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Australian Muslim citizens: Questions of inclusion and exclusion, 2006 –2020

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Australian Muslim Citizens
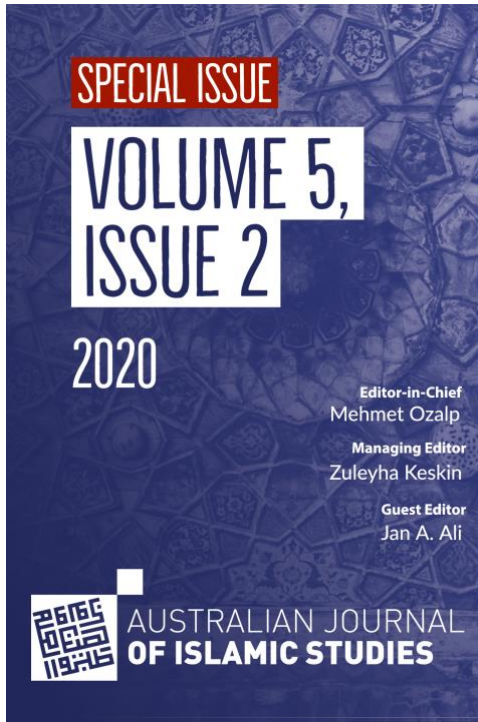## Questions of Inclusion and Exclusion, 2006–2020

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AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM CITIZENS: QUESTIONS OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION, 2006–2020

Nahid Kabir[*]

Abstract: Muslims have a long history in Australia. In 2016, Muslims formed 2.6 per cent of the total Australian population. In this article, I discuss Australian Muslims' citizenship in two time periods: 2006–2018 and 2020. In the first period, I examine Australian Muslims' identity and sense of belonging, and whether their race or culture impact their Australian citizenship. I also discuss the political rhetoric concerning Australian Muslims. For the second period, 2020, I examine Australian Muslims' placement as returned travellers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I conclude, from 2006 to 2018, Islamophobia was rampant in "othering" many Australian Muslims and, in 2020, the Australian government has adopted a policy of inclusion by repatriating its citizens (Muslims and non-Muslims), but with the COVID-19 crisis, a new dimension of discrimination has been added to ethnic minorities – in this case, Bangladeshi Australians who are mostly Muslims. They are now looked upon as the "other quarantined" or "detained Australian citizens."

Keywords: *Australian*, *Muslims*, *citizenship*, *culture*, *politics*, *COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

Muslims in Australia are a diverse group of people. They come from many nations such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Turkey and Pakistan. They are heterogeneous in language, colour and ethnic culture. The only element they have in common is their religion. Although religion and culture are different aspects of ethnicity, Muslims arguably share an Islamic culture, which can sometimes be identified by their names, dress code, and eating and drinking habits. This makes them a distinct non-Christian cultural group and separates them from the mainstream Anglo-Australian Christian population. The Muslim population increased from 0.04 per cent of the Australian population in 1947 to 2.6 per cent in 2016.[1]

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2016 Census Data Reveals 'No Religion' is Rising Fast," media release, June 27, 2017, https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/ 7E65A144540551D7CA2581 48000E2B85.

Muslims, like other immigrants, migrated to Australia for better economic opportunities, while Australia always needed labour for economic development. In 1967, the Australian government signed an immigration agreement with the Turkish government and in 1968, a large group of Turkish immigrants arrived. Most of them settled in Melbourne and worked for car companies. In the 1970s after the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon, many Lebanese Muslims migrated to Australia and settled in Sydney. After 1980, more Muslims began to migrate to Australia.[2] In 1987, I migrated from Bangladesh with my husband and son. In 1990, we proudly became Australian citizens (see Figure 1).

Citizenship involves resilience and active participation in a country's democratic system, exercising voting rights and contributing to the development of the country. Citizenship engages migrants' connectedness, identity and sense of belonging to their host country; in this context, Australia. Research has shown that Australia-born children may feel an identity or sense of belonging as Australians or Australian citizens. Overseas-born Australian citizens may need more time to develop this sense of connectedness because they identify with a diaspora.[3]

Brubaker observed a diaspora is an immigrant population that lives as a minority and envisions a real and imagined homeland by maintaining a collective memory and myth about their birthplace.[4] But Muslim youth are able to manoeuvre between their ethnic/religious culture and mainstream Australian culture using their bicultural skills.[5] That is, they retain their ethnic culture (language and traditional culture) and Islamic culture (religion) while also adopting Western culture (English language, music and sports). Yet some Muslims (including the Australian-born) find the idea of belonging to Australia challenging. They find that their culture, religion or race sometimes mark them as the "other."

In this article, I first discuss my research methodology. Second, I will discuss the literature on citizenship, Islamophobia and racialisation of culture. Third, I will examine Australian politicians' politics of fear, and their inclusion and exclusion rhetoric. Fourth, I will examine how my interview participants described their identity and sense of belonging and citizenship in 2006 and 2007. Fifth, I will discuss the issue of Australian citizenship during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Finally, I conclude, in the pre-COVID-19 period, some Muslims were treated as the "other" because of their Islamic culture and visibility, but during the COVID-19 period, they have been treated different because of their ethnicity.

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[2]   Nahid Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[3]   Fethi Mansouri and Steve Francis, "Migrant Youth, Cultural Adaptation and Social Policy," in *Youth Identity and Migration: Culture, Values and Social Connectedness*, ed. Fethi Mansouri (Melbourne: Common Ground Publishers, 2009).

[4]   Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no 1 (2006); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[5]   Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on interviews with two groups of Muslim Australians. The first group was 10 Muslim youths, Australia- and overseas-born, aged 15–17 years, whom I interviewed in Sydney and Perth in 2006 and 2007. These interviews were part of my larger project on Australian Muslim youth. The second group were seven adults aged 30 to 65 years. Six adults were interviewed in Melbourne in 2020 and another adult was interviewed in Brisbane. The method for each set of interviews was different. In 2006 and 2007, with the Muslim youths, I tape-recorded the interviews. In 2020, the interviews with the adults were conducted over the phone during a COVID-19 quarantine period and the method was note-taking.

