

# Muslim Migration to Australia: History and Contemporary Social Experiences

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**T**his chapter aims to shed light on the history of Muslim migration to and settlement in Australia, an area of Australia's settlement history that has not been extensively documented. Contrary to popular belief, Australia in fact experienced its first Muslim migration and settlements well prior to the formation of the Australian Federation in 1901. Indeed, Muslim presence can be traced all the way back to the sixteenth century with the arrival of Makassar fishermen and Malay pearlers in Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory<sup>(1)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> See; Mansouri, F. and V. Marotta (eds,) 2012, 'Muslims in the West and the challenges of belonging'. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press. Kabir, N 2004, Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History, London: Kegan Paul. Wise, A & Ali J 2008, Muslim-Australians and Local Government: The Grassroot Strategies to Improve Relations between Muslim and Non-Muslim Australians –Final Research Report, Centre of Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University: Sydney.

In the nineteenth century, during the European explorations across the Australian “Red Centre”, between 2,000 and 4,000 Afghan cameleers in particular started to migrate to Australia<sup>(2)</sup>. But following the creation of the Federation and the adoption of the “White Australia policy” in 1901, this migration significantly decreased and certain communities such as the Afghans and Syrians increasingly struggled to find employment due to racial vilification and isolation, practices that can be currently identified as instances of “Islamophobia”<sup>(3)</sup>.

Yet despite the long history of Muslim presence in Australia, the country’s Muslim population increased significantly after World War II, rising from an estimated 2,704 in 1947 to a total figure of 22,311 in 1971, with the largest group being of Turkish descent. This trend changed with the adoption of the Australian multicultural policy in 1972, after which Arab migrants began coming from different countries because of two main factors. Firstly, a push factor relating to numerous conflicts affecting Arab countries (in particular the Lebanese civil war); secondly, a pull factor pertaining to Australia introducing and implementing local government policies for economic expansion and well-targeted migration programs<sup>(4)</sup>. This wave of Arab migration has included a variety of

religious beliefs. Prior to 1975, most Lebanese migrants who moved to Australia were Christians. However, since the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975, a greater number of Lebanese Muslims migrated to Australia<sup>(5)</sup>. This was followed by successive waves of other groups such as the Egyptians, the Iraqis and the Africans.

Since 2001, the presence of Muslims in Australia has been consistently increasing. In 2001, there were approximately 282,000 Muslims in Australia<sup>(6)</sup>; this number significantly rose in 2006, with 340,000 people affiliated with Islam living in the country<sup>(7)</sup>. According to the last Census held in 2011, Islam represented 2.2 per cent of the Australian population<sup>(8)</sup>. Based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2001 to 2011, Muslims in Australia as a community increased by 69 per cent to 476,300<sup>(9)</sup>. Islam now represents the third most popular religion in Australia, after Catholicism and Hinduism. Data shows that 61.5 per cent of people affiliated with Islam were born overseas<sup>(10)</sup>. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), in 2011 1.4 per cent of the Australian population spoke Arabic. Compared to previous years, the number of Lebanese

(2) See; Omar, W Allen, K 1996, *The Muslims in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p 9. Mansouri, F. & S. Percival-Wood 2008, ‘Identity, education and belonging: Arab Muslim youth in contemporary Australia’. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, p 9.

(3) See; Saeed, A 2004, *Islam in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney. Bouma, G D 2011 ‘Islamophobia as a constraint to world peace: the case of Australia’, *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 433-441.

(4) Mansouri & Percival Wood 2008, p. 11.

(5) Poynting, S & Mason, V 2007, ‘The resistible rise of Islamophobia Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001’, *Journal of sociology*, vol. 43 no. 1, pp. 61-86.

(6) Saeed 2003.

(7) Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, *Year Book Australia 2008*, retrieved 6 September 2016, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats).

(8) Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia 2013*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>

(9) ABS 2013.

(10) Ibid.

migrants relocating to Australia has decreased. Muslim community leader Jamal Rafi explains that applications to come to Australia have become very expensive and people cannot afford them<sup>(11)</sup>. Moreover, the Lebanese community has become more integrated. Lebanese do not go back to the home country to find a partner anymore, preferring members of the community in Australia.

