Multiculturalism, Islamophobia and the Muslim Minority in Australia: A Reflection

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Abstract

Australia's approach to multiculturalism has been a journey of evolving policies and societal shifts. The country's immigration policies in the 1960s marked a significant departure from the restrictive 'White Australia' policy, leading to a more diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious population. Recognizing the potential for value and norm conflicts, the Australian government adopted multiculturalism as a state ideology, aiming to foster social cohesion and reduce inter-community conflicts. This policy has been largely successful in managing conflicts, as evidenced by the relatively low incidence of political, ethnic, and religious violence, including terrorism, compared to other nations. The positive impact of multiculturalism is evident in the thriving Australian Muslim communities, which, along with other ethnic and religious groups, have been able to preserve their cultural heritage. These communities contribute significantly to the social and economic fabric of the nation. However, despite the overarching success of multiculturalism, challenges persist. The Muslim minority in Australia has faced Islamophobia, manifesting in both overt attacks and subtle forms of discrimination. This has been a complex issue, with some Muslim groups maintaining a degree of exclusivity and engaging in identity politics, while also recognizing and embracing the broader multicultural ethos that has become an integral part of Australia's identity. The Australian government has continued to refine its multicultural policies, with initiatives aimed at promoting anti-racism, access, and equity since 2010. These efforts are part of a broader commitment to diversity, belonging, and inclusion, which encompasses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well. The policy landscape is complemented by state and territory policies that further support multiculturalism. Despite the progress, the experiences of Australian Muslims highlight the ongoing need for vigilance against discrimination. Reports indicate that Australian Muslims are a diverse group, facing stereotypes and prejudice that can perpetuate social tensions. The Australian Human Rights Commission has emphasized the importance of sharing the stories of Australian Muslims to foster understanding and address Islamophobia. The Commission's findings underscore the need for a national anti-racism framework and strong leadership to combat discrimination and support social cohesion. While Australia's multicultural policy has been a beacon of successful integration and social harmony, it is clear that the journey is not complete. The nation continues to grapple with the dual realities of a celebrated multicultural society and the undercurrents of intolerance that challenge it. The experiences of the Australian Muslim community serve as a reminder of the work that remains to be done in ensuring that multiculturalism is not just a state ideology but a lived reality for all Australians. The path forward lies in education, awareness, and institutional change that upholds the values of diversity and inclusion for every individual in the nation.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, ideology, Muslim, Australia, diversity

Introduction

Today's society generally supports the concept of multiculturalism. This idea has gained popularity and is now broadly recognized as a desirable societal principle and a state ideology. In Western nations, including those in Western Europe, the United States, and Australia, the notion of multiculturalism is assumed to be a given for the 'New World,' supplanting the 'Old World' that was perceived as traditional, discriminatory,

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and authoritarian.[1] Consequently, global perspectives on principles and dominance vary. This belief system is being progressively formulated and adopted in multiple nations, albeit with variations in the method of its execution. Multiculturalism has at least three elements, namely: culture, cultural diversity, and special ways to anticipate cultural diversity. According to Parekh[2] (2009: 19), a multicultural society is then a society that includes two or more cultural communities. The term multiculturalism refers to the reality of cultural diversity. The term multiculturalism refers to a normative response to that fact. The next view put forward by Azyumardi Azra[3] is that Multiculturalism represents a perspective that informs a range of cultural policies designed to recognize and embrace the religious diversity and multicultural aspects that are a fundamental part of society. Drawing from a breadth of scholarly insights, it is evident that multiculturalism can be seen as a philosophical framework, or at times an ideology, advocating for the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultural communities, each possessing equal socio-political entitlements and standing within a contemporary societal structure. This concept originates from a recognition of cultural variety, often described as a multicultural existence.In this study, multiculturalism is examined around solidarity and brotherhood, gender equality, open trade, family values, respect for morality, feeling sufficient in life, sharing and control of power (Burhan Nurgiantoro, 1998)[4].

The concept of multiculturalism emerged as a historical response to the influx of immigrants from Asia and the Middle East to Western nations, particularly after World War II, reaching a high point in the 1960s. This migration significantly altered the ethnic, social, and cultural demographic makeup. Consequently, it highlighted the challenges faced by immigrants in reconciling their unique cultural identities with the established norms of liberal democratic societies, as noted by scholars Joseph H. Carens and Melissa S. Williams in 1996.[5]

Liberal democracies encounter two distinct challenges regarding this issue. The first is an internal one: ensuring the social assimilation of immigrants, enabling them to adjust to the prevailing cultural norms and perspectives of their new environment. The second challenge is external: preserving the unique cultural identities and heritages that migrant populations carry with them from their original communities.[6]

In the pursuit of social integration, liberal democracies address the ethnic and cultural diversity of minority populations through two principal ideological approaches: the ideology of assimilation and the ideology of multiculturalism. These strategies, as identified by James Jupp in 1984, are fundamental in guiding how societies with diverse populations manage the inclusion of minority groups. Assimilation policies aim to integrate minorities into the prevailing culture, while multiculturalism celebrates and preserves the distinct cultural identities within a society.[7]

Assimilation ideology presupposes that immigrants will abandon their traditional customs in favor of adopting Western cultural norms and ways of life, a process often termed Western conformism. Within this framework of assimilation, dominant cultural values are prioritized, relegating the unique aspects of ethnic minorities to the margins. Such a stance can lead to the stigmatization of ethnic cuisines and the devaluation of languages tied to ethnic origins, often perceived as less sophisticated or disadvantageous in social and political realms. This approach is inherently racist and exclusionary, denying equitable access to societal and governmental resources, and it fosters an environment ripe for ethnocentrism, which acknowledges only one cultural system as valid. During the 1960s, the assimilation ideology faced scrutiny, and the emergence of multiculturalism sparked debates in scholarly and public spheres regarding the future shape of national ideologies. Some voiced concerns that multiculturalism and ethnic diversity posed a risk to national unity and Western lifestyles. Conversely, others contended that embracing multiculturalism and

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[1] Eliezer Ben Rafael (1996). 'Multiculturalism in Sociological Perspective," in Rainer Baubock (ed.), *The Challenge of Diversity: Integration and Pluralism in Societies of Immigration*, England: Avebury, p. 143.

[2] Bhikhu Parekh (2009), *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Keberagaman Budaya dan Teori Politik*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, p. 19.

[3] A Talk with Azyumardi Azra, result of interview in Jakarta, 2 October 2015.

[4] Burhan Nurgiantoro (1998), *Teori Pengkajian Fiksi*, Yogyakarta: Universitas Gajah Mada, p. 163.