I have used multiple methods for this qualitative research, including interviews, autoethnography and visual sociology. My research methodology is qualitative based on the grounded theory. For my analysis of the interviews, I also employed the grounded theory.[6] Grounded theory is an objective approach. It is a type of qualitative method that allows the data to speak. In other words, the participants speak on issues that are important to them. Researchers then construct their arguments without relying on any preconceived notions.

My second research method is autoethnography. Autoethnography is a useful qualitative research method that is used to analyse people's lives and experiences. It reveals the researchers' multiple layers of consciousness "connecting the personal to the cultural." Autoethnography can include research about personal experiences parallel to the participants' experiences while conducting specific research, and in this context, it was the question of inclusion and exclusion during a COVID-19 quarantine.[7]

My third research method was visual sociology or critical visual. Sociologists aim to engage with images through active intellectual looking and thinking. Harper observed the context of certain arguments can be captured through images.[8] Bohnsack observed, "To speak of an understanding through pictures means that our world, our social reality, is not only represented by, but also constituted or produced by pictures and images."[9] Images make a lasting impression. For better understanding of my autoethnography and grounded theory, I have included nine images in this article.

My final research method was investigation of primary sources, such as newspapers and official documents/notices provided to incoming Australian citizens by the Border Protection Force and the Australian Government Department of Health and Human Services during the COVID-19 crisis.

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[6]   Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage, 2006).

[7]   Mariza Mendes, "Autoethnography as Research Method: Advantages, Limitations and Criticisms," *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal* 15, no. 2 (2013), http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script =sci_arttext&pid=S0123-46412013000200010.

[8]   Douglas Harper, "What's New Visually?" in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research,* ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

[9]   Ralf Bohnsack, "The Interpretation of Pictures and the Documentary Method," *Forum Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 3 (2008), accessed May 12, 2020, http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/ article/view/1171/2591.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on identity and belonging indicates that identity formation depends on several factors, such as place of birth, ancestry, place of residence, length of residence, upbringing and education, name, accent, physical appearance, dress and commitment to place. Identity can also be a state of mind. Integration into the wider society, and acceptance and recognition, can make citizens of diverse ethnic backgrounds feel connected to their host country. Identity can be expressed as single, dual or multiple. Identity is always flexible and is always in a process of forming. It can be collective or group identity, in-group or out-group identity, or, in times of crisis, it can crystallise into one identity.[10] For example, during the COVID-19 crisis, many Bangladeshi Australians were keen to return to their host country. At that time, their identity crystallised into an Australian identity. Research has also found that negative news, such as reports of Islamophobia, can impact Australian Muslims' identity.[11]

Atie, Dunn and Ozalp observed the 1987 Australian government multicultural policy statement emphasised maintaining cultural diversity and freedom from discrimination. Yet, Islamophobia in Australia is well-documented. Muslims experience prejudice across all settings of life including workplaces.[12]

Dunn, Klocker and Salabay observed that anti-Islamic racism or Islamophobia (fear of Islam) should be considered a process of racialisation that is not based on biological grounds but on religion, culture and appearance.[13] For example, Muslim women wearing a *hijab* (headscarf) or *abaya* (full-length outer garment) are vilified because they are visibly different. Old racism was based on racial superiority while new racism is based on cultural superiority; both are practices of exclusion of people who do not fit in mainstream Australian society. Dunn, Klocker and Salabay observed, after every Islamic terrorist act overseas, *hijab*-wearing Muslim women in Australia were verbally or physically assaulted.[14] Anti-Muslim media reports and political rhetoric further construct Muslims as aliens or the 'other.' This is used to justify mainstream Australians' opposition to mosque building and the Australian government's very restrictive asylum seeker policy. Yet Muslim-ness is perceived even in people who may not be Muslims.[15] For example, a Hindu woman wearing a *dupatta* (a shawl over her head) or a Sikh wearing a turban may be subjected to racism because they look like Muslims.

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[10] Andrew Garrod and Robert Kilkenny, *Growing Up Muslim: Muslim College Students in America Tell Their Life Stories* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Nahid Afrose Kabir, "Young Muslims' Identity in Australia and the US: The Focus on the Muslim Question," in *Islam in the West: Perceptions and Reactions*, ed. Aba W. Ata and Jan Ali (Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[11] Nahid Afrose Kabir, "Can Islamophobia in the Media Serve Islamic State Propaganda? The Australian Case, 2014-2015," in *Islamophobia and Radicalization: Breeding Intolerance and Violence,* ed. Derya Iner and John L. Esposito (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

[12] Rosalie Atie, Kevin Dunn, and Mehmet Ozalp, "Religiosity, Attitude on Diversity and Belonging among Ordinary Australian Muslims," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2007): 3.

[13] Kevin M. Dunn, Natascha Klocker and Tanya Salabay, "Contemporary Racism and Islamophobia in Australia: Racialising Religion," *Ethnicities* 7, no. 4 (2007).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 564, 568.

In the context of the Australian labour market, Kabir and Evans found, although Muslims' skill levels were almost equal to those of mainstream Australians, Muslims' unemployment was three times higher than for majority Anglo-Australians and this remained consistent for three decades, 1986 to 1996.[16] In 2018, Hassan observed that discrimination in the labour market is continuing. Muslims are perceived as culturally different because of their Muslim-sounding names or different appearance.[17]

The literature on citizenship emphasises the membership status of citizens. The citizens of a country have rights, duties and obligations that imply equality, justice and autonomy.[18] Political philosopher Hegel stressed the need for recognition of the concept of citizenship. Holding the status of citizen implies inclusion in the wider community, as well as individual autonomy. This autonomy reflects the rights of the citizen and concept of human dignity.[19] In the Australian context, Yule observed that citizens should have the rights to life, liberty, justice, a fair trial, recognition and protection by law. Socioeconomically, they all should have the rights to work, obtain a fair wage and gain an education, to move freely in the community and enjoy the benefits of the society's progress.[20] But in the context of Australian Muslims' citizenship, Peucker observed that Muslims are stigmatised in media discourse. They are also excluded by public discourse. This leads to the collective denial of Muslims' "substantive citizenship and their recognition as equal members of society and the political community."[21]

The Politics of Fear

Research shows that Australian politicians' perception of the "Muslim Other" and the "us" versus "them" debate existed before the 11 September 2001 Twin Towers terrorist attacks in New York, United States.[22] Since the 1990s, Lebanese Australians in Sydney have been labelled as criminals because of a few incidents involving some youths, the police and mainstream society. In November 1998, some youths of Lebanese heritage fired guns at a police station. Immediately, New South Wales Premier Bob Carr and the Police Commissioner linked the incident to a Lebanese gang of drug dealers instead of criticising the incident as "un-Australian." By politicising this criminal act and labelling Lebanese people as member of criminal gangs, Premier Carr was re-elected in 1999.[23]

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[16]   Nahid Kabir and Raymond Evans, "Muslims and the Australian Labour Market, 1980–2001," *Immigrants and Minorities* 21, no. 3 (2002): 74.

