intercultural contact (relationality) and factual knowledge (understanding), the survey included three items to measure prejudice in Australia (see Figures 1–3).³⁶

Figure 1. Survey outcomes for assessing prejudice across the major faiths based on respondents’ feelings about a relative marrying a person of different major faiths



Source: Mansouri and Vergani 2018.

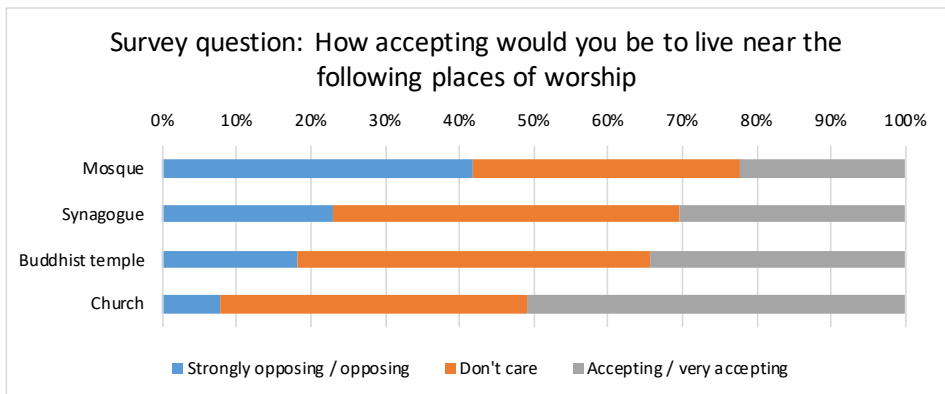
Figure 2. Survey outcomes for assessing prejudice across the major faiths based on respondents’ feelings about a neighbour being of different major faiths.



Source: Mansouri and Vergani 2018.

36 See Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the ‘Muslim Question’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170; Kevin Dunn, Racism in Australia: Findings of a Survey on Racist Attitudes and Experiences of Racism, available at: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41761/4/dunn_paper.pdf, (accessed 06.05.2019).

Figure 3. Survey outcomes for assessing prejudice across the major faiths based on respondents' feelings about living near a place of worship of different major faiths.



Source: Mansouri and Vergani 2018.

Figures 1–3 show a high level of rejection of and negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam that cannot simply be explained by the secular nature of Australian society. Indeed, when such attitudes are compared with attitudes towards other religious groups, it becomes evident that the disproportionately higher levels of negativity indicate a deeper historical, as well as more contemporary, hostility and antagonism towards Islam that have been captured by the civilizational clash hypothesis of some scholars, most notably Samuel Huntington. Along similar lines, empirical data reported in the Scanlon Foundation surveys over the course of eight years shows similar findings, with negative sentiments towards Muslims – whether immigrants or Australian-born – being significantly higher than towards those from other faiths.³⁷

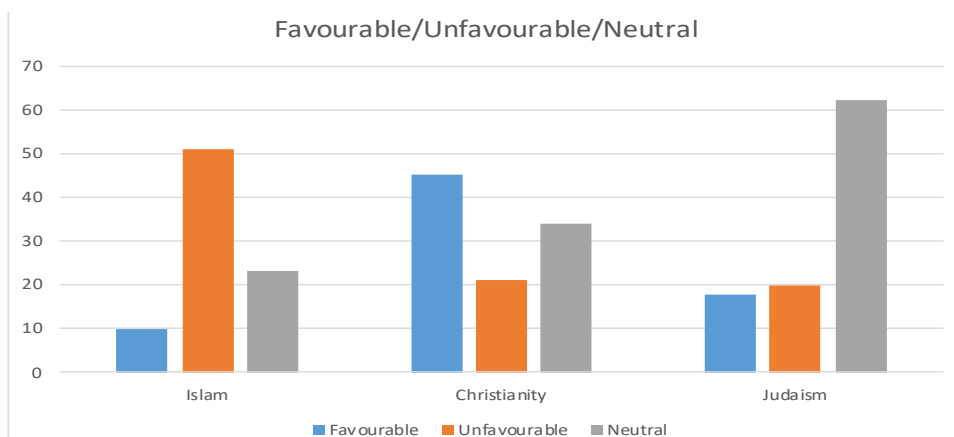
More recent studies report findings that support this trend of disproportionately negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. The global YouGov-Cambridge Globalism Project, for example, surveyed 1,006 Australians online on their views towards immigration, among other subjects. Conducted in early 2019, the survey found that more than half of the respondents (51 per cent) viewed Islam unfavourably, as opposed to 10 per cent who viewed it positively.³⁸ The data, when cross-referenced with the other 22 countries surveyed, indicates Australia (ranked 6th) as one of the most negative countries in regards to attitudes towards Islam.³⁹

