

Local Governance, Intercultural Tension and the Racialisation of Muslims in the West

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Australia has a highly diverse population² which presents opportunities but also challenges to policy makers at all levels of government. Cultural diversity, therefore, in addition to being a demographic feature of Australia, has been a key feature of current government initiatives and policies aimed at addressing migration issues ranging from equitable settlement service provision to active citizenship and inclusive cultural policies. Multiculturalism, as a policy framework, was adopted in the 1970s as a cornerstone to this vision. The advantage of multicultural policies was that they provided guidelines by which it was possible to bring diverse groups of people together while continuing to respect the different cultural and religious perspectives of all Australians. It was touted as a distinct improvement over the 'White Australia' policy, whereby migrants to Australia were expected to assimilate into mainstream society, and in the process, to let go of affiliations with their heritage and past life in their countries of origin.³

Over the years, multiculturalism has received widespread public and government support but also more recently it attracted much criticism. For some, the problem is that multiculturalism has become too politicised.⁴ While the original ideals were well meaning,

what has developed, to a large degree, is a process designed to attract political votes from certain groups, in particular among those mostly recently settled migrant groups. Further still, some argue that multicultural policies have actually worked against the original ideals they were based on and have not accounted for the fact that society is divided along multiple axes apart from race such as gender, sexuality, religion and class.⁵ These post-structural criticisms were influential in questioning the analytical prominence of 'race' as a mode of social exclusion and as a basis for social and political identity. However, the primary critiques levelled at multiculturalism remain that migrants have been able to access the rights associated with the Australian citizenship and more broadly the Australian way of life without having to assume the social and civic responsibilities necessary to build a cohesive society.

Against this backdrop, this chapter will explore these issues further drawing on some of the debates that relate to the complex issues of international politics, cultural diversity and Muslim identity in the West. The new international agenda dominated as it is by the language of terrorism, violence and risks has led to significant policy changes in the areas of citizenship and multiculturalism. This chapter will discuss some of the implications of these new policy changes that have engendered experiences of social exclusion among Muslim Diaspora in western cities. Given that multiculturalism as a 'fiscal' policy has shifted from the federal to the local level, this chapter will explore local perceptions of Islam, Muslims and multiculturalism among members of local governments, community groups and civil society leaders in the state of Victoria.

Transnationalism and Muslim Diaspora in the West

Frequent and high volume transnational migration is one of the key processes associated with globalisation. Migrants who struggle with combining aspects of their cultural and religious heritage with that of their adopted countries are thus involved at an intimate individual and community level with broader transnational identity negotiation. For this reason, globalisation cannot be perceived as only related to transnational corporations and governmental policies, or alternatively to that which is 'out there, remote and far away from the individual'. Rather, globalisation is emerging as a phenomenon with the power to influence the 'intimate and personal aspects' of

an individual's life, whatever their political, religious and cultural orientations.⁶

Perceived tensions between Islamic beliefs and Western values are invoked as being at the heart of such personal negotiations of intercultural encounters. For Muslims in general, Islamic principles are a 'source of orientation' from which they strive to live as moral citizens in an increasingly globalised world.⁷ Muslim migrants in Western countries are faced with the need to 'negotiate new identities.'⁸ This is a complex situation where they resist being treated as 'outsiders' and excluded from society, while at the same time resist the full adoption of certain Western practices and values that they may see as contradictory to their core religious beliefs.⁹

This is particularly true, as highlighted by Esposito, when considering Muslim individuals who live 'as a minority in a dominant [Western] culture that is often ignorant about Islam or even hostile to it', where the experiences of 'marginalisation, alienation, and powerlessness', especially since 9/11, has prompted a 'struggle with the relationship of faith to national identity.'¹⁰ Thus implied is that the experience of large-scale transnational migration such as that of Muslims can lead to 'confrontation over identity issues'¹¹ both at the individual level and in the community. At the individual level, Muslim migrants often need to find a way to live in Western societies, while at the same time remain true to their Islamic faith. Migrant identity, from this perspective, cannot be viewed as either fixed or singular. It is instead multifaceted and influenced by many competing factors including religion *and* community. Migrant identity formation can, therefore, be defined through 'inscription,' where migrants are viewed through the lens of the dominant culture, and 'ascription,' where migrants take steps to create a unique identity that contains traces of their cultural background and religious orientation, as well as elements of mainstream societal practice and belief.¹²

