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Journal of Globalization for the Common Good
Dedicated to Global Dialogue & Cooperation
ISSN 1931-8138 | Contact | Search | Home

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The concerted spotlight on Muslims and Islam in general today is warranted by the tragedy of 9/11; the waxing and waning of anti-Islamic sentiments continuing as subsequent world events have unfolded. The labels of Islamic militants, insurgents, hardliners and terrorist cells in media reporting, and the rhetoric of world leaders fuel the negative portrayal that extends to assumptions about the lives of Muslim women and their "oppression" in their dress code, especially the veil. Why does the veil invoke such feelings of antagonism in the west; what drives this "clash of cultures"; is the resolve on removal, a curtailment of the choices of women who wear it; and how do these issues impact on the ideals of multiculturalism and social sustainability are some questions this paper attempts to address.

Keywords: Muslim women, multiculturalism, gender equality, integration, public space

Introduction

The focus on the Muslim woman's dress-code and in particular the headgear popularly known as the veil has been intense since the "war on terror". The discourse of the veil and calls for "regulating" it stem from the wider depiction and discussion of Muslim presence in western societies; a presence that now fervently invokes deliberations over pluralism and citizenship in light of conflicting religious and liberal values. Contested and challenged in the rhetoric of democratic-liberal values, the veil becomes framed as a deterrent to gender equality and in the eyes of the feminist critic defies and disparages efforts for equality rights. Our premise is that the depiction of Muslims and by extension the position of the Muslim

woman needs to be analyzed and understood in the context of the broader discourse of its framing.

Following the discussion on Muslims in Australia, in this paper we examine how the homily about the veil is influenced by foremost the early perceptions about Muslims in Australia. The historical border containment to maintain an Anglo-Celtic society resulted in very small numbers of Muslims (as well as other groups) in early Australian settlement. With little contact and interaction with Muslims, conjectures were based on the dominant voices in political and media commentary. Secondly, that the current discourse is highly influenced by the way political commentary and media representation using a culture critique to conjure the Muslim image; and thirdly, that the stereotyping has far-reaching negative consequences on Muslim women whose own stance on the issue remains largely obscured in the debate.

Methodological approach

We employ frame analysis to deconstruct public perception of the ontology of both Muslim women and Muslims generally in Australia (as we believe one is the consequence of the other). As a methodology, frame analysis examines the effects of what have been called frame elements in understanding phenomena. These elements or tropes are words, phrases, expressions or images used in figurative ways to have a desired effect by triggering cognitive, interpretive responses based on existing knowledge and norms of the society. The concept of framing is generally attributed to Erving Goffman's influential work (1974) in which he sought to identify some of the basic frameworks of understanding to make "sense out of events" and placed the study in the general analysis of representation and connotation.

In her comprehensive review of "locating frames", Kimberley Fisher (1997), examining the writings of key contributors to the discourse like Snow (1988, 1992), Benford (1994), Gramson (1988, 1992, 1993, 1995), Donati (1992, 1994), von Dijk (1977, 1980, 1985), and Lakoff (1987, 1980) who have applied the theory in different fields, finds little consensus over "basic questions" like "what frames are" or "how individuals and cultures make use of them" (Fisher, 1997, para 1.5). However, she is decided that "a study of framing informs the study of how societies process information to generate meaning (ibid). By using major cognitive schemata through which people interpret the world around them, frames enable users "to

locate, perceive, identify and label" (Goffman, 1974, quoted in Fisher para 2.3) events. One aspect of Goffman's work is linked to a dramaturgical framework of social analysis where audience segregation is essential so that members of the audience for one role cannot see other performances not intended for them (Goffman, 1959). The media and political representation of Muslim women has actively aimed at achieving this social segregation; we employ the methodology to deconstruct the perception of the "other" to understand the aversion to Islam and its adherents in this context.

Since 9/11 the language and imagery used in media and public commentary have impacted negatively on Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular through their visibility in dressing. Using frame analysis the study seeks to uncover the underlying issues that contribute to these perceptions. Studies and media documents have provided the observed evidence of negative portrayal and various research reports have been consulted to provide verification of experiential evidence to illustrate the corollary concerns of attributed images.

From private to public Islam in Australia

As perceptions cannot be isolated from historical processes, in the interpretation and understanding of the current processes of representation, a brief historical setting as a starting point is deemed necessary. The development of assumptions about Muslims and their lifestyle can be viewed as primarily situated in the historical presence of Muslims in Australia. In keeping with the early immigration policies, interaction of Australian mainstream society with Muslims was largely restricted and limited; therefore the experience of "knowing" Muslims or their diasporic cultures through personal contact has been narrow in Australian society and mostly dictated by political inclinations.

