
**Living with Racism:
The experience and reporting by Arab and
Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse
and violence since 11 September 2001**

Report to The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

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Introduction

In June 2003, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) engaged the Centre for Cultural Research (CCR) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to investigate Australian Arabs' and Muslims' experiences of post-September 11 racism, the extent to which these experiences were going unreported and the reasons for this. The CCR team was charged with addressing the following questions:

1. What types and extent of racially motivated acts are experienced by Arab and Muslim Australians?
2. What patterns are there in the geographic location of these events and their reportage or non-reportage? Are there any conspicuous areas in which complaints are not being reported?
3. To what extent are such racially motivated acts perpetrated by individuals or groups?
4. Are there identifiable types of groups or patterns of individuals among perpetrators?
5. What is the gender composition of the vilifiers/assailants (for incidents both reported and unreported)?
6. What is the gender composition of the victims/complainants (for incidents both reported and unreported)?
7. What is the ethnic composition of the victims/complainants (for incidents both reported and unreported)?
8. What are the religious affiliations of the victims/complainants (for incidents both reported and unreported)?
9. How is the perpetrator's racial motivation identified by victims/complainants?
10. What interrelations of racism and sexism may be discerned?
11. What meanings do these events have for the people involved, and for their communities?
12. What types and extent of racially motivated acts are officially reported? Conversely, to what extent do such acts go unreported, and why?
13. In what circumstances are people less likely to report racist incidents: in the workplace? In neighborhoods? In schools?
14. Are men or women less likely to complain, why, and in what circumstances?
15. What forms of redress or action do complainants/non-complainants seek?
16. Do complainants feel that their reports have been acted upon or will make a difference?

The research team was comprised of:

- Associate Professor Scott Poynting: chief investigator/team leader;
- Dr Greg Noble, co-chief investigator;
- Dr Paul Tabar, research associate – research design and translation;
- Elissar Mukhtar, research assistant – interviews;
- under the directorship of Professor Ien Ang, Director, Centre for Cultural Research.

In making this report, the research team wishes to acknowledge the support of Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner Dr William Jonas AM, and the contribution of HREOC staff to the research design and execution, notably Meredith Wilkie, who was Director, Race Discrimination Unit for most of the course of the project; Dr Susanna Iuliano, Policy Research Officer; Omeima Sukkarieh, Community Liaison Officer; and, in the final stages, Christine Fougere, Acting Director, Race Discrimination Unit. We thank all the anonymous respondents and interviewees who gave so generously of their trust, their time and their stories, and the numerous community organisations who assisted us in distributing the questionnaires. We are also grateful to our UWS colleagues Ali Jinnat for his statistical expertise and Garry Richards for his generous expert advice on coding. Thanks to Mohamad Issa who assisted with translation, and Imad El-Eter with interviewing.

Background

During the 1991 Gulf War, there occurred in Australia a spate of racially based attacks on residents of 'Middle Eastern appearance' or of national and ethnic origins commonly associated with the Islamic faith. When the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA seemed likely to prompt another outbreak of incidents of women having their hijab torn at in public places, of people being spat upon or more violently assaulted, of incidents of arson, vandalism, threats and harassment, a number of instrumentalities and organisations began to keep logs or even to maintain telephone 'hotlines' to record and respond to these occurrences. Such records indicated a sharp increase in incidents of racial attack or vilification immediately after the airliner attacks in the United States in 2001, and an elevated level of such events for several months afterwards, as had occurred during the Gulf War in 1991. This pattern was repeated after the Bali bombings in October 2002. In both cases, there was an intensification of existing, ongoing and everyday forms and patterns of vilification which had continued since the 1990s and before (Poynting, 2002).

At the time of the Gulf War, the brunt of racial attacks was disproportionately borne by Arab-background women, notably Muslim women and girls wearing the hijab (Newell, 1990: p.21, Hage, 1991). There were anecdotal and media indications that this trend continued to be significant following the events of September 2001 (eg *Daily Telegraph*, 26/11/01: p.13). Moreover, number of the recent attacks were explicitly sexualised, involving, for example, indecent exposure, offensive sexual suggestions, and threats of sexual assault (Poynting, 2002).

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (1991: p.362) noted that, in 1991, 'There were also reports of violence and harassment against people of Middle Eastern origin who are neither Arab or Muslim'. The recent round of attacks also included assaults on people who were neither, such as Sikh men wearing turbans; and others who were not Muslim, such as graffiti and arson attacks on an Orthodox Christian church that bore signs in Arabic script (Rath, 2001). It is a moot point – and one calling for empirical investigation – whether such attacks should be defined as racially motivated or primarily a matter of religious bigotry and hatred. The federal Australian law makes it illegal to vilify or discriminate against persons on the basis of race, colour, national or ethnic origin (and on the basis of descent in relation to discrimination), but not on the basis of religion alone. In the current circumstances, that offers little protection or redress to Muslims, who are presently bearing the brunt of racial hatred in Australia. Indeed as early as 1991, research showed that Muslims were among the four most vilified and racially attacked groups in Australia (HREOC, 1991; Jureidini, 1997). The other three groups were Aboriginal people, Asians (meaning ethnic Chinese and South-East Asians) and Jews. All of these three are covered by the federal Racial Discrimination Act 1975. The categorisation of Jews as an ethnic as well as a religious group (which categorisation also, incidentally, applies to Sikhs) offers them protection under the legislation which has not been officially extended to Muslims by the courts.

A number of instances of racial vilification in the recent events were reported in the media to have connected the terms 'Arab' or 'Muslim' with 'terrorist', a pattern reported during the Gulf War, long before the September 11 attacks (Committee on Discrimination against Arab Australians and Committee of Arab Australians, 1992: pp. 49-52). Community organisations also complained of this ideological linkage. This is a discourse which had been doing the rounds of recent talkback radio comment and tabloid columns, as had the connection of the notions of 'gang' and 'rapist' with Arabs and Muslims, especially in Sydney after a moral panic over a series of group sexual assaults in 2000 (Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales, 2003). The manner in which these types of ideological elements are disseminated and circulated calls for further investigation, as do their connections with the amplification of racial violence. It should be noted that, in the ideology of racism, categorical confusions between 'race' (eg 'Middle Eastern Appearance'), ethnicity (eg Arab), nationality of origin or background (eg Lebanese), and religion (eg Muslim) are common, and distinction *in practice* between racism directed on 'racial', ethnic, or national grounds is not always possible or valid.

This is all the more problematic currently, for over about the last decade, especially since panics from 1998 over 'ethnic gangs', over 'race rapes' in Sydney in 2000-2001, and asylum seekers and then the terror attacks from 2001, we have seen the emergence of what we might call 'the Arab Other' as the pre-eminent folk devil in contemporary Australia (Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins, 2004). The links that are made between these events, the 'perpetrators' involved and their perceived communities, depend on the racist imagining of a supposedly homogenous category which includes those of Arab or Middle Eastern or Muslim background. This is not a singular category, of course – it includes people from diverse ancestries and with very distinct histories – but it is *seen to be* a singular category. A common factor is found through blaming whole communities for criminal acts, but also in labelling as 'deviant' certain actions – such as seeking asylum – and a range of other practices whose key feature is their visible and threatening difference – such as building a prayer centre (Dunn, 2001). The extent to which the categories of race, ethnicity (culture) and religion are conflated in the 'common sense' of racism is an aspect which needs to be studied, especially in as much as it determines the scope of legislation and the targeting of anti-racist initiatives and resources.

