

# 4. The Muslim Community in Australia

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## Introduction

Contrary to popular discourse, Muslims-Australians are a heterogeneous community. Muslim communities in Australia come from a range of theological traditions and encompass different cultural, sectarian, linguistic, and ethnic values. This means that Muslims in Australia practise their cultures according to the cultural traditions of their individual countries and in some cases according to different ethnic traditions within these national cultural traditions. The religious and cultural diversity of Muslim-Australians has its origins in the post-World War II national mass immigration program initiated by the Australian government to recruit immigrants for national development.

This chapter examines the heterogeneous character of Muslim-Australian communities through an exploration of post-World War II migration patterns of Muslim immigrants to Australia. The issue of social inclusion of Muslims into the wider Australian community is more than simply about development of new social policy. Muslims in Australia are in more ways than one already part of the Australian mosaic. Their integration needs to be highlighted in popular discourse and through the development of programs and initiatives, a clear and concrete path can be paved for their continued integration.

## Muslims in Australia

The presence of Muslims in large numbers is a relatively recent phenomenon in Australia. However, Muslims have been linked with Australia as early as the sixteenth century, in the west and north regions, through the Macassar fishermen from the eastern islands of Indonesia (Ahmad, 1994) and then through Malay and Filipino pearl divers recruited by the Dutch colonial authorities (Jones, 1993). Due to their small numbers and the absence of a community base, these Muslims played a marginal, if any, role in Australian social and cultural life (Cleland, 2001). Subsequently cameleers, commonly known as 'Ghans' were brought from the Indian subcontinent during the nineteenth century to help explore the Australian deserts and establish trade and communication routes (Mograbay, 1985). The Ghans established small Muslim communities called 'Ghantowns' (Akbarzadeh, 2001). The first 'Ghantown' mosque was built in 1889 in Broken Hill in outback New South Wales and the building survives today as a museum occupied by the Broken Hill Historic Society. The Afghans also built mosques in Adelaide in 1890, in Perth in 1904, and in 1907 in Brisbane, all of which continue to function as mosques to this day (Ahmad, 1994). These early mosques symbolised the initial establishment of Islam in Australia.

However, the introduction of the railway in the remote interior and the utility truck, in particular the T Ford model in the 1920s, made camel cartage redundant and hastened the demise of the camel-carrying industry (Ahmad, 1994). As a result, the 'Ghan' communities slowly began to disappear. Furthermore, in 1901 when all the former

colonies were federated, Australia's early commitment to the White Australia Policy barred most non-Europeans from gaining citizenship and this further marginalised the Afghans. Without citizenship and no prospect for employment many old camelmen returned to their homelands while some remained to see life through in Australia (Jones, 1993). With their numbers dwindling through repatriation and natural causes, it became increasingly 'difficult for those who remained to retain their Islamic identity', (Johns and Saeed, 2002: 198). Separated both religiously and culturally from the main white Anglo-Celtic society, a vast majority of this generation of Muslims abandoned their Islamic conviction resulting in the public disappearance of Islam (John and Saeed, 2002).

### **Post-World War II Muslim Immigration**

After the Second World War, the Muslim population again began to increase in Australia and correspondingly so did Islam. By now Australian governments and businesses realised that in order for Australia to be part of post-war development, the nation had to grow demographically and economically. The sourcing of large numbers of migrants as workers, therefore, was related to the dynamics of the global economic position of developed capitalist societies like Australia (Castles and Miller, 1993). The need for large numbers of migrant workers for Australia was not just a national issue but was directly related to the nature of Australia's economy and its positioning in the global capitalist world. At this time, Australia was a developing capitalist society that had the necessary preconditions, financial structure, and political and natural resources to develop industrially, however, it did not have the adequate labour resources and capital to achieve this development (Field, 2000).

While the mass migration programme initiated in 1947 sought immigrants from British origins, the ambitious immigration targets soon saw the immigration net expand and gradually become more global and culturally diverse. Subsequently, Muslim immigration was part of this process.

Although Albanians, former citizens of the Ottoman Empire, arrived in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s, their numbers were too minute to make much difference to the Australian landscape (John and Saeed, 2002). Turkish Cypriots, therefore, were the first Muslim immigrants to start arriving in significant numbers in the 1950s and 1960s followed by Turkish immigrants between 1968 and 1972 (Humphrey, 2001). Lebanese Muslims followed, constituting the largest Muslim community in Australia by early 1970 and they continued to grow, particularly after the outbreak of civil war in 1975 in Lebanon (Armstrong, 2000). The period 1950 to 1975 not only saw an increase in the Muslim population in Australia but also a significant increase in the number of arrivals of professional and skilled personnel, 'such as teachers and engineers from Egypt, doctors from the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, and tertiary students from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan' (Ahmad, 1994: 318). Between 1947 and 1971 the Muslim population grew from 2,704 to 22,311 (Omar and Allen, 1997).