[17]   Riaz Hassan, *Australian Muslims: The Challenge of Islamophobia and Social Distance* (Adelaide, South Australia: University of South Australia, 2018), 10, accessed August 29, 2020, https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/4f85e84d01014997a99bb4f89ba32488/australian-muslims-final-report-web-nov-26.pdf.

[18]   Keith Faulks, *Citizenship* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 13.

[19]   Hegel, cited in ibid., 4.

[20]   Valerie Yule, "Australian Citizenship and Human Rights," *ISAA Review* 7, no. 2 (2008).

[21]   Mario Peucker, *Muslim Citizenship in Liberal Democracies: Civic and Political Participation in the West* (London: Macmillan, 2016), 238.

[22]   Zouhir Gabsi, "Towards Demystifying Islamophobia: A Muslim's Perspective," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 3 (2019).

[23]   Kabir, *Muslims in Australia.*

In 2000, Australian-born Bilal Skaf, who has a Lebanese heritage, along with 14 Lebanese-Australian men committed three gang rapes on young Anglo-Australian women. Bilal Skaf has been convicted and is serving a 31-year prison sentence. These horrendous crimes were criticised by Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. But Muslim Australians and particularly the Lebanese community bore the brunt of being labelled the "other." Lebanese Australians were racially profiled as of "Middle Eastern appearance." They were stigmatised as criminals, drug dealers, gang rapists and, after the Twin Towers terrorist attacks in America, as "terrorists."[24]

On 27 August 2001, the Norwegian ship *MV Tampa* rescued 438 mostly Afghan refugees from a sinking Indonesian boat. These Muslim refugees were fleeing the volatile situation in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but the political rhetoric against asylum seekers became that they were "illegal queue jumpers."[25] Later, on 28 October 2001, in his Federal election policy speech, Australian Liberal Prime Minister John Howard stated, "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come."[26] Thus, he made it clear who would be included and excluded from Australia.

In February 2006, Federal Treasurer Peter Costello commented that Muslims who want to live under Islamic *Sharia* law had no place in Australia.[27] In September 2006, Australian Prime Minister John Howard commented on talkback radio that "a small section of the Islamic population" was "very resistant to integration" because they failed to learn English quickly enough and did not accept Australian values such as gender equality. Therefore, the Howard government proposed a four-year waiting period for migrants to become citizens, together with a new citizenship test requiring knowledge of Australian values and history as well as the English language.[28]

On 1 October 2007, the Australian federal government introduced a test for people applying for Australian citizenship by naturalisation. The aim of the test was to find out the applicants' knowledge of English and understanding of Australian values, history, and national and Indigenous symbols.[29] It generated a lot of controversy, with many questioning how a test can induce Australian values among new immigrants.

In 2017, One Nation leader Senator Pauline Hanson posted a hashtag to social media: #Pray4MuslimBan. This was posted after the terrorist attacks by Muslims in Britain in March

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[24]   Ibid.

[25]   Kehla Lippi, Fiona H. McKay and Hayley J. McKenzie, "Representation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers during the 2013 Federal Elections," *Journalism* (2017): 3, doi: 10.1177/1464884917734079.

[26]   John Howard, "Election Speech" (speech, Canberra, Australia, October 28, 2001), Australian Federal Election Speeches, accessed August 29, 2020, https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/2001-john-howard.

[27]   Karen Barlow, "Aust No Place for Sharia Law: Costello," *ABC News*, February 24, 2006, accessed August 29, 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2006/s1577241.htm.

[28]   Rick Kuhn, "Xenophobic Racism and Class During the Howard Years," *Marxist Interventions* 1 (2009): 66; Nahid Kabir, "What does it mean to be un-Australian: Views of Australian Muslim Students," *People and Place* 15, no. 1 (2007): 62.

[29]   "Citizenship Test Introduced," *SBS Immigration Nation*, October 1, 2007, accessed August 20, 2020, https://www.sbs.com.au/immigrationnation/resources/article/126/citizenship-test-introduced.

2017.[30] One year later, on 17 August 2018, Hanson wore a *burka* in the Senate of the Australian Parliament to criticise Australian immigration policy. By wearing the *burka*, she criticised the policy that allows immigration of Muslims who do not integrate into the Australian way of life and whose religion does not provide gender equality. Hanson also wanted a ban on wearing the *burka*.[31]

Also, in 2016, the Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton commented that the Fraser government, "should not have let Lebanese Muslims into Australia in the 1970s because a small cohort of people had been charged with terrorism-related offences."[32] On the other hand, in 2018, it was reported that Dutton approved the visas of some Europeans who were about to be deported.[33] Australia has always struggled with who stays and who goes. This led to the "White Australia" policy.[34] Yet some Australian politicians want to retain "White Australia" racism when they decide who belongs.

PARTICIPANTS' IDENTITY AND BELONGING, 2006–2007

The Australian Muslim youths aged 15–17 years whom I interviewed defined their identity in various ways – single, dual or multiple – as Australian, Australian-Muslim, Lebanese Australian, Bangladeshi-Australian Muslim and so on. They identified some factors that reflected their Australian values, such as "a fair go," tolerance, acceptance and citizenship. One participant, Mehnaz (female, Bangladeshi origin), said, "Giving everyone a fair go, is very much Australian but it is something that is universally acceptable."[35]

Imran (male, Egyptian origin) said, "Well, growing up in Australia for so long, it's something you adapt to. You become Australian as who you are, yeah you can't help it."[36] Fatima (female, Lebanese-Syrian origin) emphasised tolerance, "'Australian' is accepting everybody's opinions and religions and cultures; it doesn't really matter who you are. You are in the same country. You are all the same citizens."[37] Similarly, Muneer (male, Lebanese

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30   David Sharaz, "'Put a Ban on It': Pauline Hanson calls for Muslim faith to be banned," *SBS News*, March 23, 2017, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/put-a-ban-on-it-pauline-hanson-calls-for-muslim-faith-to-be-banned.

