## Introduction

## The Notion of Culture

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Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations around the globe owing to the cultural policies as well as the globalization. The study of the culture of a particular population encompasses on their language, social habits, music, arts, cuisines, and religion. Initially, the Australian population was dominated by the Aboriginal families before the colonization by the British. The British colonization directly impacted all the aspects of the Aboriginal community regarding the land use, ways of life, spiritual life, and the law of the land. This interfered with the traditional way of life, and also contributed to the change in culture, religion, and language. Despite the cultural diversity of Australia, Islam in the land is a minority religious affiliation. Currently, there is lots of interest in Australia's Muslim community. The Muslim Australians make up a small section of the Australian society and are not considered as a homogenous group. For such concerns, this paper will analyze the notion of culture by investigating the Muslim culture in Australia. This will be achieved by outlining how sub/counter culture is constructed through the major components of culture such as symbols, language, values, norms, artifacts, and practices. Also, the study will investigate how they differ from the dominant or mainstream culture such as Christianity.

## Background of the Study

Research by the Australian government has revealed that 36% of the Muslim Australians are Australian-born while the other 66% constitutes those that arrived in the nation as immigrants from other parts of the globe such as Lebanon, Turkey, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Fiji. Also, the research revealed that a vast majority of the Australian Muslims do not experience a conflict of loyalty between Australian citizenship and Islam. However, the benefits enjoyed by the Australian Muslims are the recognition and promotion of culture by the government and other communities.[[1]](#footnote-0) The government produced a comprehensive report under the federal Living in Harmony Initiative by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) expressing the freedom and the rights enjoyed by the Australian Muslims despite being a minority group. The report expressed the beliefs, practices, and institutions of Muslim Australians and the construction of a multi-faith network. The Australian Muslim community comprises of only 1.7% of the overall Australian population. Despite being a minority group, there are ethnic representations from non-migrant and migrant backgrounds belonging to Muslim faith such as Indigenous Australians and Anglo-Celtic Australians.[[2]](#footnote-1) In this case, the concept of cub-culture become complex based on the varying ethnicities of the individuals that believe in this religion.

## Components of Culture

According to Brent and Lewis, various factors constitute the aspects of the culture of any community or a population. There are two distinct components of culture: artifacts or objects and ideas and symbols. The first aspect, known as the material culture constitutes of the society’s physical materials such as clothing, technology, means of transport, and other artifacts. Equally important, the second type, called the nonmaterial culture is composed of the language, values, beliefs, and symbols that define the particular society.[[3]](#footnote-2)

## Language

A majority of the Australian Muslims are proficient in English. Most of the Muslim Australians communicate using English except in their cultural settings and institutions. Research indicates that those aged between 21 years to 39 years are the most proficient in English while those aged over 60 years are the least proficient in English. Also, the data shows that almost 50% of the Australian Muslims are aged 24 years or younger. The other common languages that are communicated by Australian Muslims include Turkish and Arabic. Most of the Australian Muslims (about 87%) speak English as well as another language such as Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Bosnian, Malay, Hindi, Dari, and Pashto. Also, approximately 11% of the Muslims in Australia only speak in English.[[4]](#footnote-3)

## Equality

Equality has always been an issue especially concerning the discrimination against women in Islam. The culture has The for the oppression of women by the community as well as their families. An example is a custom of wearing the veil and the treatment of women especially in Muslim states in Middle East nations. Generally, the Muslim women face more challenges than their male counterparts in Australia. Most women face obstacles and discrimination both from their community and non-Muslim Australians. Also, research shows that newly arrived Muslims face greater challenges adapting to the Australian way of life and breaking the isolation cycle.[[5]](#footnote-4) This is particularly a great challenge to the Muslim refugee women in Australia as they seek to adjust to a cultural setting that is diverse and address the culture and language barriers.

## Clothing/ Dress Code

The dress code of the Muslim women is derived from the Qur’an which demands women to cover. Also, the Bible has a similar command, and it is common for pious Jewish women to cover their heads, as well as Christian nuns and women from several Christian nations. The Qur’an commands the Muslim women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty and not display their beauty and ornaments. Muslim women who choose to wear and cover do so as a sign of their faith.[[6]](#footnote-5) The women that choose to wear the scarf on their heads or the burka are the most visible people of the Islamic community. This group of women is the most misunderstood and oppressed by the Australian people or their families as being the most visible people representing the minority religion which is assumed to endorse terrorism. Since the September 11 Attack on the US, there has been a rise of racial abuse and other forms of discrimination against the Muslim community simply because of their beliefs.[[7]](#footnote-6)

## The Muslim Challenge and the Multiculturalism Debate

The Muslim community in Australia has come under discrimination from the indigenous population. The study conducted by HREOC revealed that Muslim Australians commonly experience racial vilification, discrimination, threats of violence, and actual violence. Also, there have been reports of insensitivity towards the Muslim cultural practices such as negative comments regarding the dress code of Muslims and failure to allow for holidays and prayer breaks in accordance with the culture. Also, a study conducted by the National Fear Survey revealed that Muslims are associated with terrorism, and the non-Muslim Australians reported generalized fears of certain things such as traveling in planes. Also, non-Muslim Australians showed that they were not comfortable staying in public places especially in the presence of Muslims. As such, Muslims are highly likely to experience discrimination along various thematic categories. Muslim children and women are particularly more vulnerable and are more likely to be physically and emotionally attacked by the on-Muslims.