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a steep increase in the growth of Australia's Muslim population. For instance, in 1991 there were 148,096 Muslims which constituted 0.9% of the total Australian population (ABS Census, 1991); in 1996 there were 200,902 Muslims constituting 1.1% of the total Australian population (ABS Census, 1996); and in 2001 there were 281,578 Muslims constituting 1.5% of the total Australian population (ABS Census, 2002); and most recently in 2006 there were 340,389 Muslims constituting 1.7% of the total Australian population (ABS Census, 2007). Though Muslims live across

the Australian continent, ABS data indicates they are mainly concentrated in New South Wales and Victoria (as the table below shows). In all states and territories, Muslims mainly live in the capital cities (Omar and Allen, 1997: 23).

Census Year	2001	2006
New South Wales	140 907	168 786
Victoria	92 742	109 370
Western Australia	19 456	24 186
Queensland	14 990	20 321
South Australia	7 478	10 517
Australian Capital Territory	3 488	4 373
Northern Territory	945	1 089
Tasmania	865	1 050
Other Territories	707	700
Total	281 578	340 392

*Table 2: Australian Muslim population by State/Territory*

*Source: Census 2001 and Census 2006*

- In New South Wales, where the largest Muslim population lives, Muslim-Australians constituted 2.5% of the total state population (ABS Census, 2007).
- Within New South Wales, over 50% of the Muslim population lived almost entirely within a radius of fifty kilometres of Sydney, making Sydney the most concentrated Muslim population in Australia (ABS Census, 2002, 2007).

This steady increase has been mainly attributed to immigration; however, high birth rates have also contributed to the rapid increase in the Muslim population. The table below prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2004 using 2001 Census data shows that the Muslim birth rate in Australia is a significant factor towards Muslim population growth. Also, it shows that Muslims in Australia are increasing at an unprecedented rate from within. If this trend in the Muslim-Australian population growth continues, it is possible that the second-and third-generation Muslim populace could gradually expand over the years signalling an important factor in Australia's social, economic, and political reality.

Australia	128 906
Lebanon	30 290
Turkey	23 125
Afghanistan	15 961
Pakistan	13 820
Bangladesh	13 358
Iraq	10 038
Indonesia	8 656
Other	96 235

*Table 2: Australian Muslims – country/region of origin.*

*Source: Census 2006.*

Muslims, in most parts of the world, are not a homogenous people and are divided essentially on sectarian and ethnic grounds. Likewise, Australia's Muslim population is extremely diverse; the table above provides a glimpse of this diversity. According to Saeed (2003), *Sunnis* make up the majority Muslims in Australia followed by the various *Shi'a* sects such as *Zaydiyah*, *Isma'iliyah*, *Druze*, *Jafariyah*, and *Alawiyah*. Additionally, there are traces of *Ahmadism* and *Wahhabism* in Australia as well as various other minor sects. Between 1975 and 2000 Muslims have come from over seventy different nations and make Muslim-Australians ethnically the most diverse religious group in Australia (Saeed, 2003).

### **Ethnic Diversity among Muslim-Australians**

Like migrants generally, Muslims migrate to Australia for a multitude of reasons, however, the economic advantages, educational opportunities, family reunion, and escaping political oppression in their homelands are some of the more prominent criteria for making Australia their permanent home (Jones, 1993). Whilst some migrants come from Islamic monocultures such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria, a lot of them arrived from countries like Albania, Lebanon, and Nigeria, that are themselves culturally and religiously diverse (Jones, 1993). As a result, Muslim migrants have different experiences of Australian society, and cannot be categorised as one homogenised group. The plurality of Muslims and their experience as migrants contrasts with the popular media representations of Islam and Muslims being uniform and homogeneous.