[5] Joseph H. Carens and Melissa S. William (1996), "Muslim Minorities in Liberal Democracies: The Politic of Misrecognition," in Rainer Baubock and Agnes Heller (eds.), *The Challenge of Diversity: Integration and Pluralism in Societies of Immigration*, England: Avebury, p. 157.

[6] Jean I. Martin (1978), *The Migrant Presence: Australian Responses 1947-1977*, Sidney: George Allen & Unwin.

[7] James Jupp (1991), "One among Many," in David Goodman, D. J. O'hearn and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (eds.), *Multicultural: The Challenge of Change Australia*, Victoria: Scribe, pp. 184-185.

ethnic variety could address the social, political, and economic inequities faced by minorities. This perspective is bolstered by the belief that a national identity rooted in racism would weaken as multiculturalism flourishes, as noted by Norman C. Habel in 1992.[8]

Multiculturalism has evolved into a movement aimed at safeguarding the cultural identities of minority communities. This shift in ideology has been influenced by several elements, such as: (a) the variable makeup of substantial migrant populations, (b) the rapid pace of migration leading to increased numbers of immigrants, and (c) the development of new perspectives within the majority white population regarding the principles of equality and justice for minorities, as noted by The Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs in 1982. In Australia, a comparable perspective is prevalent. It is a nation built on the shoulders of immigrants and is recognized as a liberal democracy situated in Asia, close to Indonesia. The religious landscape in Australia, with the exception of the native Aboriginal communities, was primarily shaped by settlers from overseas. These settlers brought with them their diverse religious beliefs and practices, which have since evolved through the influence of missionaries, clergy, academics, monks, and the media. Consequently, the religious composition of Australia is intrinsically linked to the country's migratory history and the evolution of its populace. Until the 1960s, the prevailing view in Australia was that it was predominantly a Christian nation. However, this perspective shifted during Prime Minister Whitlam's time, reflecting a transformation towards a society enriched by diverse cultural heritages. Consequently, Australia also embraced a variety of religious beliefs. The dense and dynamic population of Australia, with its myriad of cultural values and norms, can be sociologically perceived as a breeding ground for potential conflicts and violence due to its social, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Yet, it is this very diversity that constitutes Australia's distinct character. Notably, Australia is recognized for its relative tranquility amidst various forms of conflict, particularly religious strife, in stark contrast to its neighbors, including Indonesia, as well as other regions like the Americas and Europe.

This inquiry presents itself: How does a nation, home to a diverse array of ethnic groups, manage to mitigate the escalation of tension and violence that often arises from cultural disputes, terrorism, and extremism? Such a country stands tall and respected for its ability to foster social unity and cohesion, seemingly defying the conventional theories of conflict management and setting a precedent in nation-building.

Constructing a harmonious society and social solidarity in Australia, hailed as a model of modern success, is far from a straightforward task. The journey has been marked by persistent resistance. Initially, there was a strong hesitance within the dominant white population to engage and empathize with immigrants, minorities, and people of color, who introduced their distinct and sometimes clashing cultural identities. Furthermore, there was a palpable fear among the white populace of relinquishing their racial and cultural dominance, rooted in Anglo-Celtic traditions, coupled with an intense sense of nationalism.

The paper delves into the challenges faced by the Muslim minority in Australia, examining the dynamics of multiculturalism and the prevalence of Islamophobia, as well as tracing the historical footprint of this community on the continent commonly known as the land of the kangaroo.

The Historical Background of Australian Muslim

Muslims have a longstanding history in Australia, dating back to times prior to European settlement in 1778. Makassar fishermen from the Indonesian archipelago were known to navigate the waters off the Darwin coast in search of sea cucumbers (trepang), which they traded with China. During these visits, some of the fishermen formed unions with Indigenous Australian women and introduced the Islamic faith to the region. The significant influx of Muslims to Australia commenced with Afghan migrants between 1860 and 1910. This period marked the beginning of a notable chapter when mining magnates employed camels,

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[8] Norman C. Habel (ed.) (1992), *Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia*, Adelaide: Australian Association for the Study of Religious (AARS), p. 12.

facilitated by Afghan handlers, for transport and inland expeditions. (Adapted from Mary Lucille Jones, 1993).[9]

Subsequently, a contingent of 34 Afghan camels was introduced, which led to the establishment of a robust Muslim community in the peripheral towns. Their presence, albeit brief, served as an impetus for others grappling with economic hardship in Australia's expansive and affluent territories to seek fortunes on the continent. An influx of approximately 3,000 to 4,000 individuals marked their entry into Australia, where they predominantly took up the trade of peddling essential goods. This period heralded the advent of Muslims in Australia, a chapter that has since been woven into the nation's historical and cultural tapestry.

In 1901, the establishment of the federation brought about a challenging period for the Muslim community with the introduction of the White Policy, a racially prejudiced legislation. This policy denied non-European individuals the chance to apply for naturalization and permanent residency. As a consequence, employment opportunities dwindled, relegating them to the fringes of society. A significant number chose to return to their countries of origin, while a minority persisted in Australia. By 1921, the population of those who stayed had dwindled to approximately 3,000. They faced religious and racial ostracism from the Anglo-Celtic majority, leading to a decline in adherence to Islamic faith among them, as noted by Mary Lucille Jones in her 1993 study.[10] The 1901 White policy marked the end of the arrival of Muslims who entered Australia.

Following World War II, a period often referred to as the 'honeymoon phase' unfolded for the Muslim community. This era was marked by the resolution of various challenges faced by the Australian society, both from within and beyond its borders. The nation had been grappling with a sluggish increase in its population, which stood at a mere 9 million, in stark contrast to its robust economic expansion that necessitated the importation of additional workforce from overseas. On the international front, Australia was confronted with aggression due to the Japanese military's incursions into Southeast Asia, which included the occupation of Papua New Guinea and the bombardment of Australia's defenses in Darwin. Additionally, the rise of new Asian nations, including neighboring countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, and India, posed external challenges. In response to these adverse circumstances, the Australian government promptly took measures to boost population growth as part of a strategic plan for long-term national defense. This involved relaxing the criteria for immigration and the acceptance of migrant refugees, concurrently reinforcing the process of industrialization that was already underway.