31   Pauline Hanson, "Protect our Australia Way of Life: Senate Speech," media release, September 19, 2018, https://www.senatorhanson.com.au/2018/09/19/protect-our-australian-way-of-life-senate-speech/.

32   Katharine Murphy, "Peter Dutton's 'Lebanese Muslim' Comments will Dismay Security Services, Labor Says," *The Guardian*, November 22, 2016, accessed August 29, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/22/peter-dutton-lebanese-muslim-comments-dismay-security-services-labor.

33   Damien Cave and Isabella Kwai, "In Australia, One Man Can Decide a Migrant's Fate: Did He Abuse that Power?," *New York Times*, September 6, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/world/australia/peter-dutton-au-pair.html.

34   James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

35   Interview, Perth, 2006; Kabir, Nahid. "Are Young Muslims Adopting Australian Values?," *Australian Journal of Education* 52, no. 3 (2008): 229.

36   Interview, Sydney, 2006.

37   Interview, Sydney, 2006.

origin) commented, "We came to Australia because in Australia you can get citizenship, like Muslims and Christian are living in Australia, and – it's a good thing."[38]

Mustapha (male, Egyptian origin) stated, "Well, I know a lot of Australian people, they're very nice people, they'll help out whenever." Aziz (male, Egyptian origin) emphasised tolerance and freedom of speech:

> Well, I think a good Australian [citizen] is someone who stands up for people's rights and people's beliefs and is tolerant and is accepting of other people's cultures and other people's beliefs and isn't afraid to say how they truly feel, and to stand up for what they feel is wrong.[39]

Yet, in my study, some participants were confused, thinking they were born in Australia and some of them had never visited their country of origin, but they were still labelled as having "Middle Eastern appearance" and accused of not integrating or embracing Australian values. For example, Rukaiya (female, Lebanese origin) said: "I'm an Australian. I'm born in Australia. You [the media] should not label me? You want us to integrate but yet you call us Lebanese Muslim of Middle Eastern appearance." Feiz (male, Lebanese origin) was distressed by being treated as the "other" because of the colour of his skin.[40]

In my research, I found many participants were distressed by the media representation of Muslims. For example, Ayesha (female, Jordanian background) said:

> Muslims have been judged because of the media and it has impacted on us in a good way. And there's lot of things that do happen. And once I was on holiday with my family and my father, he likes to buy houses and he fixes them up and sells them and that's what he used to do. And we were on holiday and he was checking out a house, I was with my family. We were outside, a lady, the neighbour, she jumps out of the bush and she starts screaming at us, and she said, "If you buy this house (because my mother's got a scarf on) I am going to burn it down" and she started swearing at us.[41]

Many people expect, in the citizenship context, Australian Muslims would get a "fair go," including multicultural acceptance and equality. But some participants in my study found, because of their Muslim visibility (*hijab*), they were not accepted in mainstream society. Elaine (female, Afghanistani heritage), who wears a *hijab*, commented:

> I am not confident at all, like getting a job, because I have tried everywhere, every single shop for chemist or anything, agencies for applying for a job and all that I hear is just "Sorry." As soon as they see me with scarf, I don't know, maybe I am getting like that, or maybe it is in reality. They just say "No" or "We don't have any position" or "We'll just putting you on waiting list." Even though once I went to a departmental store and I was giving my resume to the manager and asking him if he has any positions and some other worker was with him. He took my resume in a way that was like he didn't want me there and he laughed with other workers and he made fun of me in front of them. I was really embarrassed and angry at them. I didn't want such a thing, like if he didn't have any

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[38]   Interview, Sydney, 2006.
[39]   Interview, Perth, 2006.
[40]   Interview, Sydney, 2007.
[41]   Interview, Sydney, 2006.

position or if he didn't want me, then he could have just said, "Okay, I'll take your resume," but he was laughing and making jokes and looking in a funny way.[42]

Several studies have shown that some Muslim women remain doubly disadvantaged because of their *hijab*. Sometimes, Muslim women wear the *hijab* due to religious obligations or they may choose to wear the *hijab* because of their Muslim identity. Some may also choose to wear the *hijab* because of their family's or community's expectations. But in some public places, shopping malls, restaurants and workplaces in Australia, Britain and America, these women are discriminated against because they are considered the "other."[43]

Similar to my research findings for this article, in his 2017 research, Diallo found similar positive and negative responses from Australian Muslim students on Australian values and citizenship.[44] As one respondent said, Australians' attitudes towards Muslims are good: "My friends say that it's good for people to be able to learn about your culture." Another participant said, "I hadn't had any bad experience. People smile at me." The participants were also aware of the Australian media stereotype of Muslims. One participant said, "There are negative attitudes from the wider community but they are from the mainstream media."[45] Other research on the media representation of Muslims in Australia has found that some media reporting through its headlines and images portrays Muslim news negatively. This can have a negative impact on the identity and feelings of belonging for some Muslims.[46] Therefore, some media representation of Muslims can generate doubt about Australian Muslims' citizenship.

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[42]   Interview, Sydney, 2007.
[43]   Aparna Hebbani and Charise-Rose Wills, "How Muslim Women in Australia Navigate through Media (Mis)representations of Hijab/Burqa," *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012); Nahid Afrose Kabir, "Muslim Women in Australia, Britain and the United States: The Role of 'Othering' and Biculturalism in Identity Formation," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 36. no. 4, (2016).
[44]   Ibrahima Diallo, "Attitudes of Australian Muslims and Australian Wider Society towards Muslim Institutions," *ARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society* 4, no. 1 (2017).
[45]   Ibid., 8.
[46]   Jacqui Ewart, Adrian Cherney and Kristina Murphy, "News Media Coverage of Islam and Muslims in Australia: An Opinion Survey among Australian Muslims," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no 2 (2017).