The majority of Muslim migrants settle in large capital cities, in particular Sydney and Melbourne (Humphrey, 1998). These large urban centres provide relatively cheap accommodation, particularly in their outer suburbs, and offer employment in the manufacturing and service industries, and are also homes to other groups from the same ethnic backgrounds, which supports the socio-cultural and emotional needs of new Muslim immigrants (Cleland, 2001). Thus, Muslim immigrants typically settle close to each other. Following the dominant pattern of immigrant settlement in Australia, Muslims gravitate towards their own ethnic circles concentrated in the working class suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne (Humphrey, 1998). In Sydney, for instance, Muslim communities are concentrated in four Local Government Areas namely Auburn, Bankstown, Canterbury, and Liverpool (ABS Census 2006). The overwhelming concentration of Muslim immigrants in these two capital cities corresponds to the settlement patterns of Mediterranean migrants. In the case of Muslim immigrants, 50% settled in Sydney and 23% in Melbourne, according to the 1991 Australian Census (Bouma, 1994). Humphrey (1984) observes that chain migration - by which individuals immigrated and later brought over families, relatives, and friends - and close settlement were pivotal in creating the geographical concentration of Muslim immigrants, emphasising the significance of social relations based on parochial and family ties and ethnicity (Humphrey, 1984). Humphrey (1998: 21) claims that 'Muslim immigrants have entered Australian society through the cultural mediums of family, community and religion which have located them in social spaces shaping their status, employment and residence patterns'.

According to Humphrey (1998) this has meant that the established social relations of the family and village community have become even more firm and indispensable resources of social barter in themselves. Consequently, this has helped create social microcosms. These social microcosms have been meticulously built through the application of personal efforts in home making, family creation, ethnic language maintenance, and selective

shopping based on culture. These social microcosms are also maintained and further perpetuated transnationally by recognising the importance of maintaining links with the past. This is done, for instance, by going 'home' for a visit, sponsoring family members to immigrate, and sending money to extended family back home.

Family and community bonds have been of paramount importance for Muslim immigrants to immigrate, to receive support during settlement, to re-establish their traditional social worlds, and, ultimately, to obtain Australian citizenship. Family in particular has been the principal resource in reproducing social and religious culture. Chain migration made immigration possible and acted as the vehicle for penetrating the broader society. Family and community bonds facilitated residential grouping from which emerged Muslim community and Islamic life. As Humphrey (2005: 136) notes, 'The family and village community was used as the basis for recreating community and re-establishing religious life'.

However, the emergence of Muslim communities and Islamic life is not so autonomous and has involved a complex web of institutional interaction and coming to terms with certain ideological realities namely integration, assimilation, and multiculturalism. The nature of Muslim communities and Islamic life in Australia therefore needs to be understood in this context.

## Immigration and Assimilation

In Australian immigration history, the question of who should be permitted to settle in Australia has been directly associated with the idea of which people will assimilate with the least resistance. Immigration during most of the last century was essentially an issue about the maintenance of white mono-cultural national identity through the practice of selective immigration.<sup>1</sup> It was a way to develop Australia and assist its participation in the post-World War II global order based on ethnic and cultural purity.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian colonial society culture and race were key issues in the creation of the nation-state. The birth of the Australian nation-state, the transition from colony to a constitutional monarchy in 1901, clearly acknowledged memberships in terms of race. The 'Immigration Restriction Act' of 1901 denied entry to 'coloured' people. Its legacy was the 'White Australia Policy' which survived beyond the post-World War II period of Australian mass migration.

The 'White Australia Policy' continued to shape the post-World War II immigration initiative. Assimilation was the approach adopted towards difference to ensure cultural uniformity expressed as Australian national identity. The key aim of the assimilation policy was the preservation of an imagined homogenous national community founded on British culture and institutions (Jakubowicz, 1989). Assimilation was a racist model that expressed the supremacy of the Australian host society in cultural rather than racial terms.

Eventually, it was the immigration program, the large influx of immigrants from different parts of the world, which weakened the openly racist construction of the Australian nation-state. The on-going arrival of non-British immigrants fractured the formal ties between

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<sup>1</sup> Selective immigration means permitting only those immigrants to settle in Australia who were deemed white and easily assimilable.

Britishness and citizenship and nationalism. The official stance on Australian nationalism and citizenship began to change as early as 1958.

It was for the first time, then, in 1958 that the 'Immigration Restricted Act' or the official 'White Australia Policy' was subjected to reform. Thus, the openly racist dictation test was abolished in 1958 (DILGEA, 1988: 42). Then in 1959 further changes were made allowing Australian citizens from an immigrant background to sponsor their non-European spouses and single young children to immigrate to Australia (DILGEA, 1988: 43). Importantly, in 1964, the rules governing the entry of people described as 'of mixed descent' were relaxed further (DILGEA, 1988: 48).