Prior to the latter half of the 20th century, the influx of Muslim ethnic groups into Australia was minimal, yet those who arrived were notably well-educated and held professional qualifications. It wasn't until the decade of the 1960s that the Muslim demographic saw a significant surge, with approximately 10,000 individuals, predominantly from Turkey, relocating to Australia. This movement was facilitated by a bilateral agreement between the Turkish and Australian governments. The following decade witnessed a substantial migration of Muslims from Lebanon, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, seeking refuge from the civil strife in their homeland, with subsequent arrivals from Palestine. Yearly, Australia continued to welcome Muslims from diverse nations including Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. This steady influx contributed to a doubling of Australia's population by the year 1998, marking a significant demographic shift since the post-World War II era, as noted by Gary D. Bouma in 1994.[11]

This last phase can be called the formation of a Muslim community base in Australian society, especially from the 1960s to the 1970s. In general, the Australian Islamic community is urban, as seen in the Australian census (1996), the majority of Muslims (50%) live in Sydney and Melbourne (32%) and a small number of others are scattered in other major cities.[12]

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[9] Mary Lucille Jones (1993), "The Years of Decline: Australian Muslims 1900-40," in Jones M. Lucille (ed.), *An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the 17 Century to the Present*, Melbourne: The Law Printer, pp. 84-85.

[10] Jones (1993), "The Years of Decline," pp. 84-85.

[11] Gary D. Bouma (1994), *Mosque and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, p. 27. See, Dedi Mulyana (1995), "Twenty-Five Indonesians in Melbourne: A Study of the Social Construction and Transformation of Ethnic Identity," unpublished dissertation, Monash University, Melbourne, pp. 263-270.

[12] See, Australian Goverment (2011), *Trend in Migration: Australia 2010-2011*, Department of   Migration and Citizenship.

The Muslim community's foundation is twofold. Primarily, it's structured around ethnic lines. The Turkish community represents the majority in Sydney, with significant Lebanese and Bangladeshi populations following. Indonesians also form a substantial segment of Sydney's demographic mosaic. Similarly, Victoria is home to a notable presence of Turkish and Albanian groups. These communities predominantly practice Sunni and Shia Islam, with a minority adhering to the Ismaili branch, as well as the Lahore and Qadiani factions of the Ahmadiyya movement. Secondly, the community is also organized by locality. In areas like Preston in Melbourne and Lakemba in Sydney, the Muslim population is dense enough to establish their own local communities.[13]

The newly established Muslim community has not yet succeeded in bridging the gaps between different ethnic Muslim groups, remaining divided along ethnic lines. The allegiance to one's ethnicity continues to be a strong force, resulting in minimal social interaction among these groups. At Australian Islamic festivals, ethnic groups such as Turks, Lebanese, and Albanians are quite noticeable, each celebrating in their own distinct way. This division among ethnic Muslim groups may be a natural result of the mindset of individuals settling into new, unfamiliar environments, as suggested by Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh.[14]

Mosques serve as a unifying element among diverse ethnic groups within neighborhoods and cities. This role helps to mitigate the potential for overly strong ethnic allegiances. In the Muslim community, mosques are pivotal for both worship and social interaction. They act as hubs for the practice, interpretation, and celebration of Islamic rituals. Consequently, mosques also function as landmarks for community identity and self-recognition. The Australian Islamic community, in particular, orchestrates nearly all its religious and societal functions through these sacred spaces. The expansion of Islam in Australia aligns with the establishment of numerous mosques, notably in New South Wales and Victoria, where there are 80 mosques. The government's favorable stance on mosque construction has significantly aided this development.[15]

The opening ceremony of Preston, Victoria's most expansive mosque marked a significant moment, attended by delegates of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne. This event underscored the accomplishment, despite the complex process involved in obtaining approval for mosque construction. The mosque has been a cradle for the development of ethnic and Islamic leadership. This leadership is predominantly composed of clerics dispatched by their respective ethnic nations, notably Turkey, Egypt, and Albania, along with a modest contingent of Islamic academics, alumni of universities in the Middle East. Policies promoting multiculturalism have streamlined the process for these clerics to secure visas for entry, facilitating their mission to bolster religious services. The role of religious leaders is pivotal in preserving the religious identity of their communities. Nonetheless, these imported models of leadership frequently face challenges as they acclimate to the unfamiliar milieu of Australian cultural dynamics, and some clerics continue to adhere to an 'ethnic-centric' approach. Consequently, the core topics of Islamic studies are not adequately addressed, diminishing their relevance and insight into the experiences of Australian Muslims, as noted by Anthony H. Jones and Abdullah Saeed.[16]

Initiatives to represent the diverse Muslim ethnic groups have led to the creation of numerous bodies, from local to national levels. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) operates at the national level, while entities like The Islamic Council of Victoria serve at the state level, acting as the Muslim community's

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[13] Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs (1998), *Towards a National Agenda for Multicultural Australia: A Discussion Paper*, Canberra: Commenwealth of Australia. See, Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Aus-tralians: Our Developing Nationhood*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 86

[14] Abdullah Saeed and Shahram Akbarzadeh (eds.) (2003), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sidney: UNSW Press.

[15] Departement of Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of Multicultural Affairs (1989), *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

[16] Anthony H. Jones and Abdullah Saeed (2003), *Islam in Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, Sydney. See, Abdullah Saeed (2004), *Muslim Australians: Their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions*, Departement of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Multicultural Foundation in Association with The University of Melbourne, p. 7.

liaison with state authorities. AFIC plays a pivotal role in voicing the concerns of Muslims at the national level and also works to support and address the requirements of Muslims across Australia.[17]

This organization is funded by the support of local communities, oil-producing Muslim countries, and the proceeds from the issuance of *halal* certificates. Beyond the confines of this entity, there exist various social groups dedicated to the proficiency in English, fostering unity, advocating for gender equality, and preserving cultural heritage. The Canberra Islamic Center stands out as a significant institution, founded in 1993 and officially opened by the Governor General four years later. This center represents a milestone for Islamic culture and the Muslim way of life, offering socio-cultural amenities and acting as an intermediary between the Australian authorities and Islamic diplomatic missions in Canberra on behalf of the Muslim community. Furthermore, a plethora of weekly and occasional religious sessions are organized by individuals, groups, and student bodies who are pursuing their studies in Australia. The vibrancy of these religious practices often gives the impression that one is not in the secular, predominantly Christian context of Australia. However, these activities saw a marked decline following the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the Bali bombings in 2003, as noted by Khalida Begum in her 1984 study.[18]

In the 1980s, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) initiated the creation of contemporary Islamic educational institutions ranging from primary to high school levels, with financial backing from Saudi Arabia. This initiative included the establishment of notable institutions such as The King Khalid Islamic College in Melbourne, The Malik Fahd Islamic School in Sydney, and an Islamic College in Perth. The educational program at these schools encompasses both secular and religious studies. Graduates from these institutions are acknowledged for their academic excellence through their acceptance into Australian tertiary education. The sustainability of these Islamic educational centers, along with other similar schools, receives financial aid and subsidies from the Australian government, which are derived from the taxes paid by Australian citizens. This support system stands in contrast to Western nations like the United States and Britain, where Islamic schools do not benefit from state funding, making the Australian model a more favorable circumstance for the Muslim community in Australia.[19]

Contemporary Islamic educational entities play a crucial role in sustaining the educational journey of second and third generation Muslims in Australia. Originating from developing nations and often caught in the turmoil of civil conflict, a majority of these individuals possess limited education and lack professional skills. Consequently, only a minority with academic or higher educational credentials and specialized knowledge manage to overcome the barriers within the entrenched social frameworks of Australian society, which often leads to their marginalization.