So in and of itself, the formation of such hybrid identities is not problematic as it is an inherently personal experience and has its primary impact on a particular individual. The problem, however, is that a perceived attachment and adherence to a particular set of values, such as those associated with Islam, can be interpreted by others as confronting and challenging to mainstream culture.¹³ Debates about the virtues of hybrid identities are affected by a range of assumptions about the nature of Islam and Muslims, by

'stereotypical assumptions and pronouncements regarding the status of women in Islam, arranged marriages, or the inherently fanatical, violent and irrational tendencies of [some] Muslim leaders and their followers.'¹⁴ They are affected by assumptions that Muslims represent a 'culturally alien presence' that has the potential to disrupt existing patterns of social cohesion.¹⁵ The aftermath of the London subway bombings (2005) reflects the popular belief that 'alien qualities and attributes have come to be implanted in the western body itself', and are no longer just an issue of border control and immigration but national security.¹⁶ As a result of subsequent international incidents of terrorism, the very idea of cultural diversity has come under severe scrutiny, especially with regard to which ethnic practices can be un-problematically confined to the personal realm, and which ones pose a potential threat to society. These debates raise the further question of the sustainability of multiculturalism, both as an ideal and as a social policy, in this security-dominated context.

Citizenship and Social Exclusion

Citizenship and social exclusion need to be related back to the process of globalisation which inherently contains contradictory elements. From one perspective, increased levels of migration 'exemplify how globalisation represents a long-term historical trend toward the integration of economies, peoples, and cultures regardless of national boundaries.'¹⁷ The advantages of this process, however, are challenged by the experience of many migrants when they arrive in a new country, especially those who were forced by circumstances beyond their control into making such a move in the first place. Rather than being assisted during the settlement phase into the new society, many migrants are faced with exclusionary policies because of perceptions of cultural difference and/or undesirable mode of entry. In the case of Muslim migrants, they have often been characterised as the violent and dangerous 'other'. This is especially the case for Muslim men who are generally perceived as potentially violent. In contrast, Muslim women are perceived as 'submissive' and in need of Western liberal ideals associated with gender equality.¹⁸

Within the Australian context, the experience of Muslim males is further exacerbated by the Australian Government's shift from 'a discourse of full participation under multiculturalism' to a

risk-focused approach whereby Muslims are asked to integrate fully or risk being 'kept under surveillance and controlled.'¹⁹ In fact, in many Western countries, a discourse is now emerging of closed national citizenship, whereby those considered outside the majority sphere are regarded as potentially 'destructive and subversive.'²⁰ Such negative attitudes have a disproportional negative effect on minority groups' experience of more pronounced social exclusion and a more limited access, if any, to citizenship rights.

At present citizenship represents a 'socially constructed phenomenon' defined and differentiated by established patterns of influence and power in society that can be exclusionary by nature.²¹ But when reduced to its essential dynamics, citizenship can also refer to the opportunities available to individuals to pursue collective endeavours utilising their respective individual capacities. Also implied in citizenship debates is the possibility of social inclusion and exclusion to be experienced simultaneously by different types of citizens since the rights of citizenship are often not distributed evenly in society.²² In this respect, for example, Muslim Australians in the post-9/11 era have had their personal 'integrity and loyalty as citizens' questioned.²³ If certain Muslim Australians indeed pose a threat from within, then like any other source of threat their activities can be monitored for any trace of subversion and dealt with accordingly. In this context, measures taken against religious or other freedoms of Muslim Australians cannot be viewed by the wider community as a violation of human rights, but as necessary to protect Australian society and its citizens. But the problem is that the linking of 'Islam' to notions of 'risk', 'threat' and 'violence' has taken place largely in the absence of any tangible evidence to that extent. This is why it has been argued that 'the risk perspective of the war on terrorism is a recipe for alienation and division.'²⁴