In 1972, race and culture were removed from official discourse on the recruitment of immigrants with official abolition of the 'White Australia Policy' and its replacement with multiculturalism as the dominant theme in immigration and settlement policy. By this time mass immigration changed the character of Australian society and it became literally multicultural. This meant that multiculturalism as the official national policy prohibited discrimination on the basis of culture or race in the recruitment process of immigrants and their treatment in Australian society. In this regard by the late 1980s the multicultural policy identified and emphasised three critical points:

- (i) Cultural identity – the right of all Australians to express and share their cultural heritage,
- (ii) Social justice – the rights of all Australians to equal treatment and opportunity,
- (iii) Economic efficiency – the requirement to maintain and develop the skills of all Australians, regardless of their background.

### **Muslims and Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism meant the recognition of the diversity of the Australian population. The policy supported the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of large diverse cultures of Australian people and encouraged and assisted individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions to reflect the multicultural character of Australia in their local and overseas dealings. It meant that all members of Australian society had the right to equal access to services, regardless of their ethnic background.

Immigrants were granted fundamental rights to live according to their own cultural values, yet, nevertheless were expected to integrate into Australian society. The new multiculturalism policy meant that ethnic and cultural diversity were encouraged, however, only to the extent that it did not undermine the values, customs, and institutions of the dominant Anglo-Celtic society and conformity is practiced. It was basically assumed that immigrants arriving in Australia would automatically adapt to the dominant Anglo-Celtic way as they worked here, and they would simply abandon their customs and habits (Graetz and McAllister, 1994). This became the distinctive Australian trajectory to full citizenship. Integration, in essence then, entailed participation in the key areas of society - namely labour, education, and housing; a pathway to fruitful existence for immigrants. Failure to integrate would result in deprivation. In other words, cut off from the many benefits and privileges available and offered to ordinary citizens. Equality<sup>2</sup> did not mean

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<sup>2</sup> The term equality means 'of equal value'. For instance, while a Chinese Australian and a white Anglo-Saxon Australian are not thought, by some people, equal, they are 'of equal value'. Equality, at least

similarity but an 'equal playing field' for all. The idea of a mono-cultural society was abandoned and difference was celebrated and made the basis of integration.

However, if Australia is a multicultural society in which cultural diversity is celebrated then why is it that cultures are valued differently? As Humphrey asserts, 'The lexicon of multiculturalism differentiates and values cultures differently according to undeclared criteria' (2001: 37). Why for example, does the Muslim presence produced through immigration, often present a perceived threat to the Australian national mosaic? Or why are Muslim beliefs and practices too often considered discordant with the patterns of public life in Australian cities? Why are Muslim practices of prayer and fasting, for instance, seen to challenge the conformity of the modern public sphere and its ideals?

Attitudes towards Muslims in Australia indicate that despite the formulation of multiculturalism as a public policy the views of the dominant group predominate. There is a modernist view that expects immigrants, particularly from more traditional societies, to assimilate through the processes of secularisation and individualism. The modernist view is founded on the premise of secularism – the diminishing significance of religion – forcing religion from the public sphere into the private domain, thus, the expectation that immigrants, perhaps the second and third generations, will eventually assimilate as individuals who become divorced from their ethnic roots.

In Australia, Muslim organisations and cultures have emerged from settlement and immigration processes connected in complex ways to working-class immigrant experience of social marginalisation and economic deprivation (Humphrey, 2001). For Muslims, their immigration experiences have forced them to negotiate their cultural identity with the Australian state and society. In relation to this, Michael Humphrey argues that the 'Muslims in Australia' narrative is a reflection of the politics of multiculturalism that limits both pluralising and homogenising tendencies:

It is pluralising through the migration process that has generated local, ethnic community-based Islamic religious institutions which, in turn, helped decentre and localise the religious authority of tradition. It is homogenising through a multicultural politics of 're-traditionalisation' – the essentialisation of culture as a defensive, as well as representational, strategy that tends to place ethnic culture in compartmentalised social space (2001: 35).

The negotiation by Muslims of their cultural identity in the context of Australian multiculturalism has left them relegated to the 'Other' in the national imagination, which is both defined by, and predominantly represents the culture of, the hegemonic group. It incorporates Muslim-Australians only insofar as they contribute to the 'cosmopolitanism' of the dominant group, and, therefore, merely as the 'Other'. This aspect of multiculturalism is thus essentially a policy for the management of ethnic minorities. According to Hage (1998) it involves strategies of exclusion alongside the rhetoric of inclusion. In a sense, then, this form of multiculturalism maintains the marginality and liminality of immigrants and their descendants.

