

Fethi Mansouri, "Citizenship, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Australia" in *Islam and the West. Reflections from Australia* (eds. Shahram Akbarzadeh & Samina Yasmeen; Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005) 149-164

Mansouri begins by providing examples of discrimination towards Muslims in the White Australia period (I would add that such discrimination was not limited to Muslims nor aimed at Muslims *per se*).

### **Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity and National Identity**

Mansouri cites Hall and Maharaj's contention that multiculturalism and racism are not opposite ends of a pole but are both increasing simultaneously. For, despite the rhetoric of equality and equal opportunity (a 'difference-blind' model of multiculturalism), the majority of the Australian public does not really support differential treatment of minority groups, the characteristic of democratic multiculturalism.

Mansouri claims that while the Australian Government's multiculturalism acknowledges the reality of cultural diversity, it "asserts the dominance and power of an Anglo-Celtic Australian core at the heart of the nation, its institutions of power and the Australian identity" (151). He contends that it was very difficult for the non-Anglo-Celtic Australian to truly feel a sense of belonging in Howard's Australia.

### **Muslim Asylum Seekers and the Politics of National Security**

Mansouri observes that national security can be used to legitimate racial and religious misrepresentations against minority groups with impunity, commenting:

The national paranoia that followed national security issues such as the 'war on terror' and 'border protection' resulted in a discourse of demonisation, misrepresentation, mistrust and exclusion aimed at Australians of Muslim and Arab backgrounds (154).

Mansouri recalls the "Tampa" and "children overboard" incidents, involving "the government as the representatives of the Australian nation clearly defining an Australian national identity against an Other that was Muslim and primarily Middle Eastern" (154-155). He cites other examples illustrating how "the government appeared quite willing to portray asylum seekers as an irresponsible and aberrant group, hostile to Australian standards of decency and parental responsibility, with little regard for their children's well-being or safety" (155). Australia, with its TPV (temporary protection visa) became "the only country in the world to provide 'temporary' sanctuary to those who had been recognized as genuine refugees under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention" (155).

Following September 11, government ministers insinuated that some asylum seekers might be linked to global terror networks. Mansouri comments,

In excluding Muslim and Middle Eastern asylum seekers from the Australian nation, the government established, or built upon, a discourse of Australian nationalism that largely excludes Muslim- and Arab-Australians (156).

### **The Problematic Status of Islam in the West**

Mansouri begins this section by describing stereotypes of Muslims. He regards the association of Islam with "extremism, intolerance and violence", following Western discourse on events such as the Iranian revolution of 1979, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and various terrorist acts, as in keeping with a long-

standing anti-Arab racism in the West. He follows Edward Said in rebutting the treatment of Islam as a monolithic entity, commenting:

Thus well before September 11, there existed in the Western imagination an acceptance of an Islamic totality and its association with violence, oppression and terror (160).

### **Conclusion**

Mansouri protests at the failure to recognize the enormous diversity among Australian Muslims. He describes a political and social climate in which "immigrant Muslims in Australia, because of their cultural difference and pronounced visibility in a predominately secular society, have been constructed both as a threat to social homogeneity and increasingly as a potential risk to national security in the age of the 'war on terror'" (161).