Data released in 2016 by the Ministry of the Immigration and Border Protection provide a more recent picture of the presence of migrants coming from Arab and Muslim countries as permanent residents. According to the data released in 2016, the number of skilled migrants coming from Arab and Muslim countries increased in 2014 to 2015, with more Pakistani than Irish citizens relocating to Australia as permanent migrants. In the years 2014-2015 skilled migrants coming from Pakistan were 6,974 and the family migration of Pakistani citizens reached 1,302 migrants (Ministry of Immigration and Border Protection 2016). Most of these migrants are assumed to be Muslims since, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2013 87.7 per cent of migrants from Pakistan identified themselves as Muslims<sup>(12)</sup>. Skilled migrants from Arab and Muslim countries permanently relocating to Australia in the year 2014-2015 also come from Malaysia (3,997), Indonesia (2,007), Iraq (568) and Syria (220)<sup>(13)</sup>.

(11) Overington, C 2016, Muslim migration to Australia: the big slowdown, *The Australian*, retrieved 14 September 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/muslim-migration-to-australia-the-big-slowdown/news-story/6be73d718d50476f940e30281d885b99>.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Ministry of Immigration and Border Protection 2016.

The Humanitarian Programme has also contributed to increase the presence of Muslim and Arab migrants in Australia. In the period of 2015-2016 a significant portion (58.9 per cent) of visas granted offshore were allocated to Middle Eastern countries (DIBP 2016). Iraq received the highest number of visas granted in the Humanitarian Programme (4,358) followed by Syria (4,261) and Afghanistan (1,952) (DIBP 2016). It should be noted, however, that the increasing presence of Muslims in Australia is not only directly connected to immigration, but also to high birth rate within Muslim and Arab communities<sup>(14)</sup>.

### **Social Experiences of Muslim Australians Post 9/11**

The increasing fear of ethnic diversity and the antagonism towards Arab- and Muslim-Australians, as well as Muslim migrants, have been strictly connected to international and local events that affected Western countries, including Australia.

“September 11” invoked a considerable backlash against Arab- and Muslim-Australians for a number of reasons<sup>(15)</sup>. Firstly, the nature of the act sparked outrage, horror and intense shock throughout the world, with Western countries experiencing for the first time the

(14) See; Mansouri, F., M. Lobo and A. Johns 2016, Grounding religiosity in urban space: Insights from Multicultural Melbourne. *AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHER*, VOL. 47, NO. 3, pp. 295-310.

Mansouri, F. (2nd ed.) 2011, 'Australia and the Middle East: A Front-line Relationship.

(15) Johns, A., F. Mansouri and M. Lobo 2015, 'Religiosity, Citizenship and Belonging: The Everyday Experiences of Young Australian Muslims'. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* Volume 35, Issue 2, pp. 171-190.

Mansouri & Percival Wood 2008, p. 1; Mansouri 2011.

impact of a major terrorist attack. Secondly, due to a misinterpretation of the reasons of the event, Western countries started to search someone to blame for the attack. “September 11” cemented Western leaders” and mass media’s positioning of Islam as a homogeneous entity that incites anti-Western primordial violence<sup>(16)</sup>. Hysterical and panicked sections of the public in Western nations started to look at their fellow citizens and at asylum seekers, Arab or Muslim or both, as potential terrorists and untrustworthy individuals <sup>(17)</sup>. According to the Australian Arabic Council, a twenty-fold increase in vilification against Arab and Muslim Australians was registered in the country in the three weeks following the events of September 11<sup>(18)</sup>.

In the same year, the Australian government contributed to the negative representation of asylum seekers coming from Middle Eastern countries. The climax was reached during the so-called “Tampa” and “children overboard” incidents that happened within Australian territorial waters. Following these incidents, the Government made substantial legislative changes, making it more difficult for asylum seekers of Arab and Muslim background to reach Australia<sup>(19)</sup>. As Leach <sup>(20)</sup>

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(16) Saeed 2004, p. 186.

(17) Hage, G 2002, ‘Postscript: Arab-Australian belonging after ‘September 11’, in Hage, G. (ed), Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 243.

(18) Australian Arabic Council 2001, ‘Racial Vilification Against Arabic and Muslim Australians in Light of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks in the United States’, Melbourne.