Methodology

The first phase of the research was a self-complete survey. HREOC distributed 1,475 reply-paid self-complete questionnaires to individuals and through ethnic and religious organisations in both Sydney (685) and Melbourne (790). These two capital cities have the greatest numbers and the highest population density of Muslims and people of Middle-Eastern origin of all Australian cities. The survey instrument was in both English and Arabic with multiple-choice and Likert-scale components supplemented by provision for very brief open-ended comments of a line or two. It bore the prominent note, 'Your responses and all your personal details will remain completely confidential'. Respondents were invited to volunteer for an in-depth in-person interview at a later date. Not all of the questionnaires sent out to community organisations by HREOC were distributed to potential respondees, and some individuals received several copies through various sources. We estimate that about 1,000 of the 1,475 reached the hands of distinct eligible individuals. We aimed at securing a 20% minimum response rate for questionnaires, and in the event we received back completed some 186 out of the 1,000-odd, with about a quarter of these agreeing to be interviewed.

Given the length of the questionnaires (4 pages in the English version, 6 in the Arabic version), the fact that most were not addressed to individual recipients, and the impossibility therefore, of individual follow-up, the response rate of about 20% is well within the conventionally acceptable range. It is likely that some of the very same phenomena that we were investigating in relation to under-reporting of racism, that is wariness of the state and lack of trust in its authorities, militated against higher response rates for the survey. Certainly, interviewers reported repeated instances where (especially Arabic-speaking) respondees had changed their mind about volunteering for interviews. These participants explained that, despite their respect for the researchers and their appreciation of the research, and notwithstanding the anonymity, the level of state surveillance and intervention in their lives left them fearful of negative repercussion.

In the survey, we asked if respondents had experienced any racism, abuse or violence since September 2001, and if so, what had occurred. (This threefold phrase, 'racism, abuse or violence' is introduced in Question 1 of the instrument and repeated throughout the questionnaire. It is intended to be as clear as possible, given the self-administered nature of the survey, and to cover a broad range of possibilities. In reporting here, we will often abbreviate it to 'racism'.) We asked if they, and the community they identified with, had experienced more such racism since 11 September 2001. We asked if they had reported or made complaints about such incidents to official bodies, and if so, whether they were satisfied with the responses and outcomes. Those who had not reported the racism, we asked why, and what could be done to make reporting more possible or worthwhile.

The qualitative phase followed up on the same questions, but asked what meanings do these events have for the people involved, and for their communities? What forms of redress or action are complainants/non-complainants interested in? Do complainants feel that their reports have been acted upon or will make a difference?

The 34 one-to-one, in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews of 30-40 minutes each were tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. They were all conducted in English, except for one in Arabic by a bilingual interviewer, though Arabic was offered to all volunteers. There was a male and a female interviewer. Each interviewee was informed, 'The interviews are anonymous and confidential. Your name will not be used', as well as being assured that any identifying material would be removed from the transcripts.

We interviewed in Sydney and Melbourne, where we had distributed the questionnaires: the two most populous cities and those with the highest proportion of Arab and Muslim background. Of the 34 interviews, 18 (13 women and 5 men) were conducted in Melbourne and 16 (13 women and 3 men) in Sydney. This roughly reflects the gender proportion of respondents to the questionnaire, of which about 30% were men. Ages of interviewees ranged from 17 to 57; the mean age was 28 years. This reflects the median age of the survey respondents, which was also 28 years. There was a broad cross-section of socio-economic status. Religious denominations included: Sunni Muslim, Muslim (a number declined to specify further), Shi'ite Muslim, Maronite Christian, Orthodox Christian and Assyrian Christian, as well as those who said they came from families of some of these backgrounds but were themselves atheist or 'not practising'. The majority of interviewees were Muslim, and the majority of these Sunni.

Part 1: The Survey

Experiences of racism

The survey responses from individuals corroborated the anecdotal reports from ethnic community organisations which had been reflected in the media articles referred to in the Background, above. These were reports of sharply increased

incidence of racism, abuse or violence against Arab and Muslim Australians since September 11th, 2001. (Note that such sources as ethnic community organisations and Muslim religious associations were systematically and exhaustively canvassed in the community consultations of HREOC's *Isma* Project, which took place simultaneously to, but independently from, the research reported here.) Most of our questionnaire respondents experienced an increase in racism against them personally and against communities with which they identified. Two-thirds had personally experienced an increase in racism since 11 September 2001: one-third reported 'a bit more' racism; one-third 'a lot more'. Only about one-fifth of survey respondents reported no increase in personal experiences of racism, abuse or violence since around 2001. Some 93% of those surveyed believed there had been an increase in racism, abuse and violence against their ethnic or religious community; with 64% reporting 'a lot more' racism directed at their community.

Women reported that they had experienced racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001 more than men, confirming the widespread anecdotal reports. This difference was determined to be statistically significant.¹

Q5 How often have you experienced racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001 * Q14 Sex Crosstabulation

		Q14 Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Q5 How often have you experienced racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001	Every day	1 9.1%	10 90.9%	11 100.0%
	Every week	17 45.9%	20 54.1%	37 100.0%
	Once a month	12 27.3%	32 72.7%	44 100.0%
	Less than a month	13 22.0%	46 78.0%	59 100.0%
Total		43 28.5%	108 71.5%	151 100.0%

Muslims were also far more likely to report they had experienced more racism, from both a personal and community perspective, compared with other non-Muslim respondents. Again, the differences were found to be statistically significant.²

Q1 Experienced any racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001 * Q24A Religion Crosstabulation

		Q24A Religion			Total
		Muslim	Christian	Other	
Q1 Experienced any racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001	None	18 51.4%	15 42.9%	2 5.7%	35 100.0%
	Less than before	7 87.5%	1 12.5%		8 100.0%
	About the same	10 66.7%	5 33.3%		15 100.0%
	A bit more	55 84.6%	10 15.4%		65 100.0%
	A lot more	52 96.3%	2 3.7%		54 100.0%
Total		142 80.2%	33 18.6%	2 1.1%	177 100.0%

¹ A statistical test called the 'two way contingency table test using the chi-square statistic' was performed on the table of responses to Question 5 of the survey (*How often have you experienced racism, abuse or violence since 11 September 2001?*) together with and *Question 14 (what is your gender?)* This approach tests whether there is a significant difference in the distribution of responses of men and women to this question. This test was significant with a p-value of 0.032. The p-value represents the chance that the difference will be declared significant when it is actually not. Generally a p-value of less than 0.05 or a less than 5% chance of making a false conclusion is used to determine significance.

² The Chi-squared test for this personal experience of racism, abuse or violence since September 11 against religion was highly significant at 0.000: that is, there is zero possibility of the pattern occurring by chance. Of a similar level of significance (0.000) was the Chi-squared test against religion of whether the community an individual identified with had experienced more or less racism.

Q3 The community you identify more or less racism, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001 * Q24A Religion Crosstabulation

		Q24A Religion			Total
		Muslim	Christian	Other	
Q3 The community you identify more or less racism, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001	Less than before	1 100.0%			1 100.0%
	About the same	7 58.3%	5 41.7%		12 100.0%
	A bit more	32 62.7%	19 37.3%		51 100.0%
	A lot more	104 89.7%	10 8.6%	2 1.7%	116 100.0%
Total		144 80.0%	34 18.9%	2 1.1%	180 100.0%

The frequency of racist incidents was also greater for Muslim survey respondents: 27% of Muslims experienced racism weekly compared with less than half this proportion, 13% of Christian respondents. Most survey respondents, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, men or women, reported experiencing racism, abuse or violence once a month or more frequently.