Immigration's impact on both Australians and Muslim migrants transcends mere population statistics, encompassing a broad spectrum of social, cultural, religious, political, and economic factors. This is evident in the way the Australian community perceives Muslims, and conversely, how Muslim migrants strive to adjust and assimilate into their new environment. Often, Australians' perception of Muslims is tainted by stereotypes that paint them as a marginalized group lacking a rich history or civilization, and as potential participants in a global conspiracy. These stereotypes are sometimes reinforced—or challenged—by the media's portrayal and the influence of global political events that are unfairly associated with the Australian Muslim community. Consequently, this leads to biases and discriminatory practices, manifesting as exclusion, isolation, and animosity Muslim communities engaging with Australian society often encounter difficulties assimilating due to the stark contrast between their cultural heritage and the diverse cultural landscape of Australia. The transition can be jarring, leaving many feeling displaced and overwhelmed by their minority status in a religious context, compelling them to assimilate into unfamiliar cultural practices. Common reactions include culture shock, bewilderment, and a sense of disconnection, which are natural barriers to the adaptation and assimilation process within Australian society. It is observed that social interactions within these communities frequently gravitate towards ethnic similarities, including cultural

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[17] Alan Black (ed.) (1991), *Religion in Australia: Sociological Perspective*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
[18] Khalida Begum (1984), "Islam and Multiculturalism: With Reference to Muslims in Victoria," unpublished dissertation, Monash University, p. 110
[19] Drew Youngman (1995), *Double Standard: An Independent View of Religious Discrimination in Australia*, Self-Published.

symbols and traditions. While the reaction of a segment of Australians towards Muslims may be considered subdued, the prevailing commitment to multiculturalism and the general sentiment within Australian society casts a ray of hope for the integration and adaptation of Australian Islam. This optimism is further bolstered by the Australian Government's dedication to fostering a sense of inclusion and mutual religious comprehension. Notably, the formation of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) stands out as a significant initiative. The WCRP has been instrumental in promoting and aiding new immigrant communities through a series of interfaith dialogues and gatherings, playing a crucial role in this endeavor.[20]

The current narrative surrounding 'Islam in the West' characterizes it as a clash between two distinct cultures—Muslims and Westerners—stemming from their fundamental differences, with one being faith-based and the other secular. Consequently, Islam's presence in Australia is often viewed as a challenge to the nation's multicultural ethos. This perceived discord is thought to result in an ongoing cultural opposition by Muslims to the prevailing aspects of modernity, which include the principles of democracy, the movement towards secularism, and the pursuit of gender equality.In his dissertation, "Twenty Five Indonesians in Melbourne: A Study of the Social Construction and Transformation of Ethnic Identity," presented at Monash University in 1995, Dedi Mulyana also shares a perspective that echoes this sentiment. He suggests that a segment of the Indonesian Muslim community continues to hold a strong ideological allegiance to Islam. This adherence, he posits, casts a shadow of doubt over their integration, leading to perceptions of them as potentially disruptive to the cohesive national identity of Australia.[21]

In his 2004 publication 'Muslim Australians: Their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions', Abdullah Saeed presents a theory that diverges from the earlier assertions of Zubaida Begum regarding the dual ideological rifts within Australian Muslim factions, as well as Michael Humphrey's concept of cultural defiance. Saeed's work delineates a significant shift in the stance of Muslim communities in Australia towards the nation's multicultural ethos. The quest for a distinct identity has seen Islamic political thought diminish in its influence, with the community's aspirations aligning more closely with full-fledged Australian citizenship. Progress is evident as this group actively seeks to assimilate and embody the Australian national identity. According to Saeed, the ideological underpinnings of multiculturalism are pivotal to this assimilation, with religious liberty and the freedom to employ religious symbols being key components.Gary D. Bouma's scholarly contributions underscore the significant role played by the Islamic community in fostering religious diversity in Australia. His research highlights how this community's efforts have been instrumental in establishing a base for peaceful coexistence among different faiths within the country. This recognition is a testament to their impact on Australian society. Furthermore, the nation's approach to multiculturalism can serve as a practical illustration of Bhikhu Parekh's interpretation. Parekh posits that a society is multicultural if it encompasses a variety of cultures, much like it is multi-religious or multi-lingual when it includes multiple religions or languages. He suggests that a multicultural society is one that houses diverse global cultural groups, each with its unique blend of concepts, meanings, values, social structures, histories, customs, traditions, and practices.

Islamophobia in Australia

Islamophobia often stems from a lack of understanding about Islam. Nowadays, with the advent of information technology, one can easily access knowledge not just through traditional means like books and the internet, but also via social media platforms. The media has the potential to both hinder and foster various issues, including the spread of Islamophobia among its audience.[22]

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[20] Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of Multicultural Affairs (1989), *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

[21] Dedi Mulyana (1995), "Twenty-Five Indonesians in Melbourne: A Study of the Social Construction and Transformation of Ethnic Identity," unpublished dissertation, Monash University, Melbourne, pp. 263-270.

[22] Shinta Lailatu, Maghfiroh and Siti Rohma (2021), "Optimalisasi Media Sosial Sebagai Counter Islamophobia di Australia," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 44-49

The dynamics between social media and societal interactions are shaped by four primary factors. Initially, it's the personal usage patterns of social media that intertwine with one's lifestyle, significantly impacted by how frequently social media is utilized in daily routines. Subsequently, age plays a pivotal role, as it significantly affects how individuals engage with social media platforms. Furthermore, the diverse personalities reflected across social media profiles contribute to this relationship. Lastly, the distinction in how individuals connect within physical and online communities also influences this interaction.[23]

The rise of Islamophobia in Australia can be partially attributed to the influx of asylum seekers and immigrants. Moreover, a series of pivotal events have significantly impacted the perception of Muslims, such as the attacks on September 11th, the Bali bombings in 2002, the Madrid train bombings in 2004, and the London bombings in 2005, after which the Muslim community faced widespread suspicion.[24]