The Empirical Case Study

This empirical study underpinning this chapter was carried out amidst a backdrop of a number of key securitised events in 2005 (the London subway bombings, riots in France and unrest at Sydney's Cronulla beach). Each of these events, like 9/11 before them, reflects not only the prominence of international security concerns but also the fragile status of intercultural relations. More critically, these events highlight the controversial connections made between issues

of culture (including religion) and national security. In fact, these events have precipitated a range of media commentary directly linking multicultural policies in an almost causal relationship to increased insecurity and the threat of terrorism. With the dominant discourse of terrorism and the retaliatory 'war on terror', intercultural tensions between Muslim minorities and their host societies have been exacerbated.²⁵ In this context, the need for mutual understanding and tolerance has become critical.²⁶ The importance and urgency of addressing questions of cultural diversity and intercultural relations from a local government perspective cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

The study reported in this chapter examines perceptions towards cultural diversity and multicultural policies, and the role of local governance in managing intercultural relations. These issues are explored through focusing on the experience of Muslim Australians who have been subject in recent years to a more pronounced racialised public discourse. Through an analysis of the strategies employed by Darebin City Council in Victoria, the project considers two interconnected questions: (1) whether multiculturalism, as a cosmopolitan project, is losing credibility in Australia; and (2) whether the level of racialisation of Muslim migrant communities in Australia has increased in response to recent securitisation of international events. This chapter will also reflect on the role of local governance and whether it is the most optimal vehicle to address intercultural tension in the community.

Research approach and methods

The project employed a triangulated design using secondary analysis together with the generation of qualitative and quantitative data sets. An analysis of policy documents and initiatives undertaken by the participating local government provided the key source for secondary data. Two surveys were also administered: an internal survey of Darebin City Council employees, and an external survey of a stratified sampling of residents in the Darebin community. In addition, twenty-two in-depth interviews were conducted with community and religious leaders, business representatives and local council managers.

Both the internal and the external surveys were comprised of a combination of questions eliciting scaled, open-ended, closed and

partially closed responses from each respondent. The primary objective of the surveys was to explore local attitudes towards diversity, perceptions of multiculturalism, views on the role of different levels of government in managing multicultural issues and community attitudes towards Islam and Muslim communities in the local area.

The integrative conceptualisation of social development used in this project is premised on selected key theories of globalism,²⁷ social exclusion²⁸ and the formulation of socio-cultural identities by minorities in multicultural societies,²⁹ as well as active citizenship. The specific focus is on the identification of the various socio-cultural factors in contemporary politics that have culminated in an increase of discriminatory and at times racialised activities directed towards Muslim communities in Australia following terrorist events such as 9/11 and the Bali bombings.

Much of the research in the area of social exclusion, focuses *either* on the social issues facilitating the emergence of minoritised ethnic groups who are often stereotyped in essentialist racist ways,³⁰ or on the responses of national governments to perceived problems associated with immigration and official discrimination.³¹ Few studies, however, set out to examine local government initiatives addressing social exclusion in multicultural societies. This kind of research where grass-roots initiatives and partnerships with key elements of civil society are examined is an important way in which statements about civilizational clashes and inter-cultural tensions can be tested empirically.

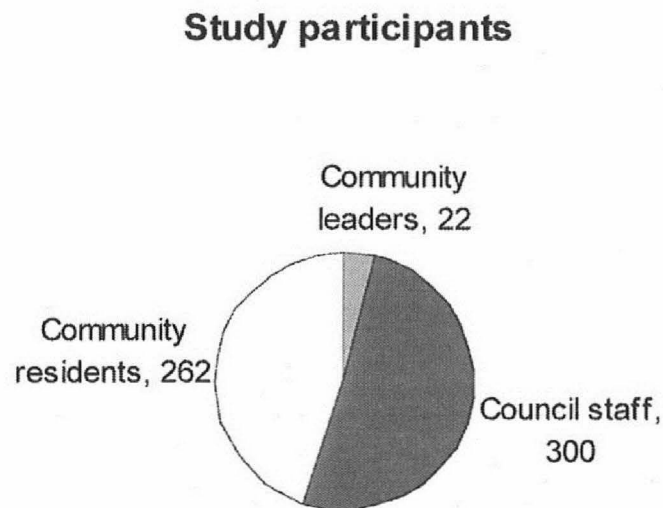
About this study

The total number of participants was 584 that included 262 respondents to the internal survey within the Darebin local council, which represents approximately 33 per cent of the total staff numbers. A total of 300 interview-style external surveys of ten to fifteen minutes duration were conducted among a stratified sample of Darebin community residents. Figure 12.1 summarises the total number of participants in this study.