Sites of Racism, Abuse or Violence

The street

The physical site of racism, abuse or violence most cited in the survey was the street. Some 58% of respondents had experienced racism on the street. Women experienced racism on the street more than men, with 62% of woman compared with 50% of men reporting this experience. Muslims reported racism in the street far more than non-Muslims: 67% of Muslims as against 27% of non-Muslims. Over half of respondents who nominated a believed cause of the racist attacks that they experienced, nominated their wearing of the hijab.

The media

The media was the next most frequently cited 'place' of racism and abuse of Arab and Muslim Australians nominated in the survey. Some 47% of respondents to the questionnaire had experienced racism in the media, with Muslim respondents reporting media racism more than non-Muslims. New South Wales (NSW) respondents noted vastly higher levels of media racism or abuse than Victorians, over six times as many. This probably reflected a series of media-driven moral panics about so-called 'ethnic gangs' of Lebanese immigrants in Sydney (Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar, 2000; Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, 2003; Poynting, Noble, Tabar and Collins, 2004).

Shops and shopping malls

The experience of racism, abuse or violence in shops or shopping malls was indicated by 43% of respondents to the questionnaire. Almost half (47%) of women respondents experienced racism in shops, compared with about a third (34%) of men. Over half (51%) of Muslim survey respondents experienced racism in shops, compared with roughly a sixth (16%) of non-Muslims.

Driving or in public transport

Some 43% of respondents reported being subjected to racial abuse while driving. Fully half (50%) of Muslim questionnaire respondents reported receiving abuse while driving as against only one sixth (16%) of non-Muslim respondents. Many participants also reported being subjected to racial abuse on public transport or while travelling as passengers in private vehicles, as we shall see in the interview material below.

Schools and colleges

Just over a quarter of survey respondents experienced some form of racism, abuse or violence at school, technical college or university. The extent of this experience is underlined by the fact that, while many others (such as parents or various family members) have contacts with educational institutions, only 29% of the sample were full-time students. Over two thirds of Muslims experienced racism in these sites, compared with 19% of non-Muslims.

Work

Just over a quarter (27%) of respondents experienced racism, abuse or violence at their workplace. Men represented a higher proportion than women of those experiencing racism in employment: 36% of men compared to 24% of women, but the latter figure becomes 31% when discounting for those cases who have indicated 'home duties' as their occupation. (Only 1.6% of cases indicated 'unemployed'). Muslim respondents reported much higher rates of racism at work than non-Muslims: 30% compared to 19%.

Leisure Places

Racism, abuse or violence at leisure sites, such as sportsgrounds, picnic areas, parks and cinemas, was reported as experienced by 24% of questionnaire respondents. Roughly the same proportion of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents experienced this.

In Government Offices

A smaller percentage, 12% of survey respondents, reported experiencing racism, abuse or violence in government offices. By this we understand that they have experienced racism while in, or while accessing services in, government offices. Some 14% of Muslims experienced this, however, compared with 2.7% of non-Muslims. A far higher percentage of respondents born in Afghanistan than any other birthplace, said they experienced racism in government offices: 10 out of 25 cases, or 40%. This may possibly reflect experiences of asylum-seekers, but we cannot conclude this on the basis of the survey. There is obviously a need for further research on this question among Afghan immigrants and refugees.

Perpetrators of Racism, Abuse and Violence

Some 71% of respondents who had experienced racism, abuse or violence identified the perpetrators as 'Australian', 'Aussies', 'Anglo', 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Anglo-Australian', 'Originally from England', 'English Speaking Backgrounds', 'English', 'White', 'White Australian', 'Caucasian' and the like. Five cases (3.4%) were identified as Southern European; one case only (0.5%) as 'Aboriginal'; 22.3% No Response and 2.7% 'Other'.

Individuals or groups perpetrating racist incidents were identified as 52.3% male, 17.4% female and 24.8% combinations of both (with 5.4% unknown). The median identified age group was 30-39, with ages clustering around 20-29 (25%), 30-39 (21%) and 40-49 (13%). Age 19 and younger represented 10%; 50 and over 6%, with 22% of cases having 'no idea'.

Perpetrators were acting alone in 40% of incidents, and in pairs in 27%. In 24% of cases, three or four were involved, and in 9% of cases five or more.

Complaints

Of those surveyed, only 6.5% had reported incidents of racism, abuse or violence to the police. Only 3 cases out of the 186 had made a formal complaint to HREOC; 4 out of the whole sample had made a formal complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW; and none had complained officially to the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission. One single respondent had complained to the Ombudsman; one to the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales. This certainly bears out the thesis that the number of reported cases represents only the 'tip of the iceberg', even for complaints to ethnic community or religious community organisations, which were made by 5% of respondents.

Given the extent of racism experienced in the media by respondents to the questionnaire, it is noteworthy that only 3 cases of the 186 had complained to the Australian Press Council, and the same number to the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

Only 6 of the 186, or 3%, had complained to their employer about racism, abuse or violence at work. A larger proportion, 7.5%, had complained about racism to authorities at their educational institution. Some 19%, however, reported that they had complained directly to the person(s) who had been racist towards them.

The most frequent reason given by respondents who did not report was recorded for those who did not think anything useful would come of it; this was indicated by one third (33%) of respondents. A little over half this number (19%) indicated that they did not know who to report to, and much the same proportion (18%) said that it was because they did not want to make trouble for themselves or their family. A similar number (17%) was afraid of reprisals.

Of those who complained, 30% were very satisfied or quite satisfied with the outcome; 70% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Part 2: The Interviews

The in-depth, face-to-face interviews with those willing to participate in the next phase of the study, focused on the experience of racism, abuse and violence amongst people of Arab or Muslim background, and what impact it had on their lives, as well as their experience in reporting – or not reporting – such incidents. The experiences varied in the nature of the incident, the places where it occurred, the perpetrators, the degree of harm or threat, the extent to which it involved racial or religious elements, the impact of gender and class, and so on.

The events recounted ranged from seemingly minor incidents of social incivility, to verbal abuse, through threats of violence including stalking and threatened sexual assault, to actual physical assault from veil-tearing to a stabbing; as well as property damage from graffiti and vandalising motor vehicles, to bricks through windows and arson. Most were one-off incidents, but several respondents detailed ongoing experiences, even campaigns, of sustained vilification and harassment. Most events involved one or two perpetrators, but some respondents talked about treatment at the hands of larger groups, or even institutional racism. Most interviewees cited several examples and many indicated that some forms of incivility or vilification, based on ethnicity or faith, were a regular part of their daily life in contemporary Australia.

Social incivility

The most frequently recounted experience is perhaps best described as social incivility – people being verbally abusive or exhibiting behaviours which are perceived by the recipients as rude and insulting.

The frequency of the experience of social incivility was expressed by Sabah, a young female Muslim university student of second-generation Lebanese background who told of many incidents ‘when people give you dirties [looks], or you feel unwelcome, or how people act towards you’. She recounted a typical experience:

There are many incidents, but the most recent was, I was around Central Station; I was going home in the afternoon. What happened, I heard some guy saying, ‘Oh terrorist, oh terrorist!’, and I just ignored him and walked off. I think it was adults, and they were males; they were standing by in Central Station.

Her experience contains elements often found in other incidents – it was in a public place involving unknown male perpetrators – but it is also interesting because it reflects a significant proportion of incidents which make explicit reference to the perceived links between international terrorism, especially since 2001, and the cultural background of the victim. Also interesting here is the reaction of the young woman, whose disregard suggests this is such a typical experience of her daily life that it doesn’t warrant a response. Apart from telling her friend, the idea of making a formal complaint does not arise.