37 Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2017*, ACJC Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Melbourne, 2017.

38 Naaman Zhou, *Australians Accepting of Migrants but Negative Towards Islam, Poll Finds*, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/04/australians-accepting-of-migrants-but-negative-towards-islam-poll-finds> (accessed 07.06.2019).

39 Ibidem.

Figure 4. Selected data from YouGov survey of 1,006 Australians in February and March 2019.



Source: YouGov, cited in Zhou 2019.

Indeed, such negative attitudes can neither be regarded as part of a broader public backlash against diversity, nor a mere conservative hardening towards multiculturalism, where fear and suspicion of Australians with multiple ethnic and religious allegiances have become common practice.⁴⁰ These negative sentiments certainly reflect a rising fear of culturally visible communities who are seen as unable to integrate into majoritarian Anglo-Celtic norms.⁴¹ But more critically, such consistently negative public attitudes as reported in the various data sets mentioned above also reveal a worrying normalisation of Islamophobia. This normalisation is evident in its progression from a far-right fringe element of the (white) dominant society to a central position of “acceptability” and an institutionalisation in the public domain.⁴² The electoral successes of right-wing senators and MPs in recent years is an apt illustration of this normalisation. For example, in 2018 former far-right senator Fraser Anning gave a “Final Solution” speech in relation to Muslim migration, while far-right One Nation leader Pauline Hanson put forward the “it’s ok to be White” motion in parliament, to which many “centrist” politicians offered their support.⁴³ Ironically, the social isolation

40 Fethi Mansouri, Matteo Vergani, Intercultural Contact, Knowledge of Islam, and Prejudice Against Muslims in Australia, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 66, 2018, pp. 85–94; Fethi Mansouri, Sally Percival Wood, *Identity, Education and Belonging: Arab Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2008.

41 Geoffrey Levey, Multiculturalism and Terror, *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*, Raimond Gaita (ed.), Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2011, pp. 42.

42 Scott Poynting, Linda Briskman, Islamophobia in Australia: From Far-Right Deplorables to Respectable Liberals, *Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 11, 2018, p. 213.

43 Gareth Hutchens, Government Blames ‘Administrative Error’ for its Support for ‘It’s OK to be White’ Vote, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/16/government-blames-administrative-error-for-its-support-for-its-ok-to-be-white-vote>, (accessed 08.05.2019).

that has been forced upon some members of the Muslim Australian communities has been interpreted as a dissociation from “Australian-ness” and evidence of loyalty to an external religious or political order that is considered an “enemy” of the West. This xenophobic treatment of Muslim Australians cannot only be understood as a consequence of recent world events. Rather, a broader history of Western discourse on Islam needs to be critically examined to properly account for the evolution of xenophobic sentiments towards Muslim Australians.

The Orientalist discourse and the “Islam versus the West” thesis

The resurgence of Islamophobia in contemporary Western societies has attracted much debate as to its very existence as well as its exact meaning.⁴⁴ The latter matter was recently witnessed in the UK parliament, where a definition of Islamophobia for policy purposes was resisted on the grounds that this could represent an attack on free speech and the ability to criticise certain aspects of Islamic beliefs.⁴⁵ Yet, Islamophobia can be seen as another manifestation of structural racism that is increasingly driven by neo-conservatism, security agendas, colonial narratives, even elements of the liberal Left, in particular certain feminist movements that explain the plight of Muslim women in Islamic theological terms rather than cultural or historical ones.⁴⁶