In addition to the internal and external quantitative surveys, this project also conducted a number of interviews with council employees, community leaders, including religious leaders and spokespersons of relevant NGOs in Darebin, local business owners and general community members. In total, twenty-two individual

interviews of one to two hours were conducted according to four levels of stratification: demographics, connection to Muslim communities, gender and geographic location. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an in-depth qualitative perspective on the views and attitudes of community and business leaders, vis-à-vis multiculturalism, Islam and Muslim Australian communities. This analysis was aimed at uncovering social attitudes that facilitate or reduce social exclusion and factors that can engender racially motivated discrimination. Finally, the existing policy framework and project initiatives of Darebin City Council in relation to diversity were analysed and assessed in light of the empirical findings.³²

Figure 12.1: Summary of the total number of study participants.



Note: N = 584, Community leaders (n= 22), Community Respondents (n= 300), Council Staff (n= 262)

Key Research Findings

The findings highlight in a consistent manner certain views held about the meaning of key concepts such as ‘multiculturalism’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘exclusion’. The following section provides a succinct thematic summary of the more significant findings.

Perceptions of multiculturalism

The research findings show that a majority (70 to 80 per cent) of council employees and Darebin community members have positive views towards multiculturalism and believe that cultural diversity enriches the community as a whole. There is nevertheless a small but

noticeable group in the community (5 to 15 per cent) who hold negative and/or cynical views about multiculturalism. Between these extremes there is disagreement about what multiculturalism means in practice and which services and projects should be funded under a multicultural framework. The responses have been separated into two groups presented in the following tables. Table 12.1 presents the responses of community members and staff and includes mostly positive associated meanings for multiculturalism.

Table 12.1: Perceptions of multiculturalism among respondents.

Multiculturalism means ...	Community		
	respondents	Staff	(Difference)
a) A fair go for everyone regardless of country of birth	83.2	86.2	-3
b) Freedom for communities to celebrate their customs and traditions	77.1	78.9	-1.8
c) Assistance to migrants to help them achieve equality with Australian-born citizens	68	53.3	14.7
d) A way of celebrating one's heritage	74.7	73.2	1.5
Total (N)	(300)	(262)	

A majority of staff (80 to 90 per cent across the various questions) indicated that for them, multiculturalism meant 'a fair go regardless of the country of birth' and/or 'freedom for communities to celebrate their customs and traditions'. The results from the community survey were generally comparable to the staff results except for the higher scores given by the community (68 per cent) to the perception that multiculturalism can also mean 'assistance to migrants to help them achieve equality with Australian-born citizens'. Nearly 70 per cent of staff and community respondents view multiculturalism as a means to celebrate the heritage of all of the different groups living in the City of Darebin. The perception that multiculturalism is under threat in Australia is challenged by responses to more negative perceptions. Table 12.2 reports the answers of the respondents to the following options.

The combined results for these options were more variable. In response to these (more negative) connotations of multiculturalism,

the community respondents scored higher than the Staff respondents for all of the statements offered, sometimes significantly. Approximately 10 per cent of the community respondents viewed multiculturalism as a potential threat to the Australian way of life, compared to only 5.3 per cent of staff. A further 5 per cent of community respondents stated that multiculturalism is an outdated policy that is no longer required, compared with less than 1 per cent of staff.

Table 12.2: Negative perceptions of multiculturalism among respondents.

Multiculturalism is ...	Community		
	respondents	Staff	(Difference)
a) A political strategy to win the ethnic vote	14.5	6.5	8
b) A policy that is threatening to the Australian way of life	10.1	5.3	5.2
c) A waste of money	2.7	1.2	1.5
d) An outdated policy which is not required anymore	5.4	0.8	4.6
e) Other	6.7	5.7	1
f) Can't say, unsure	0	0.4	-0.4
Total (N)	(300)	(262)	

Thus while not under direct threat, multiculturalism still attracts doubters within Darebin albeit from a minority among the area's residents. Even where the majority supports multiculturalism in principle, there remains disagreement over what multiculturalism means in practice and which policy initiatives and programs should be supported and funded under a multicultural framework. Negative attitudes towards cultural diversity suggest a need for continued education on these issues. Additionally, disagreement about the desirability, meaning and practicalities of multiculturalism suggests that there is an ongoing need for community consultation on diversity management in Darebin.