Nada, a 39 year-old Lebanese-born community worker, recounted being followed in her car by a man making obscene hand gestures. He called her a ‘bloody wog’, and she felt intimidated and humiliated. Nada had no doubt that she was being vilified because of her wearing the veil. She did report the matter to the local police, but they said they were unable to do anything, as she had not noted the number plate of the car. This was a common frustration, both among those who reported vilification by strangers and those who, precisely because they *were* strangers, did not report the incidents. Several of Nada’s community work clients, she said, had also reported a man in the car alongside in a

shopping centre carpark who had called them 'wogs' and said, 'Go back to your country! What are you doing here? We don't want to see you here with your veil.'

Some of these events have a clear origin in recent international and local events, or involve a clear linking of local citizens of Arab or Muslim background with those events, however spurious: the 'terrorist' and 'rapist' taunts quoted above were echoed in the accounts given by other interviewees. Alya described a number of incidents on the local freeway, including one where a young man in a car, 'got his hand pretending to be a gun, and just went, bang, like he was going to shoot me in the head. ... He just made his little gestures, I'm going to shoot you in the head, and then away he went.' She also described another incident in which a man sat next to her in a shopping centre, with his face: 'he was very close to me, he kind of had his face centimetres from my face, and really looking at me. ... and he said, you know, really heavy accent, 'what you do here?' I said 'excuse me?' and he was reeking of alcohol, he said 'you got bomb?'

Violence and threats

In contrast to what many would see as relatively minor experiences of name-calling and so on, was the series of incidents in the life of another young woman and her family. Amal is a 17 year-old school student of second-generation Lebanese background. She tells of a horrific series of incidents beginning with being hit on the tram and having her 'scarf' pulled off by a young man and his female companion, who also verbally abused her. The assailants lived in the same neighbourhood; the attacks continued and escalated. Amal reports that the young man's mother struck her during a subsequent encounter, and that she was later threatened by some of the original assailants' associates, a group of some ten young people, boys and girls, who were carrying baseball bats as weapons. Amal recounts that she and her brother were later waylaid after school by the parents of the teenage assailants. The father shouted at Amal, 'I would not leave you till Osama Bin Laden dies; this is going to constantly happen to you till you die.' He punched in the face a young male bystander at the tram stop (also an Arab Muslim) who intervened to defend Amal; the young man later needed six sutures in his lip. After having Amal's brother in a stranglehold, the perpetrator cut his neck with a Stanley knife, and Amal's hand was also lacerated. Amal recounts further incidents where abusive phone calls were received, a brick was thrown through her house window, a petrol fire was set in her front yard, and young men with a club attacked her car. Much of her story has been documented with a community organisation, whose community worker helped Amal to secure an apprehended violence order and ultimately, when the attacks continued, assisted her and her family to move home.

In Amal's experience, the police 'didn't really treat the situation as if it was serious'. When she reported the beating and stabbing incident by phone, she was told to contact a particular police station, which referred her on to a second, which referred her on to a third. 'I told my story to so many police officers in different stations, and they go, "Oh, we can't do much because we don't know their details, we don't know this, we don't know that."' Despite her being able to identify the perpetrators from school photographs with the assistance of the Principal, no charges were ever laid, according to Amal.

Amal says she missed school for 50 days in late 2001, since she was too afraid to take the tram to school and had no other form of transport. 'I would be scared just to leave the house. I would be scared to do things on my own. I wouldn't sleep at night, I wouldn't sleep for two or three days. I would sleep in the day and stay up in the night.' She had to have psychiatric treatment because of the trauma.

There is a particular irony here in the widespread ideology, which often circulates in ethno-religious vilification, that Muslim women are oppressed, are forced to wear the hijab by the men in their families, and are confined to the household by their menfolk. Amal's mother was divorced; her brothers were 14 and 16 years old when these events occurred. No man obliged either woman to wear the hijab; they chose to do so and insisted on this right in the face of vilification and attacks. What confined them to the household was precisely these attacks. As Amal's mother, Fairuz (whom we also interviewed) said, 'I can't go out; I don't have my freedom'.

Jamila, a young Australian-born Muslim of Indonesian background is married to an Anglo-Australian man who has converted to Islam. She used to wear what she called the 'normal' hijab. Since she was abused and threatened in a train on her way to work, she has given up her job, and now wears the full burqa in public places.

It was partly that incident and then a lot of other things that happened in my life that made me decide to cover my face, so I became a full – purdah – covered woman. That was one of the incidents that made me decide maybe work is not for me. It's not only that, ... I decided I wanted to go back to school, educate myself a bit better, so that I could combat far worse incidents.

Jamila is now contemplating emigration to Indonesia.

Latifah, a twenty-five year old midwife, born in Australia of Lebanese background, recounts:

I was with my sisters and friends at the beach. ... Two guys come past and started, 'cause I wear the scarf, and some of my friends did, some didn't, and they came up, and they were going 'get that effing thing off your head, look at it flapping in the wind, I want to come and rip it off.' They were swearing their heads off at us, and we got really scared. ... We didn't say anything to them, we just ignored them, and they came up and they were swearing and threatening to rip our scarves off, and hitting us.

Alya, a 40 year-old Sunni Muslim professional woman of Egyptian birth, discusses letters and telephone calls she received in the wake of the terrorist hijackings in the USA: 'From September 11, I got some incredibly, incredibly threatening letters, and telephone calls about people wanting to do certain things. ... about coming to blow us up, and killing. "You just wait, as soon as you walk out, we'll be coming there. We're going to kill you." Really abusive things. ... Others just saying 'you don't belong in this country; go home; we're going to kill you; you're all terrorists; what are you doing here?,' but ... in very profane language'.

Another Muslim woman in her forties reported such threatening letters to her ethnic community organisation. Again, the letters being anonymous, it proved difficult to take any action. The effect was the same: the woman was afraid to leave her home alone, even to do the shopping. One of the letters, headed 'Australians Against Arabs', said:

F---ing Lebanese are terrorising our beautiful city of Sydney. You c---s are problematic. As we mentioned last time, our aim is to protect innocent Australians from those f---ing Lebanese ... we will get rid of Lebanese from our streets. Just remember that you are numbered and you (sic) number will be coming up sooner than later. F--- off!

Note, in passing, another ideological irony: those terrorising frightened Arab-named residents say that 'Lebanese' are terrorising 'Sydney'. The stated aim is to force the victims to move out of the neighbourhood. In 1991, HREOC documented a number of cases of Arab people forced to move house by such campaigns of race hate. Our indications are that the same has happened since 2001.

Media

The ideology of 'Lebanese terrorising Sydney', or of women being oppressed by Muslim men, of the hijab being an affront in a 'Christian country' or a civilised society, and the like, has been circulating for several years in the popular media, especially the tabloid press and commercial talkback radio (Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, 2003; Poynting et al, 2004). Many of our respondents saw such media vilification as inciting the very racial hatred they were suffering. For instance, Zahra (a twenty-something professional woman of second-generation Lebanese background) talked about the

media portrayal of Muslims, and situations where we've been portrayed unfairly, and in a very biased way. ... One that comes to memory, is speaking to [a commercial talkback compere] on the radio. He said some really nasty things ... making allegations on the Muslim community, just general things that you hear everywhere I guess, all allegations and nothing more. ... Everywhere I look I've been seeing things that offend me, things that upset me, things that basically make me unproductive in the work force because they upset me to that extent.

Rozalb, an Afghani Farsi-speaker tertiary student and retail worker in her early twenties who only recently began wearing the hijab, complained that she could no longer go for walks or runs for fear of harassment.