Even though early Muslim existence in Australia dates back to the 17th century with the presence of fishers from the east Indonesian archipelago to the northern coast of the country, the transient, work-related presences left little social influences. Writing about the later more enduring presence of the early Afghan cameleers, the first Muslim settlers in Australia, Stevens (1993, p 53) notes that these were largely all-male communities since no Afghan women accompanied them. Many of these unaccompanied men married aboriginal women and mostly kept to themselves; their strict adherence to Islamic codes reinforcing their

alienation from the wider society. The racial and religious intolerance of early Muslims (as well as other migrants and aboriginal peoples) was an element of the official resolve for racial purity that was legislated in the White Australia policy of the early 1900s. Tropes of the "traitorously disposed", "enemy aliens" and "disloyalty" in reference to Muslims were characteristic of 1st World War era with fears of Muslim loyalty to the Sultan of Turkey when war broke out (see Jones, 1993, p 64). The resulting hostility saw a decline of Muslim presence; a dispersed community living on the fringes of the society. The racial hierarchies of the time limited contact to the least and the bare minimum insight into the life of the Muslim was informed by public commentary.

Although the post 2nd World War increasing economic and international interdependence rendered difficulties in maintaining an Anglo-Celtic Australian society, a quota system with a one to ten ratio of non- British to British migrants, ensured the preservation of an Anglo-Celtic national identity. With no institutional and organizational support for their specialist needs in areas such as burial rites, marriage celebration or diet, as well as an acceptance of their dress code in the public, maintaining an Islamic lifestyle was difficult for many Muslims until well after the 1970s. It was largely individual and family efforts and determination that sustained an Islamic tradition and existence (Jones, 1993). With the large influx of Turkish and Lebanese migrants in the 1970s, a stronger Islamic distinctiveness developed. Today the major groupings of Muslims are from varied ethnic and dissimilar cultural backgrounds; from Lebanon, Turkey and Bosnia to the new emerging communities from places like Sudan and Somalia. They are a collective disparate group, whose diversity has been little understood in the mainstream Australian community as they still remain a very small proportion of the Australian population with 1.5 % officially affiliating with Islam in the 2001 census (ABS, 2007).

The discourse of conflicting beliefs, values and practices

Expressing their religious and cultural affinity in various observations, Muslims have found affirmations of their freedom to practice their faith contained in the Australian multicultural policy as well as in the lexis of leaders. Marking the 25th anniversary of multiculturalism in Australia in 2003, Gary Hardgrave (then Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs) vocalized his support of multiculturalism as: "People in this country are free to practice their traditions, speak their old languages, adhere to

their religions and wear whatever they like within the law". However since Gary Hardgrave's speech in 2003, the shift in public discourse demands a weighting of cultures in favour of western secular traditions. In 2005, for example, two female members of the Federal Parliament proposed Muslim girls be forbidden to wear the veil if attending public schools. Although this proposal was quickly rejected, the MPs were expressing existing attitudes within the Australian society

Viewed through a lens of modernization and secularization, Muslim traditions and practices appear in variance with the mainstream culture. As the significant "other", Muslims living in western societies are often critiqued by the ideals and practices of the dominant culture, the mores of which are derived from the age of European Enlightenment that advocated rationality, the pursuit of happiness, individualism, progress, and freedom (Kelly, 2003). In this climate, communities found to resist the dominant culture are seen as being backward and in the debate on multiculturalism as challenging acculturation processes. Exploring how Muslims in Australia have been attributed an "otherness", Saniotis (2003) inferring from several anthropology works explains the anxiety about Muslim "fittingness" in western society in terms of "order in lifeworlds" where matters out of place invoke an anxiety of "perceived threat" or a "violation of conceptual order". In the same vein, Humphrey explains this "unfittingness" in terms of faith practices (2001, p 34): "Islamic religious values, beliefs and practices are viewed as being in conflict with the organizations and rhythms of public life in the cities of the West. Muslim practices of prayer, fasting and veiling appear to challenge the conformity of secular public space and its values (often attributed than owned) with respect to gender equality in social relationships and individual rights".

This thematic conflict of cultures resonates with the rhetoric of a "clash of civilizations" of many western leaders in the "war on terror". As one of the violations of order, the issue of Muslim women's emancipation and consequently the disposal of the veil take central stage.