Figure 1: Author's Australian citizenship ceremony (with her husband and son), Australia, 1990 (photo by author, 1990)
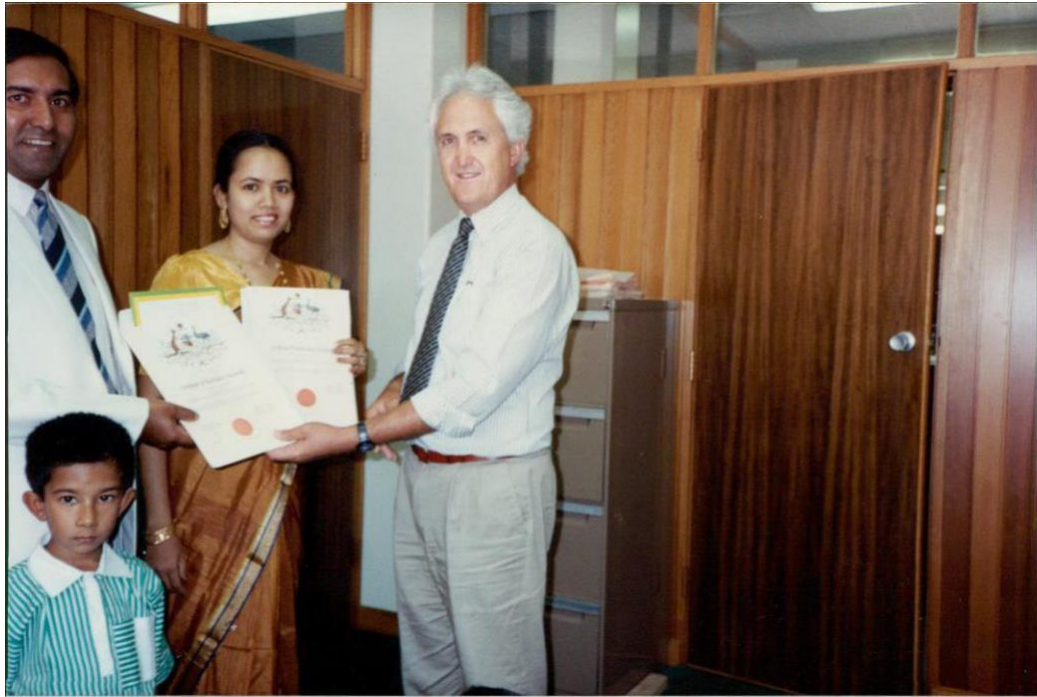

Figure 2: COVID-19 period: Author at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, Bangladesh, returning to Melbourne, Australia (photo by author, 8 May 2020)

Figure 3: Passengers being disinfected during their transit at Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo (photo by author, 9 May 2020)

Figure 4: Passengers during their transit at Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo (photo by author, 9 May 2020)
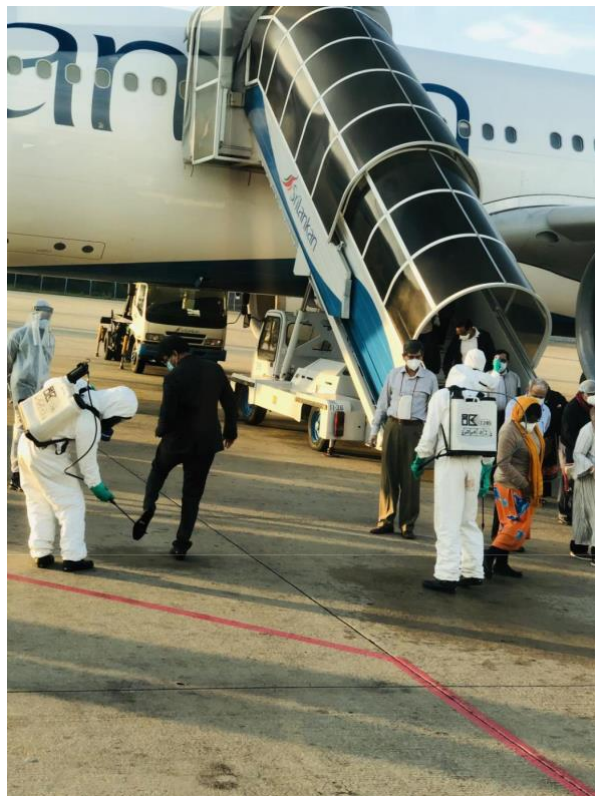
Figure 5: Author's entry to Melbourne Airport, Australia (photo by author, 9 May 2020)

Figure 6: Dinner meal bag with writing "halal" and no pork" (photo by author, 15 May 2020)

Figure 7: One evening dinner served in a brown bag (Figure 6) (photo by author, 15 May 2020)

Figure 8: One evening main meal was baked fish and potatoes (photo by author, 15 May 2020)
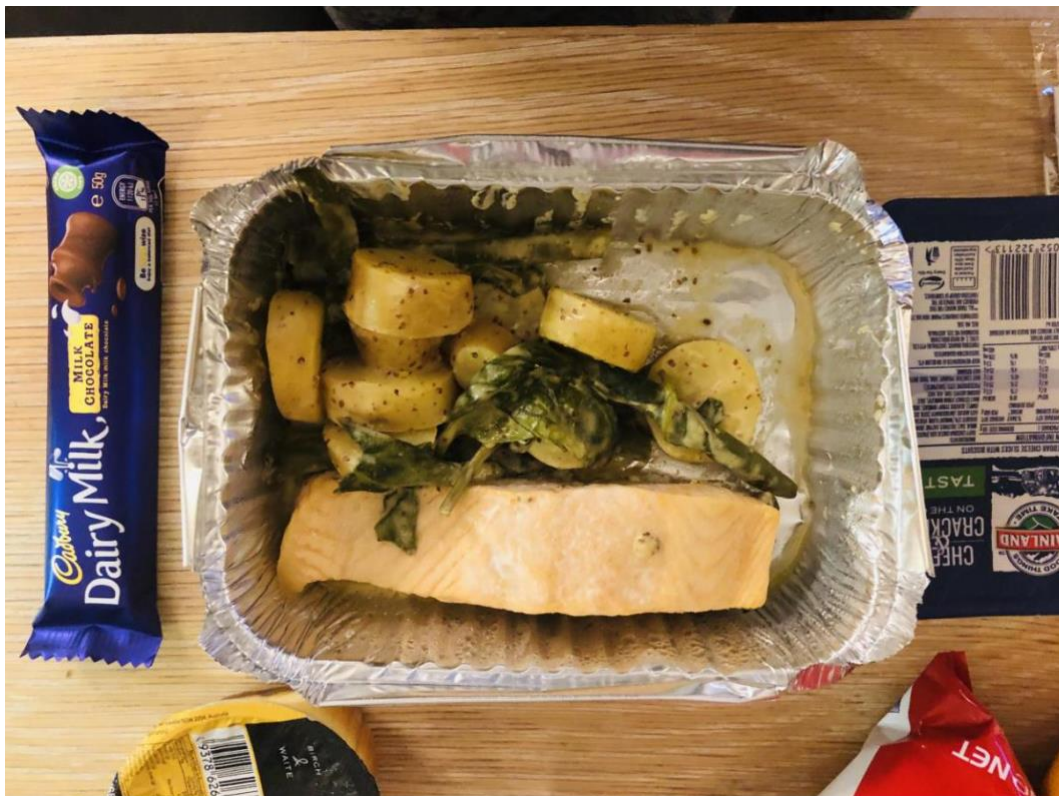
Figure 9: End of 14-day quarantine, checking out of the hotel on 23 May 2020 and getting ready for another 14-day quarantine at home in another state (photo by author, 23 May 2020)