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theoretically, denotes that difference in religious or cultural background can not become a handicap for a person or community when it comes to exercising legal, political, or social rights in society.

## Muslim Marginality

In the Australian multicultural panorama, Muslim means being 'immigrant working class' and religiously 'conservative'.<sup>3</sup> This class description of Muslim-Australians has developed from the origins of Muslim immigrants and their real experience with the Australian labour force. A vast majority of Muslim immigrants have arrived in Australia from poor rural and urban backgrounds from mostly underdeveloped countries. After arriving, these Muslim immigrants have largely been engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs within the manufacturing and service industries (Humphrey, 2000). Muslim immigrants who had academic qualifications and professional experience were even forced by the immigration processes to take up non-professional menial jobs because the Australian government deems qualifications from underdeveloped countries comparatively sub-standard, thus refusing to recognise them (Graetz and McAllister, 1994).

Furthermore, Lowenstein and Loh assert that 'Often Australia does not recognise the overseas trade and professional qualifications of migrants, so skilled people are forced to work either at unskilled jobs or to carry out skilled work at unskilled rates of pay' (1977: 10). As in the context of immigrants in general, the demand by Australian society for cultural accommodation of Muslim immigrants entails a slow transition. Migrants are typically required to initiate social and cultural adjustments to their daily social and vocational rituals by accepting the routines of the manufacturing industries in which they work and take more than one job to maintain a family or depend on limited welfare benefits with some income derived from working in the black economy. The whole process of cultural accommodation imposes upon Muslim immigrants to modify the ritual of their daily life in accordance with the practices of the broader Australian society and in so doing it impacts on the entire basis of their social existence. For example, the impact is felt on all aspects of social life such as marriage, social networks, residency, gender relations, housing, and consumption patterns. This makes the reconciliation between ethnic culture and customs and new social and work rituals problematic.

These are the demands of the class culture (Humphrey, 2001) and when Muslim immigrants fail to fulfil them, they also fail to meet, as a group, their expected economic contribution and consequently are censured for not making a fair contribution to the national economic growth and development of the whole society. Their statistical over-representation in the records of welfare benefits, workers compensation claims, and unemployment give them a negative image and push them to the lowest strata of the social hierarchy. This highlights their peripherality in urban structures and their status in Australia.

Given their marginality to the labour force, many Muslim immigrants have been pushed into a situation of mutual dependency. The requirements of social and community reciprocity due to their social marginalisation and the fear of loss of family and cultural identity often force family and community to guard the environment in which tradition is nurtured (Humphrey, 1984). However, whilst on the one hand family and community are strengthened as principal cultural capital through immigration policy and social and economic marginalisation, on the other hand, they are rendered tenuous by fearing the loss of cultural heritage and the sense of loss of identity through the process of immigration.

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<sup>3</sup> Conservative signifies traditional or customary.

Thus, Islamic organisation and Muslim culture need to be put in the context of the language of multiculturalism. Muslim cultural differences do have their origins in specific places and customary traditions but these are only further reinforced and perpetuated through the policies of settlement and windows of opportunity (Humphrey, 2001).

## Muslim Communities and the Establishment of Mosques

It was the family and village communities that formed the original basis for the Muslim community in re-establishing Islamic life in Australia. Islamic organisations, in many cases, emerged from the activities of village community organisations. Humphrey (1989b) asserts that these Muslim community organisations have been the product of family and community ties. He argues that Muslim-Australian community religious life emerged as one aspect of village community activities and that as the community grew so did the community needs and this situation made it necessary for the establishment of a separate institution which could cater for multiple aspects of Muslim community life (Humphrey, 1989b). For example, village social centres or community meeting places frequently developed into provisional prayer halls and subsequently, as the population grew and demands increased, turned into mosques. Islamic immigrant cultures and practices emerged from these localised sets of contacts in multicultural Australia. These contacts selectively fostered the recreation of religious culture in immigration where Muslim immigrants found their status transformed from a majority to a minority group.

The key religious interests of the first generation Muslims were the arranging of what may be collectively described as Muslim life-cycle rituals - birth, marriage, and death - within the local Muslim community framework. Muslim village associations were important institutions for community life and played a key role in the process of settlement (Bouma, 1994).

Mosques have assumed a significant role in the Muslim settlement process. They have emerged in direct response to growth in the Muslim population and to Muslim community needs. According to Humphrey (1989b), in the context of Muslim immigration, mosques have been significant but are not the first Islamic institutions in Australia. He asserts that mosque associations came into being alongside various other voluntary Muslim immigrant organisations during the early period of Muslim settlement.