Gendering the discourse in the media

In looking at the construction of the image of the Muslim woman, this section draws from the broader global media discourse to help determine the role of mass communication in the characterization of Muslims.

"Whenever Islam is attacked we find that Muslim women is used as a way

of showing that Islam is an oppressive religion. And so a lot of the stereotypical images about Islam often uses Muslim women as a target to attack Islam." Nada Roude, Media Spokesperson for the Islamic Council of NSW (ABC, 2002).

Edward Said's critique of "orientalism" as a pattern of western thinking about the east in its typecasting retains currency in the present assumptions about the perception of the "eastern other". In his famed and influential work Orientalism, he writes, "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence- …- but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific economic setting." (Said, p. 273). Although Said's focus is on the broader context of the image of the east in the western mind, in its proposition of the dominance of power position in the ability to define and establish conventional understandings of representation; it is significant in this discussion. The reinforcement of the image of the Muslim women's inferior position can be attributed to the visual and rhetorical frames in the political and media iconic imagery, both sites of influence on society's standpoint, and major contributors to the relationship between the minorities and majority in the context of a plural society.

Inheritance laws, female genital mutilation, honour killings, forced marriages, polygyny practice, a domesticated role for women, and of course the dress code are the principal frames that enlighten the public about Muslim women and feed notions of inequality in their minds. In the absence of any other models, extrapolations from accounts of practices in oppressive or "traditionalist" (where classical Islamic law is enforced) Muslim societies inform the status of Muslim women in Australia. Saeed (2004) explains the oppressed image of the Muslim woman in the west as being in part due to the selective footage in media reporting; he writes: "Images of how Muslim women have been treated in countries such as Afghanistan (under the Taliban) have been shown on television around the world, especially after September 11, 2001". A journalism academic, Tanja Dreher quoted in ADB report (2002, p. 75), also remarks about the framing of the veil in media discourse: "If you go back through the newspaper coverage and also television footage, the image of the veiled woman occurs again and again and again, both in Bansktown, then in terms of the Tampa and the refugee story more generally, and again in terms of the war in Afghanistan."

In addition the disproportionate focus on certain issues in analysis, reporting and reasoning while downplaying of others helps position audiences in their understanding. Through an implicit conveyance of desirable or undesirable values, media tools such as commentary, images and polls shape the attitudes and understandings of groups. The Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales' (ADB) report on racism and media discourse examined and analysed the story of a Muslim women's gym as played out in both print and talkback media. Quoting an article that detailed criticism of the gym in The Daily Telegraph (13th August 2002), in regard to dispensation of discrimination from the Anti-Discrimination Board, the ADB found implied drawing on preceding contestations about the "special treatment" for minorities and the symbolic juxtaposition of the article about Muslim special diet needs on the same page (ADB, p 64). The reactive response that reflects a conflation of global and local phenomena in perception of the target group is evident in a quote from a letter to the editor: "Are adherents to [Islam] going to integrate themselves into our pluralistic freedom-loving society? No way. This has been graphically shown by recent events such as the gang rapes, the apartheid –like requirements of the Muslim women's gym and the celebrations of the murderous attacks on the USA last September." Contained in this rancorous attack are three mutually exclusive events that are merged to respond to what is made out to be an intolerable request by Muslim women. In its message, all three are linked to the Muslim lack of integration and "hostility" to freedoms available in the pluralistic society.

Political gain in the Muslim integration debate

In its analysis of the impact of discourse on the public perception, the ADB, found an imbalance in the role of political leaders in promoting an environment of minority safety and security that is echoed in the words of Randa Kattan, the Australian Arabic Communities Council, quoted in the ADB report (p 77): "…On the one hand we heard the calls for tolerance …Yet on the other, we heard how asylum seekers threw their children overboard, a blatant lie. We heard the half-hearted inconsistent and loaded messages…Sadly, the opportunities to get political mileage out of moral outrage and the fear that had been whipped up against the Arabs, Muslims, people of Middle Eastern appearance, and refugees was not missed by many."