Indeed, the Western discursive interpretation of world events from the late 1970s onwards has led to a problematic association of Islam with “extremism, intolerance and violence”.⁴⁷ World events such as the Iranian revolution of 1979, the ongoing Palestine–Israel conflict, the Gulf Wars of 1990–91 and 2003, the conflict in Syria and terrorist activities across the region committed in the name of Islam, have all created an oppositional relation between Islam and Muslims and the West. The association of Islam with violent extremism has been further aided by the more recent upheavals across the Middle East and North Africa region, leading in turn to more pronounced forms of Islamophobia in the West including in Australia.⁴⁸ More recently, the reified racialisation of Islam has been well documented and increasingly manifesting as a form of cultural racism (dress, language, faith, religious symbols and institutions, etc.) rather than being strictly about skin colour as perceived markers of “Muslimness”.⁴⁹

44 Omar Khan, Islamophobia Definition is No Threat to Free Speech, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/may/17/islamophobia-definition-is-no-threat-to-free-speech?CMP=share_btn_tw, (accessed 15.07.2019).

45 Ibidem.

46 *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, Narazan Massoumi, Tom Mills, David Miller (eds.), Pluto Press, London, 2017.

47 Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the ‘Muslim Question’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170; Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2004.

48 Gary Bouma, Desmond Cahill, Hass Dellal, Athalia Zwart, *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Twenty-First Century Australia*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney, 2011.

49 Deepa Kumar, “Islamophobia and Empire: An Intermestic Approach to the Study of Anti-Muslim Racism”, in: *What is Islamopho-*

However, the ethnicization and racialization of Islam is not a new phenomenon in the West, with its long genealogy rooted in the colonial imaginaries of Western Empires. In the Orientalist tradition,⁵⁰ and in the dominant popular Western racist narratives, the boundaries between being an Arab and being a Muslim are greatly blurred.⁵¹ This negative, essentialist and misguided discourse that sought to ethnicise Islam has certainly been heightened in the aftermath of September 11; the “malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West”.⁵² This was epitomized in the “clash of civilisations” thesis, where Islam was portrayed as a “single, coherent entity”,⁵³ allowing Western mass media and Western policy makers to develop hostile generalisations about Islam aimed at advancing particular ideological and strategic agendas. Through such constructed images and narratives, Islam is deliberately denied any form of diversity in character, practices and beliefs, with all Muslims being characterized as having an intrinsic bad nature.⁵⁴ These discursive generalisations have often incited hatred and distrust of Muslims and those associated with Islam, thus creating banal associations between Islam and violent extremism.⁵⁵

Social inclusion of Muslims in “multicultural” Australia

Despite the significant contributions of successive waves of Muslim migrants to the making of contemporary Australia, the consequence of Islamophobia is often the ostracization of whole communities and their rendering as not deserving of societal care and incorporation. Furthermore, the rising levels of negative attitudes towards Muslim Australians further deny these diverse communities the agency and unique individual attributes of its members. This negative outcome has been detailed in recent research⁵⁶ but was also reported a few decades ago when “around Australia, Islam has become the new global enemy... Australian Muslims need reassurance that they are not seen as the enemy; and that they are not un-Australian”.⁵⁷ Indeed, there has been an historical continu-

bia? Racism, Social Movements, and the State, Narazan Massoumi, Tom Mills, David Miller (eds.), Pluto Press, London, 2017.

50 Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Vintage Books, London, 1997.

51 Ray Jureidini, Ghassan Hage, The Australian Arabic Council: Anti-Racist Activism, *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, Ghassan Hage (ed.), Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2002, pp. 173.

52 Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Vintage Books, London, 1997, p. 12.

53 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Touchstone, New York, 1997.

54 Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Vintage Books, London, 1997.

55 Ibidem.

56 *Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016*, Derya Iner (ed.), Charles Sturt University, Sydney, 2017; Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the ‘Muslim Question’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170.