(19) Leach, M. “‘Disturbing Practices’: Dehumanizing Asylum Seekers in the Refugee “Crisis” in Australia, 2001-2002’, *Refuge*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2003, p 26.

(20) Leach, M. 2003, p.25.

argues, these two incidents were used by the Government as a “central motif” of their 2001 election campaign, which aimed to define the Australian national identity against those who were labeled as “Arab Others”<sup>(21)</sup>. “Arab Others” were Muslims and, primarily, Middle Eastern. In the fearful environment post-September 11, Australian politicians often associated asylum seekers with global terror networks, fostering Australian nationalism and portraying non-Anglo- Australians, especially Arab and Muslim Australians, as dangerous <sup>(22)</sup>.

International conflicts have also influenced the image of the Arab and Muslim community in Australia. The participation of Australia in various conflicts in the region contributed to anti-Muslim sentiments. Muslim communities in Australia faced considerably hostility and xenophobia since 9/11 and especially after the 2003 war in Iraq. Many Muslims had their loyalty to Australia questioned and felt they had to choose between their cultural background and their Australian national identity.

Since 2003, Middle Eastern countries have been affected by numerous conflicts that have contributed to further deteriorate the image of Islam and Muslims in Australia. The successive Iraq conflicts since 2003, the Syrian civil war since 2011 and the 2016 Turkish coup d’état attempt are only the most current events that interested Muslim countries. These conflicts have further

(21) Poynting, S, Noble, G, Tabar, P and Collins, J 2004, Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other, Sydney: Institute of Criminology, p 63.

(22) Leach 2003, p. 29.

damaged the image of Muslim citizens who live in Western countries, including Australia.

Within Australia, the Sydney Café siege in 2014 contributed to compromising the already damaged perception of the Arab and Muslim community. Of particular note is the political rhetoric and the speculations made about the event, incorrectly linked to domestic terrorist activities<sup>(23)</sup>. The incident generated a great degree of concerns and fear among people. Moreover, since the emergence of DAECH, concerns on the recruitment among Australia Muslims as “foreign fighters” have served the interest of some political leaders to promote new anti-terror policies<sup>(24)</sup>. The emergence of DAECH has added a worrying dimension to the already vexed relationship between the Muslim world and the West. The conflict in Syria, where DAECH is a key antagonist, is becoming a regional theatre for a multi-sided proxy war. Events such as the recent waves of attacks in Tunis/Sinai/Ankara/Beirut/Paris is highlighting the transnational dimension of these terrorist activities. These current events have put under the spotlight once again the Arab and Muslim communities, creating more fear among Western countries and fostering a sentiment of uncertainty towards Arab- and Muslim- Australians and their loyalty to the country as Australian citizens.

(23) Levy, M & Visenten, L 2014, ‘The Siege Ends, Two Hostages, Gunman Dead’, The Age, Melbourne.

(24) Mansouri, F., M. Lobo and A. Johns 2015, ‘Addressing the “Muslim Question”’. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Volume 35, Issue 2, pp. 165-170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2015.1046745>

## Muslim Australians and the rise of xenophobia

Conflicts and terrorist events have clearly had an impact on the perception of both Muslim and Arab-Australians. The consequences of these events can vary, depending on many factors. A study conducted in 2003 showed that racism and xenophobia towards Muslim and Arab-Australians by other Australians reached alarmingly high levels<sup>(25)</sup>. The study also showed that every day, non-formal types of racism were experienced by many Australians indicating that one-quarter of Australians experience types of racism through everyday social interaction<sup>(26)</sup>. Attacks to vilify Muslim and Arab-Australians, particularly women, have been also widely located at the time of the War on Iraq, including death threats and threats of rape to Muslim women<sup>(27)</sup>. Muslim women, in particular, appear to be targeted for two major reasons. Firstly, those who wear hijab, or a headscarf, are physically identifiable with Islam<sup>(28)</sup>. Experiences reported by Muslim and Arab-Australians included widespread and numerous abuse include having scarves ripped off; verbal and physical assault; being spat on, intimidated and patronized; receiving hate mails; and many other examples (The Sunday Morning Herald 2004). Secondly, Muslim women are viewed by some other Australians as

(25) Dunn, K.M ‘Racism in Australia: findings of a survey on racist attitudes and experiences of racism’, National Europe Centre Paper No. 77, pp. 2-4rsity of Sydney, retrieved 6 September 2016, <<http://www.chilout.org/files/RacismSurvey.pdf>>

(26) Ibid, p. 10.