The momentous events of 9/11 came at a very susceptible time in terms of race relations in the country. Prior to the event, a series of gang rapes

committed by 14 young Lebanese Muslim Australians got blanket coverage as racially motivated crimes and created a correlation between crime and ethnicity in their reporting. And just a month before the New York incident, Australia refused to accept about 400 mostly Muslim refugees rescued by a Norwegian vessel from an Indonesian boat. Denying the Tampa permission to land in Australian waters, the government took a hard-line against what it called "queue jumpers" and described as "illegal refugees". The then Defense Minister, Peter Reith described the asylum seekers as possible terrorists (see Manning, 2004). The themes of lack of integration and hostility to freedom have since been the subject of much of the anti-Islamic political commentary in post 9/11 Australia with the Prime Minister's comments (ABC, 2006) on Muslim resistance to integration supported by others.

The rhetoric of resistance is expressed in the persuasion of the endorsement of "Australian" values, learning English and mostly treating women equally. An issue enthusiastically taken up by feminists like Browyn Bishop (Liberal Member of Parliament) who convey that somehow, the removal of the scarf bestows freedom and autonomy onto Muslim women. In responding to a Muslim woman who told her about feeling free in the headscarf, Bishop replied, "…I would simply say that in Nazi Germany, Nazis felt free and comfortable. That is not the sort of definition of freedom that I want for my country." How a Muslim woman's freedom in today's world is comparable to Nazis in Nazi Germany is anyone's guess! However the choice of simile is allegorical of a fascist regime.

Without much examination, and discussion an ambiguous lack of equality and autonomy is attributed to Muslim women largely in their dress code. Does the removal of the veil or the hijab confer any special liberties and opportunities for empowerment for Muslim women or award them equality? If democratic liberal laws favour freedom of choice then don't such demands also constrain the choices of those that wear the hijab out of preference? Gender equality as defined by a World Bank report (cited in Malhotra et al, 2002) is "equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality in terms of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity) and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process)". Yet these are the very processes that have not been addressed in these debates.

Exclusion in the public space

The politicizing of Muslim cultural values and integration detracts attention from some of the challenging issues of prejudice, lack of opportunity and mostly security issues that have received token attention. Studies on the needs and concerns of Muslim women for example, identify some central issues concerned with their empowerment and opportunities that need addressing. Besides economic needs of education, health, employment, housing, in her research on the settlement needs of Muslim women in Perth, Yasmeen (2001) found women ranking social requirements such as safety, recognition and acceptance in their principal cluster of requirements. Yasmeen found, "recognition" from other Australians and safety both important personal issues for the women linked to their Islamic identity. Majority of the women experienced hostility and found it hard to be accepted within the general community. Concerns over safety included experiences of "harassment from neighbours who used threatening and abusive language deriding their Islamic beliefs,"and "criticism and ridicule for wearing the hijab in public places and did not feel that the police could guarantee their safety" (ibid, p 83). Such hostility is also endured in employment prospects limiting participation in the workforce. In a report on the effects of visible discrimination Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007, p. 23), focusing on the employment of refugees, found that their data "indicates that discrimination in the labour market on the basis of racial and cultural visibility is quite common".

As noted earlier, Yasmeen's study of Muslim women revealed safety, lack of recognition and hostility to their dresscode as major concerns. A more comprehensive study on Arab and Muslim discrimination called *Ismae* ("Listen" in Arabic) conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in 2003 reveals ample evidence of the same. A nation-wide consultation with Arab and Muslim Australians with 1423 participants in all the states and territories was conducted over seven months in 2003. Its findings show the ugly side of intolerant perception based on no personal knowledge of the targets – "[m]ost experiences described by participants were unprovoked, 'one-off' incidents from strangers on the street, on public transport, in shops and shopping centres or on roads" (HREOC, p3). In his forward to the report, Dr Williams Jones the Acting Race Discrimination writes: "'Terrorist' 'Dirty Arab''Murderer' 'Bloody Muslim' 'Raghead' 'Bin Laden' 'Illegal immigrant' 'Black c..t' are just some of the labels and profanities that we were told have been used against Arab and Muslims in public places," who were

told to '[g]o back to your own country". These tropes and slogans are significant consequences of the frame elements used in the discourse and commentary of the Muslim "difference". Little knowledge about Muslims and their way of life exists outside the frames created in public commentary that have contributed much to the prejudice shown towards Muslims.