57 Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey among Australian Muslims*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003, p. 272.

ity of a trend that started in World War I, whereby non-Muslim Australians raise doubts about Muslim Australian allegiances to the Australian (White) nation with these doubts becoming more pronounced each time there was a world crisis or local events involving Muslims.⁵⁸ Some Muslim Australians have reacted by trying to promote a positive image of Islam to alleviate the fears and hatred perpetuated by those who espouse hatred towards Muslims.⁵⁹ Hostility and questioning of Muslim Australian belonging have caused fear, apprehension and isolation among some Muslims, effectively creating social distances between Muslims and non-Muslims, silencing those who started to believe that “they could not receive a ‘fair go’” in a hyper-securitized social climate.⁶⁰ Muslim Australians have been reduced to the same monolith of pejorative stereotypical images⁶¹ and in the process were denied their humanity by an ever-increasing army of “Muslim watchers”. These “watchers” use ill-founded narratives to define whole communities and represent them in reductionist terms of veiled women, misogynistic bearded men, barbaric parents, rapists and suicide bombers.⁶²

An important element in the Australian situation that should never be understated is its settler-colonial nature based on the oppression of First Peoples since the state’s early inception as a penal colony. Early assimilationist policies, in particular the White Australia policy (abolished in 1973), were used to assimilate migrants essentially into an Anglo-Celtic conceptualization of the nation-state paradigm. This approach to an imagined nation-state maintains an exclusivist “ownership” of the political community as well as the territory that, paradoxically, had never been ceded voluntarily by its Indigenous owners. More recently, an emergent form of neo-assimilationism, although deliberately rejecting indigenous claims of constitutional recognition, asks migrants not only to integrate fully socio-politically but also to accept the dominant Anglo-Celtic cultural norms under the rubric of national civic integration.

This neo-assimilationist tendency can be traced back to mid-1990s, when the notion of citizenship (both as a legal status and a set of values) as dictated by the state became increasingly intertwined with multicultural diversity to form part of Australia’s national identity. The onus shifted to the migrant or the “ethnic” subject to adopt the values, beliefs and practices of the dominant majority, and by extension accept being governed by the state vision for multiculturalism

58 Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2004.

59 Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey among Australian Muslims*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003, pp. 271–279.

60 Nahid Kabir, To Be or Not to Be an Australian: Focus on Muslim Youth, *National Identities*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2008, pp. 399–419; Hasan Azad, Do Muslims Belong in the West? An Interview with Talal Asad, available at: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20768/do-muslims-belong-in-the-west-an-interview-with-ta> (accessed 07.06.2019); Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo, Amelia Johns, Addressing the ‘Muslim Question’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2015, pp. 165–170.

61 Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Vintage Books, London, 1997.

62 Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2003; Nahid Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, Kegan Paul, London, 2004.

and what it deems acceptable within its confines.⁶³ Indeed, state-imposed multiculturalism that defines terms of belonging has been used as a tool to govern the “ungovernable” “othered” ethnic communities under the watchful eyes of the state.⁶⁴ In the case of Muslims in Australia, they “have become “the ungovernable” of the multicultural governmental apparatus”.⁶⁵ The criminalization of Muslim Lebanese in Sydney’s Western suburbs is a good case in point, where these ungovernable, mainly young, unemployed Muslim men, represent an intergenerational racialized, politicized and Islamicized underclass. Sydney’s Cronulla beach riots of 2005 represent an apt example of this situation, where mostly white men gathered to “reclaim” the beach from those Arab and Muslim Australians characterized predominantly in religious terms as undesirable Muslims. The riots were a reflection of Australia’s enduring structural racism that was reactivated and promulgated by neo-assimilationist politics as summarised by Hage⁶⁶:

[Cronulla] was itself the result of an impasse generated neither by the “crisis of multiculturalism” eagerly declared by some, nor by the crisis of mono-cultural assimilationism, but the crisis of the very governmentality that was based on a supposed choice between the two. Here we come to an important point. In many parts of the world, but particularly in Australia, multiculturalism is portrayed as an alternative and a transcendence of mono-cultural assimilation.