Pauline Hanson gained notoriety for her critical stance on multiculturalism, particularly towards indigenous populations and various minority groups. She has made controversial statements, such as suggesting that Muslims would be welcome in Australia only if they practiced Christianity.[25] In 2007, in Camden, a pig's head was found adorned with the Australian flag at the location designated for the construction of an Islamic school.[26] In 2011, a movement emerged to prevent Muslim communities from utilizing worship spaces in Melbourne's East St Kilda suburb. By the middle of 2014, this sentiment had escalated to the outright refusal of a mosque's construction in Bendigo, Victoria. Local inhabitants expressed concerns that the presence of a mosque could lead to violence in Bendigo and the imposition of Sharia law. One individual's comment encapsulated this perspective: "Muslims who desire a mosque should relocate to the Middle East; this is Australia."[27]

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils has expressed concern over the rising discrimination targeting Muslims, who are easily recognizable due to their distinctive names, attire, and places of worship. Representing approximately 150 Islamic entities in Australia, the federation has voiced this concern in their submission for the consideration of the government's Religious Discrimination Bill. The federation's chairman, Dr. Rateb Juneid, has proposed amendments to the draft bill, advocating for enhanced safeguards for the Muslim community.

The draft highlights a growing trend of intolerance towards minority groups within Australian society, particularly targeting religious communities. It underscores the necessity for legal safeguards to uphold the freedom of religious practice and shield against bigotry. The institution has advocated for the addition of clauses that address the defamation and degradation experienced by the Muslim population in Australia. It notes the surge in anti-Muslim rhetoric online, which risks normalizing assaults on Muslims. The urgency of addressing Islamophobia has been magnified by the tragic events in New Zealand, where a mosque was attacked by an Australian suspected of terrorism, Brenton Tarrant. Recent findings from a 2021 survey reveal that nearly 80% of Australian Muslims have encountered prejudice. These findings stem from a comprehensive national survey conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission, involving over 1,000 Muslim participants.[28]

In the year 2020, the Holland Park Mosque in Brisbane found itself defaced with symbols of Nazism and references to the terrorist Brenton. The legislation in question has been open for public feedback for a month, with the consultation concluding on Wednesday, the 2nd of October, 2020. Christian Porter, the Attorney General of Australia, characterized the bill as a defensive measure intended to safeguard individuals of various faiths, rather than as a tool for enabling discrimination.

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[23] Riaz Hassan et al. (2018), *Australian Muslim: The Challenge of Islamophobia and Social Distance*, 2018 International Center for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia.

[24] N. Lean (2012), *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*, London: Pluto Press.

[25] B. Packham (2007), "Christian Muslims' Welcome, Says Hanson," *News.com*, retrieved June 2, 2020, http://www.news.com.au/national/christian-muslims-welcome-sayshanson/story-e6frfkp9-1111113251407.

[26] R. Al Natour (2010), "Folk devils and the proposed Islamic school in Camden," *Continuum*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 573-585.

[27] ABC News (2014), "Bendigo Mosque: Council Approves Mosque Despite Fierce Protests," *ABC News*, retrieved June 2, 2020, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-19/bendigo-council-approvesmosque-despite-objections/5534634.

[28] Republika (2021), "Mayoritas Muslim Australia Pernah Alami Diskriminasi," *Republika*, retrieved January 2, 2022, https://www.republika.co.id/berita/qwjpio366/mayoritas-muslim-australia-pernah-alami-diskriminasi.

According to the proposed legislation, acts of discrimination on the basis of religion would incur legal consequences. Moreover, if a large corporation were to dismiss an employee for expressing their religious convictions, it would have to demonstrate that the dismissal caused the company "financial hardship". This requirement prompted the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils to inquire why such a stipulation was not made universal across all businesses. Nonetheless, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that the protection of religious freedoms does not infringe upon the rights of others.

The plea to the government was for the establishment of a viable solution that would equitably consider the rights of religious communities alongside those of the broader public. The 2020 report on Islamophobia in Australia highlighted the ongoing victimization of Muslims through acts of aggression and violence. The Muslim community in Australia has reportedly felt a heightened sense of vulnerability since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, which has relegated them to an undesirable predicament. Furthermore, the rise of ISIS has exacerbated Western apprehensions and hostility towards Islam and its followers. A revelation by The National Interests, an Australian entity, in September 2020 disclosed a study indicating that non-Muslim residents in areas with significant Muslim populations exhibited lower levels of Islamophobia compared to the overall sentiments in cities like Sydney and Melbourne, suggesting that harmonious coexistence may serve as a remedy to Islamophobic sentiments.

Islamophobia encompasses the unfounded negative biases or feelings targeted at Islam and its followers. Often, Australians possess limited knowledge about Muslims and their beliefs, leading to the erroneous grouping of these diverse communities as regressive, oppressive towards women, and prone to violence. The visible religious symbols of some Muslims, such as the hijab or veil worn by women, further fuel these misconceptions. There is a hasty and incorrect assumption that all Muslims adhere rigidly to their faith, which is deemed too conservative for contemporary, secular norms.

Muslims, like any substantial demographic group, represent a tapestry of ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Sociologist Riaz Hassan highlighted in 2017-2018 that 37% of Australian Muslims were native-born, with the rest originating from 183 different nations. The 2016 Census recorded over 600,000 individuals identifying as Muslim, with the majority residing in Sydney and Melbourne, often in specific suburbs. These areas are marked by their ethnic businesses, educational institutions, and places of worship, contributing to their visibility. Our research delves into Islamophobia within the ten suburbs with the highest Muslim populations in Sydney and Melbourne, in contrast to two other urban regions. Census data indicates that the percentage of Muslim inhabitants in these locales varies from 59% in Lakemba, NSW, to 30% in Dandenong, Victoria.

In a study conducted by The National Interests, 1,020 individuals were polled, with an equal number from a specific target region and from the urban centers of Sydney and Melbourne. Participants were presented with various assertions, such as 'the Muslim population in Australia is excessively large,' 'concerns about Muslims creating enclaves in Sydney or Melbourne,' or 'discomfort at the sight of Muslim women wearing headscarves.'

Participants rated their agreement with these statements on a scale from one to five, which corresponded to a range of Islamophobia from nonexistent to severe. The findings revealed that non-Muslim residents in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods exhibited lower levels of Islamophobia than the broader Sydney and Melbourne populace, with scores of 2.31 versus 2.80, respectively. This supports the contact hypothesis, which posits that interaction between diverse groups typically, though not invariably, diminishes intergroup bias.

This finding is at odds with the conflict theory, which argues that interactions between distinct groups can sometimes heighten feelings of unease and perceived threat. Additionally, the research indicated that people from Sydney displayed less Islamophobic attitudes than those from Melbourne. Specifically, in Sydney's Muslim-dominated areas, the Islamophobia score among non-Muslims was 2.18, in contrast to 2.32 in Melbourne's equivalent districts.