In addressing the Muslim problem, the fixes are focused on proposals dealing with inherent issues suggestive of lackings within the faith community with rhetorical commendation for successful integration. An emphatic denial of the media's role in propagating a negative campaign to influence public opinion helps absolve media culpability. In his address to the conference of Australian imams, Andrew Robb (2006), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, put the onus for its stigmatization on the community absolving the media's role in mobilizing bias: "…, some people say that the problem of stigmatization of Muslim people is a problem caused and generated by the media; that the media seeks to portray Australians Muslims in a negative way…I don't subscribe to that point of view – …the media simply reflects its readership, its listeners or viewing audience…, the media is reflecting the very real anxiety and suspicion within the broader community..." However, the Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty (quoted in Roberts, 2006) after yet another prolonged furor and coverage of a Muslim misdemeanor; that of a religious leader's apparent inflammatory comments over women; was of the opinion that the media was fuelling a bias against Australian Muslims.

Framing a failed multiculturalism?

In the contemporary climate of "Islam against the west" the questions of immigration, cultural plurality, toleration, and diversity in society become urgently and emotively salient. Within these concerns, the profits and failures from multiculturalism have been brought to the fore to be fervently contested. The 9/11 events fuel the debate to the point of deliberations on a consensus of reversal. The various overseas attacks have poured an outrage over Islamic fundamentalist values leading to an understanding of the attacks as a cultural conflict between Islam and the west, and in George Bush's terms "waging a struggle for freedom" (FoxNews 2003). This cultural conflict lends credence to Muslim incompatibility with western liberal values and since the attacks in London and the fears of Muslim youth being influenced is coined as home-grown terror. Using these

reference frames, sections of the Australian society have persevered on rooting "home-grown terror" in multicultural policies. How multiculturalism plays a role in the perpetration of horrendous violent acts is however unqualified in the rhetoric of commentators, but policy directions in Muslim immigration and "containing the Muslim problem" are proposed.

John Stone (2005), a former treasury secretary and National Party senator questions the intent of multicultural policies, "…can we any longer pretend that our official multiculturalism policies,…, are in our national interest? …, how are we to handle our growing, self-created Muslim problem?. In his posting Stone quotes the former High Court chief justice Harry Gibbs in a 2002 Australia Day address, "…a state is entitled to prevent the immigration of persons whose culture is such that they are unlikely readily to integrate into society, or at least to ensure that persons of that kind do not enter the country in such numbers that they will be likely to form a distinct and alien section of society,…" Are such renditions impacting on the government's position on diversity and multiculturalism in Australia? It does appear so, as Tim Johnson in his article on "Australians debating immigration and national identity" (Herald Tribune, January 28 2007) notes the "minor bureaucratic alteration" in the changing of the name of the immigration department from Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship that sends a message. The implication of which according to James Jupp (cited in Johnson), who has published widely on immigration and multiculturalism in Australia is "that this is a liberal, democratic, English-speaking society which has been well established and it is up to people who come from other cultures to adjust their behavior accordingly."

The current exigency for Muslim integration is prompted by alleged threats of "home-grown" terrorism. How much of this is real or a perceived threat is open to debate, however, the progression of denigration of Australian Muslims in recent times reported and discussed in the abundant anti-racist and anti-discrimination literature is much more a disclosure of public space ownership and the type of engineered pluralism envisioned for Australia by the leadership. By focusing on ethnic and racial differences, the causality of social problems has been adroitly attributed to cultural and value distinctions and questions of nationalism, and serves what Chaudry (2004) calls a "normative symbol of reassurance" that seeks to assure the public that possible adversaries are being contained.

The politically mediated innocuous differentiation makes a critical

difference in the perception of minority groups and their value to Australian society. It averts what Hancock (1993) calls social investment and in this case the social investment of Muslim women in Australia. According to Hancock, societies make investments of social and human resources that are needed for socially sustainable societies. It is increasingly recognized that economic well-being does not necessarily build the social fabric of communities; that we need to make investments in other areas of communal life. These investments that Putnam (2002) and Cox (1995) call social capital promote social justice by not only providing basic needs but also enhancing the physical, mental and social well-being of the population. Created through interactions between people in daily life, these investments are located in networks that thrive on exchanges in society. In the contemporary environment such investments are vital for the profit of both Muslim women and their contribution to the society that they are a part of. A conducive environment for access and opportunity in employment, advocacy and agency are vital for enabling generation of social capital or investment. In the following section, we look at the three areas of employment, advocacy and agency in which intervention may help produce a favourable outcome in Muslim women's contribution to Australian society.