In the incidence of racism ... on a day to day basis, when you look at how you're being portrayed in the media, people have a stigma towards you. ... There's no specific incident where I can say someone has done something, but ... people look at you, or act towards you, or behave towards you in a way that you know that it makes them feel uncomfortable around you.

Latifah, when referring to the assault on her and her friends on the beach because of their wearing 'the scarf', replied to the question, 'Do you have any idea why those boys did that?' by referring to the media:

From what I can think, they obviously have views about Muslims. They might not know that you're Muslim, women that wear the scarf, they might just look at us as bad people. If you look at the media, and everywhere these days, Muslims are portrayed in a negative way, and I can understand why that happens as well. They obviously have a very negative view about Muslims and Muslim women in particular. They obviously felt

powerful or something, 'cause they felt that they could speak like that to us, and do all that, and no one would do anything to them.

Jamila explained how her being insulted and menaced on a Melbourne train by two men was directly related to a commercial current affairs program the night before about gang rapes in Sydney and the purported endemic violence and misogyny of Muslim youth. During the offensive behaviour, the men spoke specifically of these matters, Jamila told us.

Khaled, a Bangladeshi background professional in his mid-twenties, talked of the media 'crushing' his painstaking personal attempts at good public relations on behalf of his religion.

... post-September 11, there was a barrage of questions from people that I work with, about, 'Who are you guys? Are you all terrorists?' There was that idea in a lot of people, maybe because of the media, and because of what was published around the world. ... A lot of effort from my side, and a lot of understanding from theirs as well, we've got to a point where my close friends who are not Muslims, they do understand where I'm coming from. ... It took a while to get that idea, and get that image across. The media comes in and basically barrages everything that we've built up on, and crushed everything, and we had to work at it, and rebuild that image.

Inaas, an Indonesian-born immigrant in her late thirties, spoke of

Just feeling very sad because everything I do, they don't know me, but it makes me feel bad, and more and more when we're looking at TV. Everything ... happen because of Muslim, because of Muslim. ... Our position in here becomes much worse, and worse, and worse.

Institutional racism

Several interviewees recounted experiences which they believed exhibited racism prevalent in particular institutions. Zahra talked about how her younger brother was held unlawfully by police during protests against the war in Iraq: 'I was upset because I believe that had my brother been white he would not have been held unlawfully for that many hours in the city'. When one of her colleagues at work overheard her complaining on the phone about what had happened, this had repercussions for her working relations within her own institution: 'The harassment I received from work, it was bloody endless'.

Ameera, a European-background Muslim woman in her forties, complained of harassing and vexatious ethno-religious profiling by Australian customs and immigration officials, on return from a trip to Indonesia. She felt that it was directly 'a result of September 11', and recalled that she found it 'really invasive' that they 'went through personal documentation'.

A number of interviewees complained of indiscriminate profiling of their co-religionists by police and security services. Murshid, a Muslim of Indonesian background (husband of Ameera) makes the point that these are the very same police to whom racist attacks are to be reported.

Like last time when I come to the mosque, I find the police is inside searching, when there's nobody there, they're thinking there is a bomb there, we're making bombs. There is already, if my wife she goes and complains to the police about little things like that, I don't think so, the police would go and listen to her.

Aladdin, a middle-aged Lebanese-background tradesman complained of menacing visits from the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), who confronted him with

the accusation that I know those who did the September 11 attack before they did it. Who they are. And that I know people here in Australia who want to do things. This kind – I think even a kid wouldn't be able to say such things, or to accuse a person where there is no evidence and nothing, just it's because his problem is that he has a beard and prays. ...

It was increasing, the scare and frightening when they accused me. I felt it was accusation. Maybe not officially, but the way they talked to me, three, two from Federal Police and one from ASIO, to come and talk to me like this ... At home I'm scared that one day they'd come in the same way they did to some people in Sydney and other places, we heard, break things and scare children, scared women.

Hamzeh, a twenty-year-old Australian-born security guard of Lebanese background, told of being pursued and pulled over by six police in three cars while driving to Friday prayers. They hailed him by loudspeaker, directed him to get out of the car, and subjected him and the car to a search for some forty minutes. One officer had his hand on his gun the whole time. 'He was really, really arrogant. "Why are you here, why are you wearing that beard, where are you going?" I go, "I'm going to the mosque." He goes to me, "what the f--- are you going to do there?" Hamzeh made the same point that it was fruitless to complain about such harassment: to whom, the police?

Part 3: Spaces of fear and incivility

As we can see already, the interviews evince not simply a range of different experiences of vilification around ethnicity and religion, they also demonstrate that these experiences occur in a variety of social and physical environments. They most typically occur on the street, at the shops, around public transport, and so on, but they can also occur in an array of social institutions – work, school, the police station, government organisations. The pervasive and regular nature of these experiences suggest that for many people of Arabic-speaking or Muslim background, contemporary Australia constitutes a landscape of fear and incivility, where any place at any time could be the basis of an experience of discrimination or abuse. These may be trivial name-calling or threats of physical violence, but they punctuate the everyday lives of many of those of Arabic-speaking or Muslim background.

Khaled and his friends were subjected to shouted racist abuse and pelted with beer by a group of young men at the cricket ground, when they tried to find place for prayers. 'The F word was said a few times, also about things like, "Go home; you're not welcome here"'. Sabah's experiences of being abused as a 'terrorist' occurred around Central Station in Sydney. Jamila, a 26 year-old Australian-born university student was on a commuter train in Melbourne when she experienced abuse of 'Mussos' from two men in their late twenties, including implied threats of sexual violence. None of the onlookers intervened. Alya described a number of events on a freeway in Melbourne. Nada and others recounted incidents of racial vilification on the road and in carparks. Alya describes one encounter, while she was in her car, of three young 'Aussie' men in a truck: 'There were three other kids with me, all in hijab, the women, obviously girls, in hijab. They were having a little bit of a go at us, doing silly things with the car, basically trying to intimidate ... I couldn't hear what they were saying, but laughing, and they got a cloth and put it around their head, trying to make fun of us'. Fairuz and many others experienced racist incivility in shopping centres. Aladdin reports an attack by an 'Australian' woman on his 12 year-old daughter, his wife and her stepmother in a Melbourne suburban shopping centre. The woman was 'aggressive with them and was swearing at them "bloody Muslims"' and 'tried to remove the scarf from her [the wife's] head'. She hit the stepmother and broke her front teeth.

As well as very open public spaces being sites of harassment, institutional settings, including those which espouse an ethic of care and tolerance, such as school, could harbour antagonisms. Amal says 'that the teachers were against us', as well as other students, when the events of September 11 occurred. She also says 'my best friend became my enemy' as a result of the terrorist attacks.

School could also be a workplace where racism occurred. Bilal, a 26 year-old teacher of second-generation Lebanese background, described an ongoing series of difficulties he had at the school where he was employed on a short-term basis. He attempted to facilitate daily prayers for Muslim students in the school (where a majority were Muslim) but was refused for what he saw as spurious reasons. He also saw discriminatory practice by the school, which allowed Christian speakers to address the assembly and to hand out bibles. In this environment, he also witnessed a lack of respect and rudeness towards Muslims.

Zahra believed that she would 'never be given a promotion' because of her religious and cultural background:

with the workforce you're fine, if you don't identify yourself as an Arab or a Muslim, but for me, I don't wear the veil, but people can tell from my actions that I am a Muslim. When I have to get leave for Ramadan, or when they overhear me on a phone call, ... that's how they identify my values and everything. ... It's like you're censored, because the only time being a Muslim and an Arab is not an issue in the workforce is when you lie about your identity, or you try and hide it to the point where it's not so obvious.