This disparity may be attributed to the denser Muslim population in Western Sydney compared to the more dispersed Muslim community in Melbourne. This further corroborates the notion that increased exposure to minority groups can lead to a reduction in prejudicial attitudes. Regarding the correlation between age, education, and Islamophobia in Australia, it appears that Islamophobic sentiments decrease among the younger population. Individuals between 18 to 34 years old have been noted to have an Islamophobia index of 2.32, in contrast to the higher index of 2.80 observed in the population over 65 years old. This trend aligns with existing studies that suggest a rise in prejudicial attitudes with advancing age.

The shift in educational content over recent years, especially within school and university curricula, is believed to contribute to this pattern. A higher level of education correlates with lower levels of Islamophobia; university-educated individuals have an Islamophobia index of 2.47, whereas those with only a decade of formal education have a higher index of 2.90. Moreover, the study indicates that Christian individuals tend to exhibit higher Islamophobic tendencies, with an index of 2.77, compared to those without religious affiliation, who scored 2.48, and those of other non-Islamic faiths, who scored 2.45. These observations were consistent across both suburban and urban areas included in the research.

Multiculturalism as State Ideology

Regarding the demographics and education in Australia, it appears that Islamophobia is inversely related to age. Specifically, Australians between the ages of 18 and 34 have been found to exhibit lower levels of Islamophobia, with an average score of 2.32, compared to those above the age of 65, who average at 2.80 on the Islamophobia scale. This trend aligns with existing studies that suggest a correlation between increasing age and rising prejudice.

Australia's identity is deeply rooted in immigration. The nation's history as a land of settlers primarily from the United Kingdom is well-documented. Following its discovery by James Cook, Australia initially served as a penal colony for the overflow of British convicts. However, the 16th century marked a significant shift with the influx of Chinese immigrants, drawn by the gold rush in Victoria. Recognizing the need to grow its sparse population, the Australian government also encouraged immigration during this period, as noted by Ghea Nawafilla in 2013.[29]

Subsequently, the Australian authorities implemented a legislative measure concerning immigration known as the White Australian Policy. This policy was characterized by its exclusionary stance, denying entry to immigrants who were not white. The stipulation was that only immigrants of the same racial background, specifically those from England or those possessing a European appearance with white skin, were permitted entry into Australia, as noted by Brock in 2012.[30]

The Australian government, concerned about potential future conflicts arising from racial and ideological disparities, sought to preserve a national identity aligned with Western economic, social, and cultural norms. This approach was sustained until 1973 when it was discontinued, allowing immigrants from diverse backgrounds to settle in Australia. Over the span of nearly six decades following the war, Australia has become home to over 6.5 million immigrants, including 660,000 refugees. The 1960s saw 45 percent of immigrants hailing from the United Kingdom or Ireland, a figure that dropped to 13 percent by the 1990s, as the demographic shifted towards an increase in settlers from the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East. The Muslim population in Australia saw a significant rise post-World War II, growing from a modest 2,704 in 1947 to 22,311 in 1971, and reaching 604,240 by 2016.

In the early 1970s, Australia's embrace of multiculturalism led to a shift in migration patterns, with a noticeable decline in Turkish grants and a rise in immigrants from various Muslim-majority nations beyond the Arab world. This surge in Arab migration stemmed from two primary causes. Initially, the driving forces were conflicts in several Arab nations, notably the Lebanese civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990.

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[29] Ghea Nawafilla (2013), *Kehidupan Multikulturalisme di Australia*, Paper, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik Unair Surabaya, p. 12.
[30] Bastian Brock (2012), "Immigration, Multiculturalism and Changing Face of Australia," in *Peace Psychology in Australia*, New York, US: Springer Peisker, p. 57.

Additionally, Australia's appealing policies, which included the introduction of progressive social reforms such as multiculturalism and an expansionist approach to economic programs, played a significant role. These policies were complemented by targeted migration schemes designed to fill gaps in the labor market. Recent data from the Ministry of Home Affairs indicates a growing trend in immigration from Muslim countries, with a notable increase in permanent migrants from Pakistan (6,235) and Malaysia (3,205). The 2014–15 fiscal year also saw a significant number of skilled migrants from Arab and Muslim countries, including Malaysia (3,205), Indonesia (1,773), Iraq (466), and Syria (313), choosing Australia as their new home.[31]

Muslims in Australia represent a vibrant and varied component of the nation's contemporary multicultural landscape. Originating from over 70 nations, including regions like the Middle East, Russia, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Southeast Asia, and China, they contribute to the rich cultural tapestry of the country. According to the latest census figures, the Muslim population stands at 280,000, accounting for approximately 1.5% of Australia's overall populace. This demographic is fairly balanced in terms of gender distribution, with men making up 53% and women 47% (Saeed, 2003, p. 1).[32]

In recent years, the growth rate of non-Christian faiths has surpassed that of Christianity. In the last decade, the adherent count for religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism has nearly doubled, becoming more prevalent. Particularly, Hinduism saw the most substantial increase from 2006 to 2016, largely due to South Asian immigration.

During the 2006 Census, out of an approximate population of 19.813 million, 12.7 million identified as Christians. By the 2016 Census, this number had declined to about 12.2 million of a total population of 23.402 million. This represents a decrease in the Christian share of the population from 0.63 percent to 0.52 percent, a reduction of roughly 11 percent. As of 2016, the predominant Christian groups were Catholics (22.6 percent of the population), followed by Anglicans (13.3 percent), and other Christian denominations (16.3 percent). The most significant non-Christian religions were Islam (2.6 percent), Buddhism (2.4 percent), and Hinduism (1.9 percent). Additionally, the proportion of Australians who indicated no religious affiliation in the Census escalated from 19 percent in 2006 to 30 percent in 2016, accounting for nearly 30.1 percent of the overall population. For further details, refer to Table 1.