(27) Nahlous, L 2001, ‘Women, Violence and the Media’, Conference – Women Reporting Violence in a Time of War, Sydney University of Technology, retrieved 6 September 2016 <[http://international.activism.hss.uts.edu.au/w\\_violence/transcripts/nahlous.html](http://international.activism.hss.uts.edu.au/w_violence/transcripts/nahlous.html)>.

(28) Saeed 2004, p. 182.

complicit in their own oppression by a patriarchal religious and cultural order, and consequently despised<sup>(29)</sup>.

Many commentators have made direct connections between world or local events and attacks upon Muslim and Arab-Australians<sup>(30)</sup>. It is worth further exploring how Muslim and Arab-Australians have come to be seen by some as implicated in events that, in reality, are often far beyond their control. This might be understood through the conflation of Muslim and Arab, the lack of understanding of Islam in Western countries, and most importantly, the presentation of Islam as a homogeneous entity that has been associated with terrorists targeting Westerner countries. Moreover, this sentiment might be regarded as part of a conservative backlash against multiculturalism, or at least a conservative hardening of the notion of multiculturalism, where fear and suspicion of any Australian with multiple cultural and national allegiances have become widespread sentiments<sup>(31)</sup>. These sentiments include fear of visible communities who do not assimilate with Anglo norms<sup>(32)</sup>. Ironically, the isolation that has been forced upon some members of Muslim and Arab-Australian communities has been interpreted as a dissociation with “Australian-ness” and as evidence of loyalty to a religious or political order that is considered

(29) Ibid. 182.

(30) Mansouri et al 2015. See: Saleem, M, Prot, S, Anderson, C. A & Lemieux, A. F 2015, Exposure to Muslims in Media and Support for Public Policies Harming Muslims, Communication Research, pp. 1-29.

(31) Mansouri, F. & S. Percival-Wood 2008, 'Identity, education and belonging: Arab Muslim youth in contemporary Australia'. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, pp. 12-16.

(32) Levey, G. B 2011, 'Multiculturalism and Terror', in R. Gaita (ed.) Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism, Text Publishing Melbourne Australia, p. 42.

an “enemy” of the West. However, xenophobic treatments of Muslim and Arab-Australians are not a consequence of recent world events. The Australian history of the treatment of cultural differences, the historical context of exclusion and prejudicial treatment of Muslim and Arab communities in Australia, and the history of Western discourse on Islam need to be further analysed to comprehend the evolution of xenophobic sentiment towards Muslims and Arab-Australians.

### **The historical context: the orientalist discourse and the “Islam versus the West” thesis**

Since 2001, the violent and abusive sentiment towards Muslim and Arab-Australians has exceeded the already negative perception that Muslims experienced around the time of the Gulf War<sup>(33)</sup>. However, the Muslim and Arab community in Australia faced serious levels of discrimination and xenophobia at earlier points in history, with many episodes of harassment and xenophobia throughout the 1990s.

The Western interpretation of world events from the 1970s onwards has led to an historical association of Islam with “extremism, intolerance and violence”<sup>(34)</sup>. These events include the Iranian Revolution of 1979; the Arab-Israeli conflict; the Gulf War of 1990-91; and terrorist activities undertaken committed in the name of

(33) Saeed 2004, pp. 189-192.

(34) Ibid p. 184.

Islam in the Middle East, Philippines and Indonesia<sup>(35)</sup>. The association of Islam and extremism has been further nurtured by the more recent conflicts in Middle Eastern countries, fostering Islamophobia already present in the country<sup>(36)</sup>.

However, the relationship between the creeds of Islam, Arabs, violence and oppression has not been constructed simply after the event of “September 11”. According to Jureidini and Hage<sup>(37)</sup>, anti-Arab racism in the Western world has a long genealogy. In the Orientalist tradition analysed by Said (1997) and in the dominant popular Western racist imaginary, the boundaries between being an Arab and being a Muslim are greatly blurred<sup>(38)</sup>. The negative, essentialist, and misguided discourse has certainly been heightened in the aftermath of the events in the US, but it must be remembered that “September 11” was simply a new point on the continuum of a Western discourse.