But despite the difficulties encountered by Muslim Australians to be accepted and to belong in the national community, many Muslim individuals and groups across Australia have worked creatively to achieve both internal solidarity (bonding social capital) as well as external cross-cultural engagement (bridging social capital). These cross-cultural engagement strategies are used to reinforce local belonging and transcend the externally super-imposed boundaries on Muslim individuals and groups that are often determined by race or ethnicity.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Islam and Muslims in Australia have endured persistent forms of racialized discrimination, often reduced to a monolith of pejorative stereotypical images and a distorted Orientalist view of Islam linked to political violence and international terrorism. In this process, many Muslim Australians continue to be denied

63 *Global Perspectives on the Politics of Multiculturalism in the 21st Century: A Case Study Analysis*, Fethi Mansouri, Boulou Ebanda de B'éri (eds.), Routledge, New York, 2014; James Walsh, The Marketization of Multiculturalism: Neoliberalism Restructuring and Cultural Difference in Australia, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2012, pp. 280–301; Ghassan Hage, “Multiculturalism and the Ungovernable Muslim”, in: *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*, Raimond Gaita (ed.), Text Publishing, 2011, pp. 155–186.

64 Ghassan Hage, “Multiculturalism and the Ungovernable Muslim” . . . pp. 155–186.

65 Ibidem.

66 Ibidem, pp. 164–165.

67 Michele Lamont, Sada Aksartova, Ordinary Cosmopolitanisms Strategies for Bridging Racial Boundaries Among Working-Class Men. *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2002, pp. 1–25.

their individual agency, their diverse cultural and religious identities and their place in the local political community and in global humanity. Policy makers and media commentators alike have contributed to a problematized image of Australian Muslims, allowing misguided stereotypes to define a vastly heterogeneous community. While global political events have undoubtedly added to the anti-Muslim sentiments in Australia, as elsewhere in Europe and North America, specific historical and local factors have also played a crucial role. Negative attitudes towards Muslim Australians characterise and dominate the current social landscape and circulating political discourses. These racialized associations need to be critically appraised and deconstructed at the level of many interrelated factors, including media representations, social policies (in the form of a folkloric version of multiculturalism), and the deep, if unconscious, influence of “Orientalist” discourse on Islam.

Recently, the negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims have been further compounded by an even more salient hyper-securitised discourse with almost daily “terror alerts” issued by government agencies, self-declared experts and media reporters. The mere use of the term “Islam” to either explain or indiscriminately condemn whole communities has become an irresponsible discursive act that is problematic, counterproductive and increasingly stigmatising of Islam and Muslims. In the context of a culturally diverse society such as Australia, this demonization is problematic on both ethical and policy grounds. But such problematisation and essentialisation of Islam and Muslims endures in a political and social climate where Muslims in Australia are increasingly being portrayed as a threat to social cohesion and a potential risk to national security. This paranoid narrative feeds off a broader conservative backlash against multiculturalism that is increasingly fuelled by the far-right white supremacist groups that represent one of the most critical challenges facing Muslim Australians and affecting multicultural Australia as a whole. Yet, despite such a challenging social and political context, Muslim Australians continue to strive for a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives, where their cultural heritage and religious beliefs and practices are an integral part of their lived experience in contemporary Australia.

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Фети Мансури

ИСЛАМ И МУСЛИМАНИ У АУСТРАЛИЈИ: ДРУШТВЕНИ ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТИ РАНОГ НАСЕЉАВАЊА И ПОЛИТИКА САВРЕМЕНИХ РАСНИХ ОДНОСА

Сажетак

„Здраво, брате“ биле су последње речи Хаџи-Дауд Набија, старијег човека који је отворио врата џамије на Новом Зеланду у марту 2019. године. Неколико тренутака касније, убијен је од стране аустралијанског белог супрематисте у терористичком нападу. Ова трагедија упућује на чињеницу да муслимани на Западу тренутно имају позицију која више није само објекат вербалних напада, већ да постоји и реална животна угроженост. Напад на Новом Зеланду се догодио у локалном и глобалном контексту исламофобије и раста десничарских група које полако постају мејнстрим политичког живота Аустралије, али и шире. Овај рад анализира савремене ставове према исламу и аустралијанским муслиманима кроз призму историјског контекста насељавања муслиманских заједница у Аустралији од краја XIX века до сада. Поред тога, овај рад се бави критичким факторима који су обликовали ову миграцију и анализира савремене друштвене експерименте аустралијанских муслимана у контексту глобалне агенде хипер-секуритизације која често повезује ислам и муслимане са насилним идеологијама.

Кључне речи: муслимански мигранти, исламофобија, мултикултурализам, идентитетске политике, Аустралија

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