Impact of multiculturalism

The next module of questions was included to examine how respondents felt about the economic and political impact of multiculturalism in Australia. The responses are presented in table 12.3.

Table 12.3: Attitudes towards the economic and political impact of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism ...	Community		
	respondents	Staff	(Difference)
a) Helps to link migrants to mainstream community	79.4	69.9	9.5
b) Turned Australia into a cosmopolitan country	78.0	57.3	20.7
c) Gives Australia a competitive edge in international markets	58.4	37.0	21.4
d) Funds specialised services to migrants	56.3	35.4	20.9
e) Encourages divisions between ethnic groups and mainstream	14.3	8.5	5.8
f) Encourages ethnic minority groups to disregard Australian customs as irrelevant	12.0	6.9	5.1
g) Excludes Anglo-Australians by favouring only migrants	6.3	6.1	0.2
h) Discourages ethnic minority groups from integrating into Australian society	10.8	4.5	6.3
i) Other	1.7	4.1	-2.4
j) Can't say/unsure	0	9.3	-9.3
Total (N)	(300)	(262)	

Three-quarters of community respondents perceived multicultural policies as a way to link migrants to the mainstream community (75.7 per cent). Similar support was shown (74.3 per cent) for the belief that multiculturalism, as a policy, had helped to turn Australia into a cosmopolitan country from the 1970s onwards. These ideals are linked with the original objectives of multiculturalism, as it was enacted in Australia. By contrast, more than 10 per cent of respondents agreed with what could reasonably be termed 'negative' statements regarding multiculturalism. For example, more than 13 per cent stated that it encourages divisions between ethnic groups and almost 12 per cent of respondents in Darebin felt that multicultural policies had effectively encouraged ethnic minority groups to disregard Australian customs.

Attitudes towards Muslim Australians

The majority of the respondents felt empathy towards Australian Muslim communities and acknowledge that they have been targeted because of recent international events. There is nevertheless evidence of misperceptions, stereotypes and some negative views of Muslims within the community. These views are directly related to the international security context in the post-9/11 period and may translate into both direct and indirect forms of discrimination.

In the post-9/11 period, some Muslim Australians within the local community reported incidents of discrimination—including verbal harassment and avoidance and in some cases, discrimination and physical attacks. There is a feeling among members of the Muslim community that they have been deliberately singled out and targeted by the Australian Government and that they are viewed with suspicion by mainstream society and media. The incidents of harassment and discrimination reflect the survey findings and were described at length in follow up individual interviews held with Muslim leaders of the local community.

Table 12.4 reports where respondents obtained their general knowledge of Muslims from. They were presented with a range of responses from the statement, 'I don't know anything at all' about Muslims, to statements that indicated that they had learned about Islam from family and friends.

Table 12.4: Knowledge of Muslim Australians.

General knowledge of Muslims comes from ...	Community		
	respondents	Staff	(Difference)
a) I don't know anything at all	0	2.7	-2.7
b) My family or extended family	15.0	8.4	6.6
c) Friends	43.0	27.4	15.6
d) Books I read	38.3	31.4	6.9
e) My own life experiences	54.7	44.7	10
f) Observing people in the neighbourhood	43.7	55.3	-11.6
g) The media (TV, Press, Radio)	71.3	79.2	-7.9
h) Other	17.0	10.6	6.4
Total (N)	(300)	(262)	

Only 2.7 per cent of the staff respondents and no community respondents stated that they had no knowledge about Muslims. More than 70 per cent of the community respondents and 80 per cent of the staff respondents stated that their knowledge of Muslims came primarily from the media. This explains why the media is such a concern to Australian Muslim leaders promoting a peaceful image of Muslim groups in Australian society.

Perceptions of local government

There is general support for councils as the appropriate level of government to foster intercultural harmony. However, concerns were expressed that this emphasis should not translate into a loss of overarching support from State and Federal levels of Government towards the same goal.