She describes in detail an ongoing experience of harassment emanating from one member of her firm:

That boy, he didn't just make fun of me, he lashed out at me, he tried to humiliate me. ... That's one of the reasons I've resigned from my current job, what this boy has done; he's gone to extreme lengths to make my life very difficult. He collects things, like if I do make a personal call or anything like that, he'll collect that information and pass it on to other managers who he's closely linked to. They're male friends, white Anglo-Saxon males; they began the job at the same time. Basically, he passes on a lot of personal detail about me, and

anything I may do during work hours, so it's made to look like there's a lot going on, when really I'm being just as productive as anyone else. You've got other people at work checking what time the rugby starts, and that's called normal. ... Several times I had managers ... saying, 'are you sure you really want to be here?' I believe it's one of the reasons that I've been pressured to resign from my current job.

Most interviewees who experienced discrimination of racism at work – from co-workers or clients – were loath to complain, for fear of it endangering their employment. One professional man in his twenties, of Bangladeshi background, was considering changing his name, so he could not be identified as Muslim.

I have to go out to a lot of client sites, meet a lot of new people, and ... they even make comments, 'Oh, [Khaled], it's you guys blowing up things around the world.' They associate so much with a name. ... Just recently I was applying for a job, and I sort of feel scared putting my name down on the résumé, thinking, Jeez, is this going to be looked at as a no-no? What are they going to associate with that name? ... To contemplate thinking about changing the name, it did hurt me.

These spaces of fear and incivility also become landscapes of exclusion because they define not just what but who is acceptable. Racial vilification, by its nature, emphasises a sense of cultural difference, as we have seen above, but this sense of difference is also a sense of not belonging. Alya encapsulates this when she talks about little encounters that produce this sense: 'Incidents, like 'go on, get a move on ... in this country we do things like this', 'you don't belong in this country, go home'; 'it's just knowing that people will judge you for things that are totally outside of your control, and again not feeling like I belong to this land that I call my home'.

Part Four: Reporting to whom?

Most of the incidents of racism recounted to us in the interviews had not been reported to authorities, let alone being subjects of official complaint. For some, the events were of such an everyday occurrence that it would be impossible to report them each time they occurred. Moreover, many believed that such incidents would not be treated seriously if they complained. A number showed good reason for believing this. Some saw the individual incidents themselves as trivial, but described how their ubiquitousness and incessance builds up to an almost overwhelming feeling of not belonging, of being excluded.

Many interviewees did not know to whom they could report a particular incident of racist vilification or attack. Others knew quite well the appropriate body, and explained the pointlessness of complaining because of legislative or resource shortcomings. Still others judged that the risks associated with complaining about racism were not worth taking.

A major problem, especially with racist events in public spaces, was the inability to identify or trace the offender. Assailants or vilifiers in such places were often unknown to the victim. Someone committing an assault or vilification in a shopping centre or a train would disappear before police could arrive or often before they could even be called, and they would not have the wherewithal or the will to trace the offender. In such cases, interviewees often complained of the lack of intervention by by-standers. Jamila, subjected to racial vilification on a commuter train, said:

... what was upsetting to me was the fact that there was about twenty other people on the carriage, yet not one person said, 'Hang on a minute, that's out of line, mate', or something like that would have been appreciated by me. Considering I'm one person on my own and these two were – and there were sexual connotations, there was, you know, innuendo in what they were saying to me – I felt a bit scared.

For Jamila, it was not worth reporting this harassment to the train guard or any station staff: 'They wouldn't do anything. ... They'd probably, "Oh yeah, oh well." I don't think they'd do anything about it. They're more concerned with fare evasion and stuff like that.' She generalised this perception: 'I don't feel like I'll be represented properly if I was to go to the state government office or a federal government office to complain about something that happened against me. I don't think they would really care.'

A tram driver intervened, without having to be asked, when 18 year-old Lebanese- background TAFE student, Mustapha, was being shouted at offensively by an 'Australian' male passenger in his thirties. 'Go back to your country, you stupid Muslim! ... Go back to your country, you black c---!'. The driver kept the tram stationary, left the driver's seat, and came and sat next to the young man in the back of the tram. She declared that the tram was not moving until the offender got off. He did not, however, and eventually 'she had to drive off, 'cause the manager from the tram depot called her up and told her what's happening'. It is noteworthy that the police did not arrive within that half hour, nor did other passengers intervene to assist. The tram driver was Aboriginal.

Rema, a 22 year-old Iraqi-born Assyrian, told of having papers and a bottle of water thrown into her car in traffic by a group of young men in the car alongside.

I didn't want to go and complain, because ... you have to have evidence. You need to have the names, or the plate number, or the colour of the car. I didn't care about all of that, and I didn't look at the plate number, because I was so scared, so nervous, I just wanted to go home.

... Probably if I wasn't by myself it would be a different idea, it would be a different story. ... Probably that person next to me, I would tell them, 'Get their number,' or get anything about the car. [But] I was so scared. ... Scared, and so nervous. I was shaking, I just wanted to go home straight away.

Similarly with Latifa, when she had been stalked in a shopping centre by a man who began swearing at her with racist abuse.

He kept following me, then he started yelling abuse, and I kept ignoring him. Then it got to a point where I really started to get scared, 'cause I was going to my car, and he was following me to the car park. ... I turned around to him and said, 'Look, what's your problem? ... I'm going to call security.' Then he got scared and left. I didn't call security. I went to my car, 'cause I was really busy. ... I was honestly fearing for my life walking to my car thinking I was going to get attacked by this man.

She did not report the matter to the shopping centre staff, or anyone else, beyond telling her sisters about it. 'I feel like, if I'm going to report it, nothing's going to be done anyway; that's how I feel. Maybe that's wrong, but that's how I feel at this point in my life. I can report all these, but really, what's going to happen? There's nothing that anyone can do about it.' When asked, 'What would have helped, or enabled you to make a complaint or report?', Latifa replied:

I think knowing what to do, and knowing that the people you've made a report to did something about it, and were understanding, and didn't view you as someone who just complained and whinged, and thought that every comment made to you and every look was a racist one.

She said she had no idea to whom she could report such incidents.

Inaas, a 37 year-old Muslim woman of Indonesian origin who had also been racially harassed in a shopping centre, felt similarly about the pointlessness of making a complaint. 'I'm thinking if I'm making a complaint, what they done to you, just talking like that, it don't mean anything. No one can hear, it's not very big things, maybe they hear it, but only just ignoring like that'.

We have already outlined above how, in the very serious case of beating and stabbing reported by Amal, she found that the police 'didn't really treat the situation as if it was serious', even though she was clearly able to identify the alleged perpetrators. No-one was charged. A restraining order made her situation worse, for the court documents divulged her family's address. After a subsequent arson attack, Amal's 'front yard was on fire, petrol was thrown purposely and it was on fire'.

We called the fire brigade and the police, and they go, 'Oh, we can't do anything because we've got no witnesses or proof.' ... We had [a brick] thrown through our window; all they did was write a statement and that was about it. They didn't get in contact with us the next day.

Those who were harassed or discriminated against in the workplace often spoke of dangers, in terms of negative consequences for their employment, of reporting such experiences to their employer, especially in the private sector. Such employees tended to self-censor, and to suffer in silence the racism of superiors, colleagues or clients. Khaled, for instance, said:

I haven't done anything about it. ... I don't want to go through that process. Yeah, if I make a complaint, okay, maybe they might stop it, but what they think about me deep inside, I can't change that, and neither can a complaint. ... Bringing these things in could impact on your career. Once or twice, but if I keep making the same complaints, I don't think they'll knock back the clients; because I'm a Muslim, more than likely I'll be the one that will be knocked back. If I don't like it, then, yeah, maybe, 'Work somewhere else'.