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[31] Fethi Mansouri and Sally Percival Wood (2008), *Identity, Education and Belonging: Arab Muslim Youth in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, p. 11; Craig Overington (2016), "Muslim Migration to Australia: The Big Slowdown," *The Australian*, retrieved June 15, 2019, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/muslim-migration-to-australia-the-big-slowdown/news-story/6be73d718d50476f940e30281d885b99; Fethi Mansouri (2020), "Islam and Muslims in Australia: The Social Experiences of Early Settlement and the Politics of Contemporary Race Relations," *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 127-147.
[32] A. Saeed (2003), *Islam in Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Table 1: Religious Affiliations, 2016

Religious Affiliation		Population ('000)	Population (%)
Christian	Catholic	5 291.8	22.6
	Anglican	3 101.2	13.3
	Other Christian	3 808.6	16.3
	Total	**12 201.6**	**52.1**
Other Religions	Islam	604.2	2.6
	Buddhism	563.7	2.4
	Hinduism	440.3	1.9
	Sikhism	125.9	0.5
	Judaism	91.0	0.4
	Other	95.7	0.4
	Total	**1 920.8**	**8.2**
No Religion [a]		**7 040.7**	**30.1**
Australia [b]		**23 401.9**	**100**

a   No religion includes secular and other spiritual beliefs.
b   As religion was an optional question, the total for Australia will not equal the sum of the items above it.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016

The data from the 2001 Australian Census revealed a population of 16.5 million, with 3 million individuals born outside of Australia. It was noted that a significant portion of the Muslim community in Australia, 79%, had become Australian citizens, totaling 221,856 out of 281,578. Specifically, in 2001, 62% of Muslims were foreign-born, including nearly 11% from Lebanon and 9% from Turkey. The census also observed a rise in the number of individuals identifying with Buddhism by 79%, Hinduism by 42%, Islam by 40%, and Judaism by 5%. Among those affiliated with Hinduism, 82% were born outside of Australia, with 34% hailing from India and 11% from Sri Lanka. Likewise, about three-quarters of those affiliated with Buddhism were born overseas, with 26% originating from Vietnam and 8% from China.

The diversity within the Australian Muslim population was further highlighted in the 2006 Census, which counted over 340,000 Muslims. Of these, 128,904 were Australian-born, while the remainder originated from various countries, including but not limited to Lebanon and Turkey.

Table 2: Australian Muslim Minorities: More than 340,000 Muslims

Country	Population
Afghanistan	15,965
Pakistan	13,821
Bangladesh	13,361
Iraq	10,039
Indonesia	8,656

Source: Data from The 2006 Census

Table 3: Major Countries of Birth of Muslim Australians

Australia 36 per cent
Lebanon 10 per cent
Turkey 8 per cent
Afghanistan 3.5 per cent
Bosnia-Herzegovina 3.5 per cent
Pakistan 3.2 per cent

Indonesia 2.9 per cent
Iraq 2.8 per cent
Bangladesh 2.7 per cent
Iran 2.3 per cent
Fiji 2.0 per cent

Source: HREOC fact sheet, ABS unpublished 2001 Census data

Table 4: Australian Citizenship Rates for Select Birthplace Groups, 2001

Country of birth	% of ethnic group who are Australian citizens
Egypt	91.6 %
Lebanon	91.3 %
Syria	86.2%
Somalia	70.1%
Iraq	68.1%
Other Middle East	75.9%
Other N Africa	70.2%
All Overseas-born people	74.0%

Source: HREOC, Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians, Appendix 2, ABS unpublished 2001 Census data

During the 20th century, Australia experienced a significant influx of Asian immigrants, a movement that came to be referred to as the "Asian Invasion." The factors contributing to this migration were multifaceted. One of the attractors was Australia's relatively high standard of living, which enticed immigrants with the prospect of enhancing their own lives. Additionally, the opportunity to work and establish a stable life in Australia served as a strong motivator. As a result, Australia's societal fabric became increasingly diverse, enriched by the myriad of ethnicities and cultures introduced by the immigrants. This diversity necessitated a reevaluation of the Australian national identity, which could no longer be defined solely by the majority population but also had to acknowledge the contributions of immigrants. In response, the Australian government adopted a multicultural policy, affirming its commitment to ethnic and cultural plurality (Australian Government, 2011). This policy is rooted in the principle that no individual should face disadvantages due to their national, cultural, linguistic, or religious background. The implementation of this multicultural approach has been largely viewed as successful, fostering an environment of harmony and peaceful coexistence among Australia's diverse communities.[33]

Australian Muslims continue to navigate the complexities of aligning their national multicultural identity with their unique religious beliefs. This challenge is partly rooted in the Muslim community's desire to maintain its distinct religious identity. Despite this, multiculturalism has gained popularity and acceptance among Australian Muslims as a cherished social ideal and governmental policy. Nonetheless, instances of Islamophobia have intermittently posed challenges to this acceptance.[34]

In this instance, Australian Muslims could represent the tension between embracing a multicultural national identity and maintaining exclusive religious practices. The author notes a division among the identities of ethnic Muslim migrants in Australia. This division stems from their self-perception, personal history, psychological outlook, and conduct within the context of their interactions with the diverse Australian society and its governance. Within this framework, various forms of Islamic religious identity emerge, including scripturalist, essentialist, and cosmopolitan approaches, as detailed in Table 5.

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[33] Australian Goverment (2011), *Trend in Migration: Australia 2010-2011*, Department of Migration and Citizenship.
[34] Interview with an Australian Muslim, Helmy Heska MSc, in Brisbane, Australia on July 8, 2019 and in Jakarta, November 2, 2018; Interview with an Australian Muslim, Nina Pragina MA in Sydney, on September 3, 2018.

Table 5: Differences between Australia's Three Models of Muslim Identity

Model of Identity	Time Orientation	Basis of Loyalty	Social Relations	Mentality
Scriptualist	Past, Present and Future	Religion (Islam)	Muslim	Exclusive and Formalistic
Essentialist	Past, Present and Future	New Country, but still oriented to Culture, Religion, and country of origin	Australians and Country of Origin	Inclusive and Substantial
Cosmopolitant	Prioritize the Future	Universal	International,	Pluralism

Source: M. Amin Nurdin, *Pegulatan Kaum Muslim Minoritas; Islam Versus Multikulturalisme dan Sekularisme,* (Jakarta: Ushul Press, 2009)

The passage outlines that the identity model based on scripturalism struggles to be acknowledged politically within Australia's multicultural policy framework due to its perceived exclusivity and rigid adherence to texts. This mentality impedes integration, rendering survival in a new environment challenging. Contrasting with Begum Zubaida's 1984 findings where such a group was predominant, current research indicates it is now a minority. This shift is attributed to the impact of multicultural education and the group's improved educational and economic status within Australian society. Conversely, essentialist and cosmopolitan groups appear more adept at integrating into the political landscape without compromising their religious identities.