PICTURE ANALYSIS

Figures 1-9 reveal the Australian government's practices of inclusion and exclusion.

Figures 1, 2 and 5 show the Australian government's policy of inclusion. The author and her family were granted Australian citizenship. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian government adopted a policy of inclusion by repatriating its citizens from overseas.

Figures 3 and 4 reveal the contradiction of the Australian government's policy of social distancing and equality. By directing Sri Lankan Airlines staff to disinfect returning travellers with spray was intimidating for the passengers. Some passengers regarded it as an insult to human dignity.

Figures 6, 7 and 8 show one evening's meal, which were collected from the door. Three meals were provided daily in bags. We asked for a "halal meal" and specifically mentioned "no pork." So, the meal bags were correctly marked.

The meals provided were essentially Western cuisine, for example, salads, shepherd's pie, baked potatoes and baked fish, but Bangladesh-Australians' regular daily meals include starch, rice and curries. The six adult participants in Melbourne were not happy with the daily meals provided by the Department of Health and Human Services. So, some of them ordered

evening meal deliveries from a Bangladeshi restaurant in Melbourne. Since it was the month of fasting, Ramadan, they ordered appropriate meals for breaking their fast, *iftar* and dinner.

Figure 9 shows the author completing one 14-day quarantine and getting ready for another 14-day quarantine at home in another state.

CITIZENSHIP DURING COVID-19

In January 2020, the coronavirus known as COVID-19 first broke out in the Wuhan region of China. Then it spread outside China and affected many countries including Australia. As of 12 March 2020, there was about 20,000 confirmed cases and 1,000 deaths in the European region. So, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus a pandemic.[47] Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, stated every country should consider implement social distancing and quarantine measures, but there needs to be "the right balance between protecting health, preventing economic and social disruption, and respecting human rights."[48]

By 7 June 2020, COVID-19 had killed more than 418,000 people and infected 7.4 million globally, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. More than 3.4 million people have recovered.[49]

During the outbreak of the coronavirus, my husband and I were in Dhaka, Bangladesh. We both hold dual Australian-Bangladeshi citizenship. Bangladesh is an overcrowded country with a total land area of 130,170 km^2 and population of about 165 million people.[50] So, it is likely the pandemic would get worse in Bangladesh. On 29 March 2020, *The Australian* newspaper had the headline "Two Million could Die, UN Warns." The report stated Bangladesh would be facing up to two million deaths from the COVID-19 epidemic if immediate steps were not taken to suppress the virus. Immediately, my family in Australia texted us the news report and expressed their concern about our safety in Bangladesh.

The Australian government, through the Australian High Commission in Dhaka, Bangladesh, organised a special flight (through Sri Lankan Airlines) to bring back its citizens. On 10 May 2020, we arrived in Melbourne, and for the 14-day quarantine period, we were accommodated in a five-star hotel in Melbourne (Figures 2 and 5). Our food was provided through room service. During our 14-day quarantine period, we were not allowed to leave our room. Security officials were placed on every floor of the hotel to monitor our mandatory quarantine. Later, travellers moving to another state had to quarantine at home for another 14 days (Figure 9).

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[47]   "WHO Announces COVID-19 Outbreak a Pandemic," World Health Organization Europe, March 12, 2020, accessed August 29, 2020, http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/ coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic.

[48]   Ibid.

[49]   "How the New Coronavirus Spread," *Al Jazeera*, May 30, 2020, accessed August 20, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/timeline-china-coronavirus-spread-200126061554884.html.

[50]   "Bangladesh Population (Live)," Worldometer, accessed May 30, 2020, https://www.worldometers.info/ world-population/bangladesh-population/.

The participants in this stage of my study were Bangladeshi-Australian Muslims and Australian citizens. Like me, they travelled from Dhaka, Bangladesh, to Melbourne, Australia. They all spoke very highly of the Australian government's initiative to repatriate its citizens.

One interviewee, Hameed (male, 65 years, engineer), gave this description of his journey:

I returned to Australia from Dhaka during the COVID-19 scare in May 2020 in a special flight (Sri Lankan Airlines) arranged by the Australian government. The tickets were expensive for valid reasons.

Upon reaching Melbourne airport at about 9:30pm the following day, Australian government officials guided the passengers (284 of us, including men, women and children) through the usual immigration procedure and then filling in forms and signing documents on medical and quarantine issues. They, as always, have been polite and courteous and kept saying, "Welcome back." Then a bus took us to a luxury hotel in Melbourne city.

Similarly, another participant, Maqsood (male, age 50, pharmacist), said the 14-day quarantine in the hotel was productive: "On a daily basis, I managed to do my office work. I attended a few video calls, oversaw the factory production remotely. After *iftar*, I spoke to my boss and briefed him on the details of the day's work."

Speaking of the Australian government's care toward its citizens, Zahed (male, 45 years, academic) commented:

The mandatory 14 days quarantine is a positive step taken by the Australian government to control COVID-19 in a short time. Many other countries, such as the UK and the USA, have not been successful in controlling the virus in such a short time.