Like in many parts of the world where Muslims are in the minority, in Australia mosques cater for Muslim community needs and have become more than just places for worship. They have at once become the spiritual centres for symbolising the existence of Islam, collectivizing Muslims, and teaching and training Muslims about their religious values and practices. Mosques also act as the centres of religious, educational, cultural, and social activities.

According to Humphrey (1989a) mosques as symbols of collective Muslim presence in Australia either emerged from purchased sites which were developed into mosques or from existing community or village social venues. In either case, even though the way mosques are established is distinct, for instance, one comes into existence through communal life and the other based on broader community support both in terms of

finance and lobbying the local council, the purpose for establishing the mosque remains the same - to fulfil the social and religious needs of the Muslim immigrant community.

Muslims do not necessarily have to have a mosque to pursue a religious life. Islam permits the offering of prayer anywhere - such as in an office, at home, or even on the lawn in a park as long as the place is clean. However, mosques always have played a role beyond being merely places of ritual prayer. For instance, classic mosques such as *Masjid al-Aqsa* (grand mosque in Jerusalem) and *Masjid al-Nabawi* (Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina) have always played spiritual, educational, social, cultural, and political roles in Muslim community life. Prayer is only one aspect of Islamic life and given that Islam is a complete way of life, Muslims require, particularly in the context of immigration, mosques for other religious and social needs. In this sense, mosques as local community institutions that fulfil religious, welfare, educational, and social functions assume a role beyond a place for worship. As Humphrey (1991: 185-6) remarks:

As the pre-eminent community institution, the mosque becomes the domain for the assertion of separate identity and status within a pluralist political environment in which ethnicity has legitimacy. It is a centre from which demands are made on Australian political, legal and bureaucratic structures about the needs and rights of the 'community' vis-à-vis other groups.

Thus, through the mosque Muslims make demands regarding those aspects of life considered essential to uphold religious and moral values. For example, demands for Muslim girls to be allowed to wear *hijab* (veil) to public schools, legal recognition of the right of *imams* (leaders) to conduct marriages and perform burial services according to Muslim traditions, and acknowledgement of the right to pray at work. These demands symbolise the restoration of Muslim cultural practices in the context of immigration.

The question of religious leadership at the mosque has highlighted its intimate connection with the evolution of community and religious organisations in Muslim immigrant communities in Australia. The absence of an Islamic *shura* (consultative committee) or body of clerics has, in many instances, seen mosque leadership remain in the hands of individual mosque committees instead of separate autonomous religious organisations detached from social connections which have produced immigrant mosque communities. The course taken in the establishment of mosques reflects distinctive ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds of Muslim communities in Australia. For the vast majority of Muslim-Australians, religion continues to be deeply rooted in class structure and ethnic sources. As a corollary, local community politics based on former family and sectarian rivalry in 'home' communities continue to play out in the mosque politics (Humphrey, 1987). The claim of Muslim as an identity and the stipulations for acknowledgment of Muslim religious and legal practices, in this political milieu, are effectively competitive and drawn into the politics of a community reputation and protection of cultural autonomy.

However, the organisational focus on community association is not fixed and could be moved on to the mosque. The quintessential character of cultural capital and political resources undergoes transformation as demands originally made based on parochial attachment to kinship, friendship, and community networks are located in totally distinct political and institutional frameworks. The mosque, which is established in light of a legal framework that demands a formal organisational structure and the establishment of proper management processes, becomes a central focus and serves as a base for the mobilisation of Muslim immigrants within a political arena.

## Conclusion

Muslim-Australians from different national and ethnic backgrounds brought their own versions of religious and cultural traditions, making them a very heterogeneous group in Australia.

The assumption that Muslim-Australians are an un-integrated group of people and therefore need to be integrated into the larger Australian society through government programs and policy is only partially true. The Muslim integration issue is directly linked to their social and economic marginalisation from broader Australian society. In other words, Muslim integration or lack thereof, has a lot to do with the levels of racism and discrimination that still exist in Australian society.

It is the social and economic marginalisation not their religious or cultural values that preclude Muslim-Australians from integrating into Australian society. Affected by a multiplicity of poor social and economic conditions, Muslim-Australians find a sense of belonging and self-worth within their own communities. Unlike the larger Australian society, these ethnic and parochial communities provide Muslim people an anchorage and identity.