They believe that multiculturalism upholds religious liberties in Australia, which reinforces their allegiance to the nation and fosters a new sense of identity as Australian nationals. Additionally, the report on Islamophobia in Australia from 2019 to 2022 reveals that hate incidents are not solely a Muslim issue but necessitate governmental intervention for Australia to preserve its social harmony and honor its multicultural legacy. The second Islamophobia report highlights 349 reported incidents over two years (2017-2018), which likely only represent a fraction of actual cases due to the chronic underreporting of hate crimes. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported on March 15, 2022, that there have been 247 recent Islamophobic incidents, encompassing physical and verbal assaults, property damage, harassment, intimidation, and online threats.[35]

Broadly speaking, the Muslim community in Australia greatly appreciates the principles of Multiculturalism, which afford them the liberty and adaptability to follow their religious practices and rituals. "The implementation of multiculturalism has facilitated our engagement and assimilation with the broader Australian community, which is quite beneficial," Helmy Heska remarked. Nina Pragina added, "We sense a respect for the Muslim minority in Australia, and we experience no marginalization or discrimination on this front."[36]

Immigrants and Social Conflict

The assessment of multiculturalism's effectiveness has further motivated a diverse array of immigrants to settle in Australia. These immigrants hail from regions such as Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Observing the prosperous lives of earlier immigrants has, in turn, sparked interest among others to migrate

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[35] Republika (2022), "Islamofobia Melonjak di Australia Sejak terror Masjid Christchurch," *Republika*, retrieved November 20, 2022, https://www.republika.co.id/berita/r8rzva366/islamofobia-melonjak-di-australia-sejak-teror-masjid-christchurch.
[36] Interview with an Australian Muslim, Helmy Heska MSc, in Brisbane, Australia on July 8, 2019 and in Jakarta, November 2, 2018; Interview with an Australian Muslim, Nina Pragina MA in Sydney, September 3, 2018.

to Australia. However, to manage immigration numbers, the Australian government has implemented specific criteria for newcomers, focusing on family reunification and skills-based entry (Peisker, 2010). Immigrants are expected to contribute to the workforce, rather than relying solely on social welfare.

Since 1973, multiculturalism has been embraced as a national ethos, marking a significant phase in Australia's pursuit of a cohesive state and national identity. This approach aims to integrate diverse ethnic communities, which are often dispersed and subject to potential conflicts. The government's efforts to welcome migrants represent a shift from previous administrations' policies.

The multicultural policy is designed as a socio-political strategy for managing conflicts, aiming to alleviate tensions and prevent violence stemming from cultural disputes, terrorism, and extremism. According to The Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs (2011), the likelihood of ethnic conflicts arising from social, cultural, or religious differences in Australia is minimal, reflecting the policy's effectiveness in fostering a harmonious society.[37]

The concept of multiculturalism in Australia emerged after extensive debates and challenges, receiving support from a wide range of scholars, ideologies, and ethnic community leaders. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of the Labor Party embraced a policy of Multiculturalism. This policy acknowledged the varied cultural and ethnic makeup of the Australian populace, a consequence of renewed, large-scale immigration policies. Consequently, there was a pressing need to forge a new national identity that could serve as a safeguard, preventing future societal conflicts and violence. Initially, the implementation of Multiculturalism was confined to the government's pledge to ensure migrants' rights in fulfilling their basic needs. The government has enacted numerous policies addressing economic, cultural, settlement, and employment matters.[38]

The administration not only ensures the rights of individuals but also aims to maintain their cultural and religious diversity, viewing it as a vital component that enriches and fortifies the national identity of Australia. Cultural identities of immigrants, irrespective of their origin, are permitted to coexist alongside Australian culture. This includes sartorial choices such as the hijab, which stands in contrast to France's prohibition of religious symbols, and the embrace of multiple languages, unlike the bilingual policy of Canadian multiculturalism (French and English) that Australia looks up to. During the tenure of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser from the Liberal party, the second phase of Multiculturalism was solidified within Australian society, emphasizing social equality for all community members, regardless of their socio-cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. This phase was characterized by the provision of socio-economic and legal access, which aimed to eradicate social disparities and discrimination. Subsequent periods witnessed the establishment of various laws and regulations that cemented the principles of Multiculturalism. Ultimately, the preservation of immigrants' cultural legacies is deemed essential. The transition from a monocultural to a multicultural society is an ongoing and evolving process, as noted by Bilal Cleland in 2000.[39]

The challenge of achieving integration and fostering a sense of unity among Australians is more complex than it appears. The core of the issue is the apparent disconnect in social interactions between the Islamic community and the culturally dominant white demographic. The Muslim population in Australia serves as a microcosm of the country's broader social dynamics, as they are not only the second-largest religious group, with approximately 400,000 individuals or 1.2% of the population, following Christianity, but also because they are perceived as having difficulties assimilating and are often tagged as a contributing factor to societal tensions in Australia. Despite the fact that a significant portion of the population, 21.8%, identifies as having no religion, the Muslim community's position is indicative of the intricate web of social relationships that define Australian society.

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[37] Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Aus-tralians: Our Developing Nationhood*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 12, p. 86.
[38] See, Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs (1998), *Towards a National Agenda for Multicultural Australia: A Discussion Paper*, Canberra: Commenwealth of Australia. See, Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Multiculturalism for All Aus-tralians: Our Developing Nationhood*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 12.
[41] Bilal Cleland (2000), "The Muslims in Australia: A Brief History," unpublished paper, Melbourne, p. 59.

Concluding Remark

Multiculturalism essentially serves minority communities, providing a framework within which Muslims, among others, are encouraged to embrace their identity as authentic Australians, rather than conforming to a conventional Australian archetype. This approach encompasses a spectrum of services, including educational programs from elementary through high school, healthcare, housing, financial aid, bilingual instruction, legal support, and employment opportunities. For Muslim communities, this policy offers an avenue to convey the essence of Islam to a predominantly white society that may harbor ignorance or intolerance towards the religion.

The Muslim population in Australia encounters several internal challenges when engaging with these policies. These include a deficiency in English proficiency, a lack of other necessary skills, division among religious sects based on ethnic origins, and superficial interpretations of Islamic doctrines influenced by their native cultures. It is imperative for the Australian Muslim community to cultivate a deeper comprehension of Islam's core principles of transcendental and transcultural universalism, which can harmonize with Western multiculturalism. Multiculturalism presents a viable solution to the "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. Drawing from the experiences of Australian Muslims, some of whom remain insular and uphold identity politics, it is clear that multiculturalism has the potential to be embraced as a fashionable and ideal social paradigm, as well as a national ideology. Despite occasional encounters with Islamophobia, the integration of transcendental universalism with multiculturalism could mitigate conflicts between religious and secular societies. Consequently, Australian Muslims can be reassured that their descendants will not be estranged from their Islamic beliefs.

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Interview

Interview with an Australian Muslim, Helmy Heska MSc, in Brisbane, Australia on July 8, 2019 and in Jakarta, November 2, 2018

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