Residents and council employees were generally enthusiastic about existing diversity initiatives undertaken by the local council such as street parties, information sessions, and interpreting and translating services. However a number of community respondents were unaware of council activities and/or had the perception that multicultural services are 'only for migrants'. The local council's strategic approach to diversity provides a meaningful and productive framework through which to interpret and renew multicultural policies. While previous and existing approaches, collaborations and projects such as street carnivals and intercultural meetings were praised by council staff and community members alike, there remains a need to target services specifically to encourage intercultural harmony in the post-9/11 social environment. There is also the ongoing need to counter the perception that multicultural policies are 'only for migrants' and to generate awareness of the benefits of diversity for the community as a whole.

Support for local government notwithstanding, there is a significant number of residents who were either unaware of or uninterested in participating in local government activities and initiatives. This situation reflected broader trends identified within relevant literature and presents a challenge for local governments in terms of maintaining a high level of community engagement in diversity management. Those more informed about local government initiatives articulated views and suggestions about ways in which approaches to diversity could be improved and ways in which the

conceptual framework for multiculturalism could be revisited. This suggests that there are well-developed resources within the community to inform and strengthen local strategies. One of the challenges for local government, both in Darebin and the general community more broadly, is to develop and promote its approach to cultural diversity while addressing the perception that multiculturalism unfairly favours ethnic minorities and discriminates *against* mainstream majority groups. The challenge, in other words, is to represent an inclusive concept of diversity and multiculturalism that has positive outcomes for both cultural and religious minorities *and* mainstream groups. The problem here is that many initiatives undertaken by local councils such as cultural events and information sessions are promoted as targeting 'ethnic, migrant' groups and thus are seen by other members of the community as being exclusionary. One way of avoiding this problem is by broadening the concept of 'culture' ethnicity' to include all in particular those from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds for whom 'culture' became synonymous with non-English speaking background migrants.

Conclusion

The specific focus of the study reported in this chapter was on the identification of the various socio-cultural factors that have culminated in an increase of discriminatory and/or racist attitudes towards Muslim minorities in Australia in the aftermath of terrorist events such as 9/11 and the Bali bombings. Much of the previous research in the area of intercultural relations focuses either on the social issues facilitating the emergence of racial and/or religious stereotyping in a given society,³³ or on the response of national governments to social problems associated with immigration, official discrimination and/or racism.³⁴ While addressing important, independent issues, these studies tended to ignore the role of local government initiatives in addressing social exclusion in multicultural society. Local councils manage multicultural spaces and as such have a primary role to play in ensuring minority groups are represented, empowered and included in key decisions affecting their social experiences and daily lives. Hence this project sought to fill this gap by focusing on perceptions towards multiculturalism as a policy, Muslim Australians as citizens and local governments as agents of social change.

The findings of this study revealed a range of often complex views on multiculturalism within the community. Many people indicated that they prefer to use terms such as 'cultural diversity' because they believe that multiculturalism conjures too many negative ideas. Although most responded that multicultural policies give everyone a 'fair go', there are signs that a significant segment of the population still believes it to be only applicable to migrant groups. Despite these negative views, most interviewees were unable to envisage an adequate policy to replace multiculturalism. While they have serious misgivings about what it has come to represent, they see multiculturalism as the best available option. This reflects the general acceptance that centralised services should be diversified to serve the needs of different groups. The key questions with which this paper began can now be addressed in terms of the existing literature as well as the primary data analysis.

The first question related to whether multiculturalism, as a policy, is losing credibility in contemporary Australia. While not under direct threat, multiculturalism has been challenged in recent times and does not maintain universal credibility. This is not to deny the strong level of support that also exists for multiculturalism. However this research has shown that if multiculturalism is to continue to provide a meaningful and workable framework for managing cultural diversity in Australia then criticisms and negative perceptions must be addressed in new ways by policy makers.

Multiculturalism has become the focus of strong media criticisms with some commentators suggesting that a connection exists between multicultural tolerance and the radicalisation of Muslim minorities in ways that present a threat to Australian society.³⁵ Multicultural policies have also been criticised from a very different perspective. For some, current governmental rhetoric and policy fails to live up to the spirit in which the concept of multiculturalism was first envisaged. For these commentators official multicultural policy works in practice to favour certain approved forms of culture and behaviour and to present others as inappropriate and unacceptable. The effect, they argue, is to indirectly condone discrimination against Muslim minorities.