In 1997, postcolonial theorist Said worriedly commented that “malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West”<sup>(39)</sup>. Said (1997) challenged the “clash of civilisations” thesis epitomised by Western

(35) *Ibid*, pp. 184-186.

(36) Bouma et al. 2011.

(37) Jureidini, R & Hage, G 2002 ‘The Australian Arabic Council: anti-racist activism’, in Hage, G. (ed), *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 173.

(38) *Ibid*, p 173.

(39) Said, E.W 1997, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Vintage Books, London.

scholar Huntington (1997), where Islam was portrayed as a “single, coherent entity”<sup>(40)</sup>. According to Said (1997), Orientalist scholars, Western mass media and Western policy makers developed hostile generalisations about Islam. Through the images promoted by commentators, any diversity in character, practices and beliefs has been denied to Islam, and all Muslims and Arabs are presented as having intrinsic pejorative natures (Said 1997). Said suggested that these generalisations have dangerous consequences, inciting hatred and distrust towards Muslims and those associated with Islam, creating associations between Islam and fundamentalism<sup>(41)</sup>.

However, it is worth noting that while recent and historical world events involving Muslims and their analysis in Western media have shaped the basis of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment, such sentiment cannot be understood solely in these terms. Australia has a long history of formal and informal exclusion of “Others”. While there are historical specificities that show why particular ethnic and religious groups have been marginalised, in the case of Muslim and Arab-Australians there are some commonalities in the exclusion of minority groups that exist across groups’ experiences.

(40) Huntington, S.P 1997, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Touchstone.

(41) Said, E.W 1997.

### Issues of Belonging, Identity, and Social Inclusion in Multicultural Australia

As early as 1996, Deen wrote that “around Australia, Muslims... are convinced that... Islam has become the new global enemy... Australian Muslims need reassurance that they are not seen as the enemy; that they are not un-Australian”<sup>(42)</sup>. Saeed<sup>(43)</sup> also affirmed that there has been an historical continuity of a trend, started in World War I, of non-Muslim Australians doubting Muslim Australian allegiances to the Australian nation and these doubts were raised each time there was a world crisis or local event involving Muslims. While some Muslim Australians have reacted by prompting their community to promote a positive image of Islam in Australia self-consciously, other Muslims have felt the need to appease those who perpetuate hatred towards Muslims<sup>(44)</sup>. Hostility and questioning of Muslim-Australian identity have caused fear, apprehension and isolation amongst some Muslims, effectively creating social distances between Muslims and non-Muslims, silencing those who believed “they could not receive a “fair go””<sup>(45)</sup>. Muslim Australians have been reduced to a monolith of pejorative stereotypical images (Saeed 2003). Moreover, Muslim Australians have been denied their diversity as well as their humanity by “Muslim watchers”, using stereotypical images to define

people and representing Islam with images such as veiled women, fierce bearded men, barbaric parents, rapists, and suicide bombers<sup>(46)</sup>.

Migrants and different religious groups in Australia, especially Muslims, have faced some resistance in the process of inclusion in the Australian society<sup>(47)</sup>. Despite the difficulties encountered by Muslim Australians aiming to prove their “Australian-ness”, there are some techniques that Arab and Muslim communities have adopted to establish (or re-establish) their image. “Bridging” and “Bonding” represent two methods the Arab and Muslim community have used to connect with Arab and non-Arab communities, supporting communication among these groups as a response of xenophobic behaviours. According to Lamont and Molnar<sup>(48)</sup>, these two techniques are used to reinforce or transcend the boundaries of groups determined by race or ethnicity.

“Bridging” may be understood as the attempt to build links with non-Muslim and non-Arab Australians to counter current social divides. “Bridging” is based upon mutual understanding, cross-cultural communication and a willingness to engage with other members of the community to avoid exclusion<sup>(49)</sup>. The Muslim community has been encouraged to embrace this process to restore the

(42) Deen, H 2003, *Caravanserai: Journey among Australian Muslims*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, p. 272.

(43) Saeed 2003 pp. 186-187.

(44) Deen 2003, pp. 271-279.

