

New book on Muslims in the West aims to shift race relations debate

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A new book, looking at Muslims in the West and the challenges they face in achieving belonging hopes to encourage new thinking and a deeper understanding within Australia and elsewhere of the importance of positive intercultural relations.

"Current discussions about Muslim migrants in the west seem to always start and end with an emphasis on negative and often controversial attitudes," said the book's editor Deakin University's Chair in Migration and Intercultural Studies, Professor Fethi Mansouri. The book was co-edited with Dr Vince Marrotta.

"Our book, offers not only rigorous accounts of current difficulties, but also demonstrates the different experiences, socially, economically and politically of Muslims in the West and their level of belonging and exclusion."

Professor Mansouri, who is also the Director of the University's Strategic Research Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation, said much of the current discussion surrounding Muslim [Australians](#) was presented as a threat to national security or social harmony.

"These discussions are often epitomised by the boat people 'crisis', the 'Lebanese gang problem' and the 'global war on terror,'" he said.

"One of book's chapters co-authored by Hadi Sohrabi and Karen Farquharson shows how coverage by Australian newspapers continues to

support the argument that Muslims are threatening.

"Their analysis not only shows how coverage presents Islam as fundamentalist, barbaric and violent but by doing so alienates Australian [Muslims](#) and undermines their ability and desire to be socially connected because they are constantly exposed to stories which depict them as incompatible with so-called Western values and beliefs. "

Professor Mansouri said Andrew Jakubowicz, Jock Collins and Wafa Chafic in their chapter highlight the issue with young Muslim people who identify as Australian yet have this sense of identity and belonging diminished by their feelings of marginalisation, displacement and discrimination.

"Similarly, the chapter by Helena Onnudottir, Adam Possamai and Bryan Turner highlights and explains how indigenous populations in Australia and New Zealand have converted to Islam," Professor Mansouri said.

"They argue that the experience of social, political and economic exclusion provides the conditions for these groups to find common ground which was previously absent.

"For indigenous groups, Islamic values and beliefs may provide a psychological outlet for the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves in modern Western societies."

Professor Mansouri said the book presented chapters where bridge building had occurred successfully.

"The chapter I co-authored with Dr Michele Lobo from Deakin's CCG provides an insight into the diverse meanings of the 'Australian way of life'," he said.

"We show that good citizens are not leaders who support the standard Australian way of life but those who speak and act unobtrusively to deal with fundamental injustices in society.

"These leaders, both Muslim and non-Muslim are bridge builders who by respecting differences and embracing openness and the unfamiliar, reconstitute the Australian way of life.

"They enable us to imagine a world where we can begin to see each other as not only caring co-citizens but also as fellow human beings."

More information: Muslims in the West and the Challenges of Belonging is published by Melbourne University Press.

Provided by Deakin University

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