The Australian government has provided us accommodation in a 5-star rated hotel. It also provided us *halal* meals. The nurses and the counsellors from the Department of Health and Human Services called us every day to find out how we were doing. In this respect, their work ethics was good.

Yet the interviewees also spoke about the negative side of the repatriation process. The main points they raised were the inefficient service of Sri Lankan Airlines, the food in the hotel, claustrophobia, nervousness and mental health issues. Zahed commented:

Sri Lankan Airlines service was terrible. The entertainment channels were shut down. Families with children had a tough time.

We paid higher fare to return to our family in Australia. Normally, the one-way airfare is BDT [Bangladeshi taka] 40,000 to BDT 50,000 (about AUD 800). But I paid double the amount for the one-way ticket, BDT 1,40,000 for the economy class (AUD 2,242). But I was disappointed with the Australian government because they did not look into the "social distancing" factor. The Australian government needed to check the psychological dimension of the passengers.

The passengers in economy class sat next to one another. There were about 300 (about 284 Bangladeshi and the rest Sri Lankan) passengers from different corners of Bangladesh and

Sri Lanka. So, there were high chances of community transmission of the virus on the plane.

Zahed continued:

There was transit for a couple of hours in Colombo Airport. We were moved from one plane to another. In the meantime, when we got down the stairs of the plane, the Sri Lankan Airport staff asked us to maintain social distance. Our hands, shoes and hand luggage were disinfected through spray [see Figures 3 and 4]. Then again on the next flight, passengers seating was next to one another. So, what's the point of disinfecting us on our transit in Colombo Airport?

I was tensed up throughout the flight. Later, my tension was also shared by my family members. They were concerned that if COVID-19 was transmitted to me by other passengers. I felt relieved that after my first COVID-19 test results during the quarantine period in Melbourne, it came back negative. But I almost had a nervous breakdown.

Zahed also spoke of claustrophobia. He said that staying in one closed room for 14 days was too much. He also said the official documents contained the word "detention," which was inappropriate. Hasan said, "The term 'detention' is objectionable. So, some hotel security staff took advantage of it. Once I was in the corridor and the security yelled at me, 'You should go back to your room. You are in jail.'"

On the food issue, one interviewee, Maqsood, said: "About 300 people in the hotel during the quarantine period were of Bangladeshi heritage but the Health Department, who was in charge of the food, should have asked us about our food preference, whether we like starch, curry, etc." He added, "Staying in the room locked for 14 days was too much. I go for a walk every day. So, I felt claustrophobic."

Nasreen (female, 60 years, academic) commented:

They were not consistent in their food delivery. My husband got salad in his lunch box but I did not get a salad box. In the breakfast, they gave us boiled eggs and then they suddenly stopped. People with children have been complaining on their Facebook page that they did not provide food appropriate for children. Every day salad for a 5-year-old child was not appropriate. Once they provided smashed potatoes for dinner, which the child liked. They gave a pack of potato chips every day but that is unhealthy.

My personal observation is similar to Zahed and Nasreen. On the journey, there were some mothers travelling alone with toddlers and children below five years. The airline attendants did not assist them during their transit between flights in Colombo. In the 14-day quarantine in the hotel in Melbourne, it was very difficult for them to look after their children. They provided us with Western-style food, such as baked fish or shepherd's pie, for dinner, whereas Bangladeshi people are used to having rice and curry. One participant, Muzna (female, 30 years), said they should have provided us with proper plates and cutlery for this long period of our stay in the hotel. The food was not suitable for them so they ordered food (*iftar* and dinner) from a Bangladeshi restaurant in Melbourne.

Speaking of the negative side of the mandatory quarantine, Hameed commented:

There were a few issues that I want to highlight here.

First, to prevent human contact, there was no room services. We requested for a vacuum cleaner so that we could clean the room. We were explained that it was not available for it would incur a huge cost for the government to supply vacuum cleaners for each room. Ironically, this quarantine process forced the detainees to live in an unclean and unhygienic environment.

Secondly, most hotels and office buildings generally use a centralised air-conditioning system where air circulates in a closed system. It occurred to me that if there were even a single infected person in the building the virus would be floating in the air in the entire hotel space. There was no window one could open for fresh air. So, how safe were we? But then I also read somewhere that this unique virus is heavy enough to be unable to float in air for too long.

Thirdly, we requested for a daily newspaper without success.

Finally, the other thing I failed to work out is the penalty estimate for breaching quarantine rules – not to step outside the allocated rooms. The fine was determined to be AUD 19,826.40. I am an engineer with a PhD. For me it was a mind-boggling puzzle as to how the Australian government worked out, in such a scientific precision, the dollars and cents. As a precaution, I kept two 20 cent coins in my pocket – just in case!

As an Australian citizen, I also appreciated the Australian government's initiative to repatriate us during the COVID-19 period. The hotel accommodation (bed, towels, tea and coffee) was good. We were offered voluntary COVID-19 tests twice. That was the inclusive policy of the Australian government.

The Australian government could have enforced the practice of social distancing throughout our flight from Dhaka to Melbourne. We paid a higher fare for business class just for the sake of social distancing, but the Australian government overlooked Sri Lankan Airlines' neglect of social distancing in economy class. The Sri Lankan Airlines attendants' treatment of the passengers, particularly young mothers travelling alone with their toddlers, was unpleasant. On one hand, the Australian government emphasised social distancing, and disinfected the Bangladeshi Australians on Sri Lankan soil (Figures 3 and 4), but putting the passengers back again in the congested economy class did not serve the purpose of social distancing and added to the mental agony of the passengers who feared they would contract the virus on the plane.