(45) Deen 2003, Kabir 2007.

(46) Deen 2003, pp. 283-287, Kabir 2008.

(47) Markus, A and Dharmalingam, A 2007, *Mapping social cohesion Report*, Institute for the Study of Global Movements Clayton, Monash, Vic.

(48) Lamont, M & Aksartova, S 2002, *Ordinary cosmopolitanisms strategies for bridging racial boundaries among working-class men*. *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, no.4, pp. 1-25.

(49) *Ibid*, p. 18.



image of Muslims in Australia. However, some Muslim community members seem to comment that not enough effort has been made by the community to bridge the gap between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. According to Deen<sup>(50)</sup>, since the Gulf War, Muslim communities, including religious and ethnic groups, have failed to “build bridges” with the non-Muslim communities, fostering ignorance and xenophobia. However, blaming Muslim Australians for the exclusionary discourse supported by some non-Muslim Australians appears to be a dangerous excuse. According to Deen (2003) many community organisations have tried to address this gap between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians since 2001. According to the author, 2001 was the watershed year for Muslim activists in trying to start a dialogue with the wider community. However, the author suggested that Muslim religious leadership should emphasise Islam’s similarities and overlap with Christianity and Judaism, finding allies outside religious groups and allowing “invisible Muslims” to speak out<sup>(51)</sup>. Refugee activism, advocacy, and anti-war activism can be considered a valid example of “bridging” that has brought together Muslim and non-Muslim Australians<sup>(52)</sup>.

Muslim communities have also been involved in “bonding” activities in response to racist episodes

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(50) Deen 2003, p 283.

(51) Deen 2003, pp. 386-387.

(52) Deen 2003, p. 325.

See: Phillips, R 2009, ‘Bridging east and west: Muslim-identified activists and organisations in the UK anti-war movements’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.34, no.4, pp. 506-520.

Phillips 2009, p. 511.

and xenophobia. “Bonding” is described as the activity of strengthening the connection and support between communities and community members, reaffirming ethical and national identities of migrants<sup>(53)</sup>. The renewed interest of Muslims in Australia in the teaching and learning of Islam amongst young Muslims can be explained as a response of the events that affected the Muslim and Arab community and the feeling of challenge the community has experienced<sup>(54)</sup>.

## Conclusion

The Australian Muslim community has been reduced to a monolith of pejorative stereotypical images of a distorted interpretation of Islam linked almost in a causal manner to recent domestic and international conflicts and terror events. Muslim Australians have been and continue to be denied their individual agency, their cultural and religious identities, and their place in the global human community. Policy makers and commentators alike have contributed to a problematized image of Australian Muslims, allowing misguided stereotypes to define a vastly heterogeneous community. While global political events have undoubtedly contributed to the anti-Muslim sentiments in Australia as elsewhere in Europe and North America, specific historical and local factors have also played a crucial role. Negative attitudes towards Muslim-Australians characterise and dominate the current social and political discourse. These attributes need to be

(53) Levitt 2003, Hirschman 2004.

(54) Deen 2003, p. 388.

reconsidered in light of interrelated factors, including media representations, social policies (in the form of a folkloric version of multiculturalism), as well as the deep, if unconscious, influence of “Orientalist” discourse on perceptions of Islam and the East.

In Australia, the current perception of Islam and Muslims has been further compounded by the almost daily “terror alerts” issued by government ministers, self-declared experts and media reporters. As Said noted almost thirty years ago (1997), the mere use of the term “Islam” to either explain or indiscriminately condemn Islam and Muslims has become an irresponsible overgeneralisation that is problematic, counterproductive and increasingly stigmatising towards an entire community. In the context of a culturally diverse society such as Australia, this demonization should be considered even more unacceptable. According to the conservative wing of the country, cultural unity has been undermined by multiculturalism and by different cultural groups, particularly Muslims and Asians. It is in this political and social climate that immigrant Muslims in Australia have been increasingly portrayed as a threat to social homogeneity and as a potential risk to national security. Indeed, the on-going debates about the failure of multiculturalism and the rise of far-right white supremacists groups represent one of the most critical challenges facing Muslim-Australians and affecting multicultural Australia as a whole<sup>(55)</sup>.

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(55) Mansouri et al 2016.