Between these two extremes, support for multiculturalism remains tempered by a continued expectation that migrant groups should integrate into mainstream society. In fact, there is

disagreement about how far the government can and should dictate whether certain practices are acceptable or not. As this study showed, the vast majority (70 to 80 per cent) of council employees and community members have positive views of multiculturalism and believe that cultural diversity enriches the community as a whole. There is nevertheless a small but sizeable group in the community (between 5 to 15 per cent) who hold cynical views about multiculturalism. Thus while not under direct threat, multiculturalism remains controversial. Even where the majority supports multiculturalism in principle, there remains disagreement over what multiculturalism means in practice and which policy initiatives and programs should be supported and funded under a multicultural framework. Negative attitudes towards cultural diversity suggest a need for continued education and community consultation on diversity management.

The second research question related to the perception that the level of discrimination against Muslim communities in Australia has increased in response to recent international events. The literature on this matter supports the view that Muslim Australians have experienced an increase in levels of discrimination in response to specific terrorist attacks and the 'war on terror'.³⁶ Media and policy views which are directly or indirectly hostile to Muslim minorities have the potential to influence a population characterised by heightened anxieties and feelings of insecurity in the context of the current international security environment.

It is important to note that discrimination may be experienced in direct or indirect ways or as some scholars put it 'new racism'.³⁷ More traditional forms of racism were openly confrontational and easily quantifiable. Likewise, forms of social exclusion traditionally recognised were determined by poverty indexes. In the current context racism and discrimination have become socially unacceptable and people are generally more likely to hide or be unconscious of their racist or discriminatory behaviour. Newer forms of exclusion and racism may well take the form of avoidance tactics rather than overtly hostile behaviour, or may target property (mosques for example) rather than people. These types of actions are more difficult to detect and therefore more difficult to control.

The majority of the respondents in this study have expressed empathy towards Australian Muslim communities and acknowledge

that they have been targeted because of recent international events. There is nevertheless evidence of misperceptions, stereotypes and some negative views of Muslims within the wider community. These negative views are directly related to the international security context in the post-9/11 period and may translate to both direct and indirect forms of discrimination. There is a feeling among Muslims in the community that they have been singled out and targeted by the Australian Government and that they are viewed with suspicion by mainstream society.

The third question focused on whether local governments are the optimal and appropriate vehicles through which issues of multicultural spaces and intercultural relations are addressed. Overall, current theorising in the literature supports this view as there is strong evidence that the Australia Government has steadily shifted the fiscal burden for managing such issues to state and local governments. Indeed, the Federal Government has adopted the basic business principles related to the customisation of services to cater for the diversified groups in the community. Government initiatives are nevertheless not enough to drive genuine social change. As this paper shows, the concept of local governance is emerging as an increasingly optimal conduit for achieving improved intercultural relations and social inclusion. Indeed, councils can play a leading role in promoting the social inclusion agenda in Australia as they are ideally placed to work on grass-roots initiatives aimed at engendering better overall cross-cultural understanding.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based on a larger Australian Research Council Discovery project on intercultural relations and local governance. For a comprehensive review of this project, see the research monograph Fethi Mansouri, S Kenny and C Strong, 'Promoting intercultural understanding in Australia: an evaluation of local government initiative in Victoria', Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University, Melbourne, 2007. The author would like to express thanks to Dr Juliet Clark for her editorial support and helpful comments in finalising this chapter.
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- 9 See also: Samina Yasmeen, 'Islam and the West: some reflections', in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Samina Yasmeen (eds), *Islam and the West: reflections from Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 165–6; Bassam Tibi, 'Muslim migrants in Europe: between Euro-Islam and ghettoisation', in Nezar Al-Sayyad and Manuel Castells (eds), *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, culture, and citizenship in the age of globalisation*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, 2002, pp. 41–2; MA Muqtedar Khan, *American Muslims: bridging faith and freedom*, Amana Publications, Beltsville, MD, 2002, pp. 8–14; Mahmoud Monshipouri and Reza Motameini, 'Globalisation, sacred beliefs and defiance: is human rights discourse relevant in the Muslim world?', *Journal of church and state*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2000, p. 709.
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