The notion of culture also has an impact on the employment sector. Economists have increased their interest in understanding the effect of culture on the employment and shaping the economic outcomes. However, it is not yet clear the extent to which cultural differences in work norms and values affect unemployment. It is noteworthy that the differences in the culturally determined attitudes affect the employment status of a population.[[8]](#footnote-7) Most Australians are not comfortable employing Muslims due to the various demands such as prayer breaks. Also, Australian born Muslims are more likely to get employment opportunities than immigrants who come to the country from Vietnam, Africa and the Middle East. This trend is mirrored across America and Europe.

## Muslim Values and Beliefs

One of the distinctive qualities of Muslims is that they appreciate and do not have a problem with the western culture. This is contrary to the perception of the non-Muslims on the Australian Muslim’s culture. The Australian culture is based on some important values such as *fair go, the* rule of law and parliamentary democracy. Also, the nation possesses other fundamental values such as human rights, gender equality, egalitarianism, freedom of speech, and unity among the people. Contrary to the perception f the people, the Australian Muslims do not have a problem with these values. In fact, many Muslims migrate into Australia precisely because of these values and the promotion of equality. The Muslims in Australia appreciate the rule of law, freedom, and unity of the community despite the lack of the Islamic law that is common in many Islamic nations such as Saudi Arabia. Equally important, Muslim women are ordinary immigrants in Australia as they seek to escape the cultural chains and inequalities present in Islamic states. Nations that enforce the Islamic Laws are often characterized by the discrimination of women and lack of equal opportunities for the population. The nation provides the people with the freedom to teach, practice, and even propagate their religion. There is no conflict between the Muslim religion and the values of the Australian people and culture.[[9]](#footnote-8)

There is one significant difference between the beliefs of the Muslims and that of the mainstream culture. The Islamic religion demands loyalty from the members. This requirement of Islam clash with the requirements of loyalty to Australia. The Muslim Australians believe that they owe their loyalty to their religion before their state while the mainstream cultures owe their loyalty to the nation. Also, Muslims feel that the values, norms and the environment of Australia do not sufficiently accommodate Muslims and that the systems in place are not based on Islamic norms and values. As such, they do not feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to Australia. However, the mainstream Australians (those that were born and had lived in Australia for a long period) have aligned their loyalty to the values and norms of the nation. Their loyalty to Australia primarily means three things: commitment to the fundamental Australian values, abiding by the law of the land, and protecting and defending their homeland. None of these values and beliefs clash with the Islamic norms and principles.[[10]](#footnote-9)

The only thing that can bring a conflict between the loyalty to Islam and Australia is the introduction of a rule preventing Muslims from practicing their religion. However, the Australian laws and society are based on the idea of equality, freedom of religion and the rule of law. As such, such a scenario is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, Most Muslims do not view the coexistence of loyalty to Islam and Australia. They prefer living in a religion where the Islamic law is the primary legislation governing their way of life.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**Australian Cultural Policies**

The Australian government supports cultural diversity in the nation and eliminating cultural-based discrimination. The government commenced this initiative in 1908 following the establishment of the Commonwealth Literary Fund for needy writers of their families. Also, the government provided support to various artists to establish a diverse national art collection. The government has employed different strategies in a bid to eliminate any associated cultural discrimination especially that against Muslim women.[[12]](#footnote-11) The establishment of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils was intended to enhance a harmonious and cohesive society for all the Australians and retain the integrity of a representative democracy. The Australian cultural policies seek to ensure equality and end the discrimination against the Australian Muslims.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the diversity of the Australian community has made it a subject of interest. Muslims in Australia make up only 1.7% of the total population, thus making them a minority group. The study shows that a majority of the Australian Muslims are proficient in English and also have the knowledge of another language such as Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Bosnian, Malay, Hindi, Dari, and Pashto. Also, approximately 11% of the Muslims in Australia only speak in English. Also, the Australian Muslim women cover their head using a scarf. However, they have integrated the traditional dressing codes with the modern fashion. Muslim women wear fashionable clothes, scarf and burka thus incorporating the modern fashion with the religious requirements. However, gender inequality is still an issue facing Muslim women in Australia despite the strides by the government to promote equality. The Muslim women are regularly abused and mistreated through racial insensitive statements and threats of violence. However, the beliefs and values of a majority of the Muslims are in line with that of the Australian people.

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