One worker who did complain to her manager about racism in the workplace was Latifa, a midwife whose colleagues had made inappropriate and insulting remarks about her (clean) headscarf: 'Get that dirty thing off your head!' She had also asked repeatedly and unsuccessfully for theatre gowns with long sleeves, as the short-sleeved ones provided were not culturally acceptable. The matter of the veil (ironic, given the history of nursing uniforms) and the gown were

resolved following the complaint, but Latifa still felt dissatisfied: 'I would have like a meeting with these women that did this, and my boss and me, but that didn't happen.' She said that the women at work continue harassing her about her dress.

Part Five: Fear and insecurity after 2001

The starkest features of the landscape of fear and incivility that we have described are when people actually fear for their lives, or are afraid to leave their home. Murshid, a middle-aged Muslim man of Indonesian origin, says, 'I'm scared to go out from the house'. He is awaiting a response from the Department of Immigration to his visa application, and is fearful of being provoked in public into a retaliation that will be damaging for him.

Aladdin, a forty year-old tradesman of Lebanese Muslim background, explains that after his wife and daughter were violently assaulted in a racist attack in a shopping centre, 'We started to delay the shops for once a month, for example, we go to the shops and get all what we need.'

It affected me in that I can't leave my children alone, and family ... I have to stay with them, together. I wouldn't dare tell them to go shopping and me going elsewhere. ... We don't deal with anyone at all. We don't want to get close to anyone and vice versa. We kept a distance from all people. As the saying goes, 'folded within oneself'. ... We don't dare go on holiday to take the children, or to the beach. ... If we have to go to the cinemas, we pick a place where there are more Muslims, so that we would be more comfortable that there are less bad people [translated from Arabic].

Alya, a 40 year-old Muslim woman of Egyptian origin, a professional person who has lived 34 years in Australia, said that threatening, racist letters and phone messages 'had a horrific impact on all our lives. The kids – my son was seven, so he was always scared that people would be coming to attack us.' As a consequence, she said, 'I probably stayed [home more]; I didn't stay at home all the time, because I've got a lot of commitments outside, but it certainly made me feel less secure'.

In contrast with the egregious expressions of racist violence and verbal abuse, as we have seen, the respondents also talked at some length about the everyday experience of social incivility that permeated their daily lives. Some made clear distinctions between these incidents and the more extreme actions they defined as racist. Rozalb remarked that racism is a 'harsh' and 'extreme' word that applied more to acts of 'aggression', and she didn't think that it adequately described many of the incidents that she experienced in her everyday life. Most interviewees recounted many of these seemingly minor incidents: they could be as simple as being looked at in odd ways, but they could be extremely uncomfortable as a result. As Alya described it, 'To have people look at me as if I'm some kind of threat to their security and a real alien is a really difficult thing'.

Such incidents contribute to the overall sense of fear experienced by Arab and Muslim Australians, adding to the increasing desire to not go into public space, as we have already outlined. Sara recounted one episode where some men drove past making machine gun gestures and telling her to 'go home'; her response was that she was 'not too comfortable going out'. Hayat also describes simply being made to feel at school, 'from their eyes', as though she was 'someone different'. Yet this is more significant than simply a degree of minor discomfort – as she explains, the way the teacher treated her and her friends, 'we were always seen as less than them' [the Anglos]. Rozalb pointed out that these 'minor' incidents 'lead to racism', if they don't 'get unravelled'.

For example, I used to be able to, I love going for walks and runs, and at the moment I can't do that, because truly I'm quite fearful that someone ... will try to do something that will put me in a position where I need to defend myself. ... So doing things on a day to day to basis, that I used to be able to do, I can't do, because I'm fearful ...

As another explained in terms of apparently trivial incidents at work where he was made to feel as though he was the 'spokesperson for Middle Eastern affairs', and constantly put under pressure to discuss the Iraq war: 'It makes me feel completely uncomfortable being Australian'. In other words, such examples of mundane racism contribute to the wider experiences of exclusion and marginalisation that the more violent examples of racism dramatise.

Constrained by fear and incivility, Muslim and Arab Australians are forced to consider changing their names, their way of dress, their daily lives, or to live with everyday insecurity and affront. Some, as Ameera reports, have installed special security systems in their homes because of race-based harassment. Some Australian-born Muslims even consider emigration. Jamila, a 26 year-old university-educated Australian of Indonesian parentage, explained:

I don't hate Australia, but I would really like, I feel like I want to go somewhere where I can practise my religion easier. ... When September 11 happened ... my first reaction was, what is my daughter going to do? ...

She's a sixth generation Australian and my husband's fifth generation. ... I'm first generation Australian, and so both ways she's an Australian, and she's going to suffer because she's a Muslim, because of what these people did. ... I'm very insecure about staying here. ... We want to go overseas to get scholarships in Islam, ... anywhere where we could achieve that. ... That would be somewhere like Pakistan, or India or Syria: all the controversial places, unfortunately.

Aladdin says,

I have ... half my life here. I came here when I was 21 years and it's now been 20 years in Australia. ... We paid taxes like all others and we followed the rules as all others and we respected their laws – and we grew up.

Now having experienced what he sees as humiliating harassment by ASIO ('They only came to frighten us, not to understand and help or who's to blame'), he wants to say:

If you're not happy with my presence in Australia ... I'll go back to my country. If you don't want me here, I'll go and stay in my country. But I have left that country. ... I'll go back to Lebanon and settle down there. ... I won't see Australia in my life again till I die [translated from Arabic].

As Alya eloquently put it:

Especially after September 11, it felt like our home, which Australia has been our home, for almost all of my life ... was somehow not our home any more. This feeling that we really were foreigners here, and I've never felt like a foreigner, but ever since then I've started feeling more like a foreigner.

Conclusion

This report has attempted to portray concisely some of the experiences of racism amongst Australians of Arab and Muslim background since the attacks that took place in the United States in September 11, 2001. Using a quantitative survey and face-to-face interviews, this study examined the extent to which these groups have encountered increased or more intense forms of racism, abuse and violence in the wake of heightened social anxieties and prejudices resulting from the panic about terrorism. It also considered the nature and the sites of these encounters. It explored issues around reportage of such incidents and the readiness and ability of victims to use complaints procedures and organisations, police services and other resources. Further, the study explored the impact of these encounters on the everyday lives of respondents.

While incidence of racism towards Arab and Muslim Australians is not new, as we have already indicated, most respondents reported an increase in experiences of racism, both at a personal level and in terms of their communities as a whole, and this was particularly the case for women of these backgrounds. Moreover, Muslims were far more likely to experience such encounters, indicating the specific nature of these incidents in the wake of September 11 and local contemporaneous events, and this was reflected in the frequent references to terrorism, rape, gangs, and so on.

The nature of these experiences of racism varied widely, from the most egregious forms of physical violence or threats of violence, to active discrimination in workplaces and other sites, to verbal abuse and general feelings of discomfort and being made to feel ill at ease, especially in public places. Incidents took place in shopping centres, on the street, when driving or on public transport, through the media, at work and in leisure spaces, in schools and in government institutions. The perpetrators of these various acts were typically identified by respondents as of English-speaking background, and more often male than female. Religion was cited as the most common reason for these acts, as perceived by the interviewees, while some of the abuse clearly indicated references to terrorism and other, domestic events that have become ideologically linked to people of Islamic faith. One of the most disturbing findings of the study was the frequency of these incidents of racism – these were often everyday experiences and accepted as commonplace by the interviewees. The pervasive nature of these incidents suggest that for many citizens of Arab and Muslim background racism, abuse and violence form part of an everyday landscape of fear and incivility.