The Author's Observations

Like the participants of my study on the COVID-19 repatriation matter, some white non-Muslim Australians who experienced 14-days quarantine in luxury hotels in Sydney and Melbourne were critical of the Australian government's arrangements. They complained of

claustrophobia and insufficient and unhealthy food supply.[51] In Sydney, Dr Paul Finlay has been working at Sydney airport screening passengers' health checks. He observed that some returning travellers included pregnant women and people with dementia or severe mental health conditions. He suggested that travellers now being taken to hotels for enforced quarantine should be allowed to quarantine in their homes on compassionate grounds. The government said that exemptions were already made to some people.[52]

One of my interviewees, Mehnaz (female, 50 years, counsellor), said her daughter, Rehana, was a COVID-19 patient in the USA. She served 14-days quarantine in the USA. Then, when she returned to Australia, she was kept in a hotel in Sydney for another 14-days quarantine. Rehana could not take any further enforced isolation. She was provided with a small room with a small window that had a view of the wall of the adjacent building. So, when Rehana reported to the nurse about her mental health condition, which was running very low. The nurse immediately made arrangements for Rehana to go to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. Rehana was then provided with nice apartment style accommodation and she attended the psychologist's full sessions. Rehana felt much better. Mehnaz (Rehana's mother) commented, "That was amazing. We are very impressed with the service and promptness by the Australian government."[53]

As discussed earlier, the WHO emphasised "respecting human rights."[54] Yet the method of disinfecting the Bangladeshi Australians at Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo, was dehumanising (Figures 3 and 4). It brought to the fore the rhetoric of "us and them." They are the ethnic and racial other, carrying the virus, and they need to be disinfected.

In Australia, the hotel and government staff's (nurses and health department) fear of "them," the passengers, was agonising. They feared they would get COVID-19 from the new arrivals. We were looked upon as people carrying the virus (presumed guilty until proven innocent). For example, as they delivered food or other items to the door, they promptly disappeared as if we were some sort of extra-terrestrial species. After the 14-day quarantine, we had to sign our release form titled "END OF DETENTION NOTICE." As interviewee Hasan earlier noted, the term "detention" was demeaning. Since 9/11, many Australian Muslims felt they were treated as the "other." They are hurt because of Islamophobia, which is already rampant in the Australian society, and now many people of colour, in this case Bangladeshi-Australians, felt they were treated as an "inferior" race.

This fear has spread to the wider society. After completing our 14-day quarantine in Melbourne, when we returned to another state, we had to home quarantine. We live in an apartment hotel complex in the city. When the taxi driver was helping us with our suitcases

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[51]   Ben Smee and Michael McGowan, "Treated Worse than Criminals': Australian Arrivals put into Quarantine Lament Conditions," *The Guardian*, March 30, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/30/treated-worse-than-criminals-australian-arrivals-put-into-quarantine-lament-conditions.

[52]   Melissa Davey, "Hotel Quarantine a 'Disaster' and Vulnerable People should be Allowed Home, Doctor Says," *The Guardian*, April 5, 2020, accessed August 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/hotel-quarantine-a-disaster-and-vulnerable-people-should-be-allowed-home-doctor-says.

[53]   Notes taken May 31, 2020, Brisbane.

[54]   "WHO Announces COVID-19 Outbreak a Pandemic."

from the car, an elderly man of about 80 years or more, a resident of the apartment complex started asking, "Quarantine? Quarantine?" Then he asked the taxi driver where we had arrived from. The driver responded, "Melbourne." When we entered, the man asked the reception staff, "Will they quarantine here?" Then he said, "We are old people living here. They can't live here." The receptionist replied, "They own the apartment and they will home quarantine here." He initially could not believe that we could be the owners of an apartment. After a pause, he said, "It is not legal, they can't stay here." On hearing this, I realised we had been marked as the "quarantine people" because of our colour. The first night in my home quarantine, I felt frightened by the thought that the person might turn up with a group of people to evict us from our apartment.

COVID-19 is not only a health scare. It has demeaned human dignity and the policy of quarantine (or untouchability) seriously impacts Australian citizens of different ethnic backgrounds, as it has with me in another state and my fellow passengers in Melbourne.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have discussed interviews with two groups of Muslims. In 2006–2007, the first group of participants were Muslims of diverse backgrounds aged 15–17 years old. They shared positive views on Australian citizenship and how it impacted their identity and belonging. They recognised that Australian values included tolerance, acceptance and multiculturalism. As Australian citizens, they felt connected to the broader society. Yet some participants were distressed by media representations of Muslims as the "other," which reflected that Muslims were not as highly valued as Anglo-Australian citizens. Some politicians' comments were also divisive. For example, the former Liberal government under John Howard used divisive rhetoric such as "Muslims do not integrate." Other politicians, such as Peter Dutton and Pauline Hanson, questioned Australian Muslims' citizenship. This impacted on the wider society and reinforced the high unemployment of Muslim Australians. Muslim women wearing a *hijab* were marked as the other.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020, the current Australian government has displayed its responsibility to its citizens living abroad. In this context, it was Bangladeshi (mostly Muslim) Australians who were brought back to Australia on a special flight. Though the participants paid a high airfare, they were relieved that they could return to their host country. All expenses (food, etc.) during the 14-day quarantine in a 5-star hotel were borne by the Australian government.

In this period, the participants' main questions concerned human dignity. For example, the practice of social distancing was not followed by Sri Lankan Airlines. The passengers were clustered into economy class with no gap between seats. Then they were disinfected at Bandaranaike International Airport, Colombo, and on the connecting plane, they were again clustered into economy class. The mental agony about transmission of the virus among passengers was concerning.

After arriving in Melbourne for the 14-day quarantine, all the people were suspected of carrying the coronavirus, so they were kept separate. These passengers were not provided with culturally appropriate meals, and some people felt claustrophobic and suffered from mental anxiety.

So, with the COVID-19 crisis, a new dimension of discrimination will be added to ethnic minorities – in this case Bangladeshi Australians who are mostly Muslims. They will be looked upon as the "other quarantined" or "detained Australian citizens" (as revealed by my home quarantine experience). It is likely that some of the Australian citizen detainees will suffer from mental anxiety. My previous participants, in 2006 to 2007 (aged 15–17 years), revealed their emotions when they spoke of the wider society (media or politicians), but with the COVID-19 issue in 2020, the adult participants showed signs of mental health issues.

Australian Muslims already experience a high unemployment rate, negative conventional media representations of Islam and Muslims, and the "othering" of Muslims in public spaces. During the pandemic, a new dimension is emerging: anxiety and mental health problems for some Australian Muslims. The Australian government should introduce more measures to promote inclusion of Australian Muslims, such as culturally appropriate measures, and provide them with support and health facilities to cope during this uncertain time.

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