Enabling social capital or investment

It is well-recognized that access to income impacts on the self-sufficiency of women raising their status in the household. With increased self-reliance comes the ability to make choices that can assist in challenging subordination. However, there is little research available for workplace participation of Muslim women in Australia. Foroutan's (2006) statistical study of the impact of family formation and religious affiliation in the context of a multicultural Australian setting uses logistical regression (using full census data) as a standardization method. The impacting variables in the study are couple status, presence and age of young children and partner's annual income; and findings from the study indicate less likelihood of workforce participation for Muslim women than for non-Muslim women. However, the study by holding many significant variables constant overlooks important factors impacting on the economic behaviour of Muslim women in Australia. For example, Northcote et al's study recognizes that Muslim refugee women suffer an 'isolation cycle' that stems from both internal features of religion, ethnic and refugee background and from the social, political and institutional processes of the host society. Although this study is based on migrant refugee women,

some of its findings resonate with the aforementioned studies by Yasmeen (2001); Saeed (2004) and Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007), as well as others like Kamalkhani (2001) and Bedar and El-Matrah (2005). More research needs to be done on economic behaviour and workplace participation of Muslim women.

Like other minorities in Australia, Muslims have little advocacy representation in political processes. Highlighting of Muslim concerns has largely been due to the efforts of NGOs like the HREOC, and policy measures have been consigned to consultations with community representatives without adequate knowledge of the diversity of the Muslim society. The overemphasis on the importance of religious leaders further mutes the voice of the Muslim woman in the debate as the authoritative stance on issues is attributed to religious leaders who are all male. In media representation advocacy has largely been a responsive outcome to present views on Muslim "misdemeanors" and has been more geared for damage control than issue discussions. Often ill-equipped persons have appeared to deliver messages in defensive mode and sounding less credible than non-Muslim "experts". These comments do little to overcome the negative portrayal of Muslim women. In this context Muslim women's representation in the ability to "cross over cultures" is important in vocalizing matters of concern.

The feminist discourse in the case for (or against) Muslim women is being carried forth by those that disregard the lived out realties of the women that they speak on behalf. Giving credence only to secular forms of comprehension to analyse and understand the experiences of Muslim women, there is a sensationalizing of subjugation. Writes, Chisti: "Feminist routinely present Islam within a 'fundamentalistic' or extremist framework, projecting religion as an obstacle to women's full equality and promoting secularism as the 'natural' space for neutral and progressive work toward the advancements of all women". There are several empowered Muslim women that are able to speak on behalf of their own kind. Enabling this requires training programs in areas of enhancing leadership roles and the provision of forums to facilitate dialogue to clear the many misconceptions that exist about the lives of Muslim women.

Conclusion

In this paper we have identified several different frames that inform the Australian public about the ontology of Muslims and Muslim women. The

historical images of Muslims in Australia influenced by racial hierarchies were shared by the many minority groups in its early settlement as well as indigenous Australians. With the shift to a more racially inclusive policy, post 2nd World War, the lack of institutional support for cultural particularities lent an insignificant and benign presence to Australian Muslims in the public sphere. In more recent times, a modernist yardstick has been applied to Muslim "fittingness" in Australian society. This benchmark renders Islam a backward and archaic frame in total conflict with the rationalism associated with modern societies. With it comes a static understanding of the Muslim woman's repression and lack of agency in an attributed rejection of feminist values of gender equality.

In the current context, the focus on the Muslim conflict of culture has also been plagued by national and international events. With the large number of refugees coming in from the many war-torn Muslim countries (some of them in "leaky boats") a more threatening image of a risk to the economic and social steadiness of the country appears to take hold in public perception. This has been exacerbated by the "war on terror" commentary that adds a malevolent angle to Muslim presence in the country. The media, politicians and political commentators have also attempted to segregate the Australian audience and present only a negative image for the veiled Muslim woman.

Some of the impacts of these negative frames have been identified in this paper and reveal a need for a better understanding of the inclusion of Muslim women in Australian public to avail their potential for contribution to this society. As pointed out there are several areas of social investment that need to be studied and advanced not only to achieve a viable outcome beneficial to Muslim women but also one that promotes social sustainability in the general society. The current frames have played a role in perpetuating differences; we suggest a reframing of the Muslim woman's image to enable congruence.

The Australian society has given hope, desirability and potential to new coming migrants to succeed in many ways that very few countries around the world have been able to do. Ever since the convict settlers in the 19th century, it has been a personal choice for new migrants to call Australia home, and freedom and opportunity have been the main assets within the Australian value system. The Muslim woman's veil as a personal preference should also belong to the abundance of choices that Australia offers.

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Return to Home | Return to Table of Contents | Return to Top

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