Numerous respondents indicated, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, that key institutions of authority and power were complicit in this culture of vilification. Many cited the media as a central source of racial vilification; others complained that the various levels of government and key governmental authorities were also sources of discrimination and racism: sometimes overtly but often covertly in so far as the racism of other bodies or individuals was unimpeded by the state. This, as well as some degree of ignorance of relevant authorities, may have contributed to the reticence of respondents to report experiences of vilification. There was either a general sense of distrust towards these authorities

(such as the police), or a feeling of resignation that little would or could be done about most of the experiences. Either way, few pursued processes of reporting incidents, and fewer were satisfied with the responses they received. The consequences for the everyday lives of the respondents were immense – women especially reported an increasing unwillingness to go out into public spaces, while many respondents generally exhibited a sense of disenfranchisement from civic life.

Issues and problems

The study throws up many issues that require further research and analysis. The first of these, and the necessary starting point, is the problem of terminology. We have freely used a variety of notions – racism, discrimination, vilification, harassment, abuse, prejudice, etc – to cover the range of experiences reported and the ways respondents have understood their nature. We have often also used these interchangeably, partly because interviewees tend not to make such distinctions. Most of these terms have technical meanings carefully defined in the academic and policy literature, but they are not necessarily the language ordinary citizens use. Most participants were happy to use the catch-all notion of racism to cover a range of experiences: and they do so because it has currency for describing an array of actions which share the common feature that cultural difference broadly understood is often at the heart of socially inappropriate behaviours which help to reproduce forms of social marginalisation. While some respondents made a distinction between racism as an overt behaviour and the forms of social incivility they experienced, it is evident from this study that there is no clear line to be drawn, and those respondents themselves sometimes made the link between the two categories of behaviour. This echoes two key points in the recent theoretical literature: the recognition that processes of racialisation (Miles, 1989) reconfigure social experiences as ethnic or racial ones, but always contain a complex of causes and effects; and that the pathologising of cultural difference has replaced biological explanations as the basis of the ‘new racism’ (Barker, 1981).

The second and related issue is that the academic and policy literature often rests on distinctions between aspects of cultural difference that don’t grasp the complexity or fuzziness of experience – religion, ethnicity, culture, nationality and race are not always clearly separate but overlap in the ways people articulate their senses of identity and belonging, and hence their perceptions of and responses to others. This is partially captured in the responses to the survey question about what participants thought were the reasons for others attacking them. While these could sometimes be unambiguous aspects (such as the wearing of the hijab), they frequently voiced a mix of racial, cultural, ethnic and religious factors, and often even conflated these:

‘I wasn’t wearing any particular religious or cultural dress, however my appearance is clearly that of a Middle Easterner.’

‘Because of Arabic, Muslim identity.’

‘Because of my appearance and identity as a Muslim.’

‘Speaking Arabic in a public place.’

‘Lack of understanding about the culture and religion.’

‘Wearing a beard and having dark hair and eyes.’

‘I look Lebanese.’

‘Colour and religion.’

‘Because I identified myself as Lebanese and supported a culture of people struggling, ie Palestinian and refugees.’

These reflect ‘racial’ or phenotypical (physical appearance) aspects, issues of cultural presentation or dress, some of which are specific to a religious faith, language, broader claims to an ethnic identity, which is sometimes expressed in terms of national origin, and so on. Some respondents simply said ‘Most of the above’, given that the questionnaire had listed a variety of possible reasons. In other words, these categories are not experienced as distinct dimensions of everyday life.

This study demonstrates the need to maintain a focus on the complexity of social experience in the analysis of racism. To this end, religious intolerance needs to be deemed as unacceptable as institutional discrimination or racial abuse, but not simply instated as a separate and distinct category.

The third issue is that what we have described as a pervasive landscape of fear and incivility fundamentally alters the social opportunities for Australian Arabs and Muslims to function as citizens. If, as Hage (1998) argues, racist practices must also be understood primarily as attempts to control the national space, then these experiences are fundamentally processes of social exclusion. It is not simply that people of Arabic-speaking or Muslim background experience abuse and harassment in their lives, but that these practices serve to disenfranchise them from full participation in Australian civic life. As one student respondent described it, she felt 'less than' her Anglo-Australian peers, while many interviewees commented on not being able to leave their homes. Similarly, several interviewees commented on the political dimension of these processes of marginalisation: one said he felt he wasn't being 'represented', others talked about the ways their political involvement – such as participation in demonstrations – was being threatened. More generally, they felt that the state was complicit in – or ignored – racist attacks.

The fourth issue that arises is the gendered dimensions of racist experiences. We have indicated the greater reportage of incidents by women than men of Arab and Muslim backgrounds in Australia. This has been noted before, but it has perhaps not yet been adequately analysed. It is sometimes claimed that women are more likely to make complaints (given that men do not want to be seen to be intimidated); it is also argued that Arab and Muslim women are much more likely to be victims of racist abuse. Certainly the wearing of the hijab was the single most cited concrete reason for experiences of racism, and far more likely to provoke abuse than males having beards or wearing traditional dress. Several commentators have discussed the ways in which the hijab has become, in the west, a key ideological symbol of not only the perceived cultural difference of the Middle East and Islam in particular, but also of political despotism and social oppression and sexual inequality (Mackie, 2002). Whether it is in this that the significance of the gendered dimension of racism lies; or whether there is a further dimensions of sexual power which adds to the already complicated layering of cultural and ethnic (and class) inequalities, only more focused research will discover. Certainly the myriad links between sexuality and racism, including the most violent forms, has been explored in other contexts (Theweleit, 1987). What we can say here is that if the experiences of racism are far greater for Australian women of Arab and Muslim backgrounds, then processes of exclusion have a significant gender dimension. It is perhaps ironic that, at a time when Islamic fundamentalisms are chastised by the west for their treatment of women, it is those (especially men) of Anglo-Australian background who exhibit significant intolerance towards women who represent cultural difference and hence add to their experience of marginalisation.

The fifth issue is the problem of the system of reportage of these incidents and the ways the authorities deal with them. The resigned belief that many racist experiences aren't worth reporting, together with the expectation that little could or would be done in relation to these experiences, poses real challenges to organisations whose primary task is to deal with and prevent such experiences. There are broader problems of public education (about tolerance and about informing people of their rights and about the institutions that are there to protect those rights) that are widely acknowledged, but perhaps the point that is most significant in the current context, post-September 11, is that the various organisations whose task it is to police racial vilification are too strongly identified with the state, and the state for many Arabs and Muslims is seen as complicit in the experience of racism in Australia (or as unwilling to treat these incidents seriously). This applies not just to institutions of law enforcement – such as the police – but also to institutions which seek to defend citizens against vilification and discrimination. It doesn't help, moreover, that one of the social sites described as contributing to racism in Australia – the media – is seen to be somehow shielded from state control. In other words, for many victims of racism, the state is seen to be part of the problem, not the solution. This degree of social and political disenfranchisement cannot be addressed simply by better bureaucratic procedures for dealing with harassment, but only by broader policies aimed at enhancing social and political inclusion. Without addressing these issues, living with racism becomes a sentence of exclusion, not just an inconvenience of the moment.

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