

**Understanding Muslim Identities:
From Perceived Relative Exclusion to Inclusion**

By
Samina Yasmeen
Centre for Muslim States and Societies
University of Western Australia
Crawley WA 6009

May 2008

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	iii
Understanding Muslim Identities in Australia: Dynamic Diversity	1
Chapter One: Islam in Australia	5
Understanding Muslims Identities: Methodology	9
Western Australia as a Case Study	12
Chapter Two: Being A Muslim- Diversity of Frameworks	22
Context of Muslim Identities	24
Islamic Schools: Formal Sources of Information	24
Informal Sources/Nodes of Information.....	26
Being a Muslim: Multiple Ideas	30
Religion and Identities: A Dynamic Relationship	31
Concluding observations	41
Chapter Three: Being a Muslim in a Western Environment.....	42
Islam and the West: Locating Identities.....	42
Looking at the World: The United States, Australia and Muslims.....	45
Living in Australia and Being a Muslim.....	49
Concluding Observations	55
Chapter Four: Non-Muslim Perceptions of Muslims	56
The Wider Australian Society: A Profile	56
Assessing Non-Muslim Views on Muslims.....	57
Sources of Knowledge about Islam and Muslims	62
Views on Muslims and Islam	65
Women as the signifiers of difference.....	66
Islam- A Violent Religion?.....	66
Muslims in Australia.....	68
An Anti-Muslim Environment?.....	70
Chapter Five: Muslim Identities in Australia- Promoting Inclusion	72
Linking Local with International: Muslim identities	72

Acknowledgements

This report could not have been written without the active contribution of a team of researchers. They conducted interviews, shared their insights and prepared drafts that helped me produce the report. The list includes Wendy Chew, Kate Riddell, Zarlisht Sarwari, Sarah Mills, Nisreen Bajis, Erika Muzinic, Sajida Alvi, Salam Ziusidras, Feizel Gaffoor, Adis Duderija, Hodan Ismail, Neesha Khan, Sanja Bila, Mahmood Chatha, Sule Nair, Gaffar Karim, Heather Yeates and Mahfooz Soomro. I am also grateful to the Steering Committee members who guided me through various stages of the project, and the Research Officers in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and the Office of Multicultural Interests. Their feedback helped me rethink my own ideas. My sincere thanks go to Ms Linley Hill for diligently maintaining the project accounts, and to Philip Etherington (School Business Manager) for guiding me through the maze of budgeting. Finally, I am grateful to my husband, Professor James Trevelyan, who shared his knowledge of qualitative research processes, and trained the research team in the use of various softwares to assist with the analysis— all with a smile and full support for the project.

Executive Summary

In an age dominated by discussion of counter-terrorism, an understanding of Muslim identities needs to be developed within the context of issues of inclusion and exclusion, and an acceptance of diversity of views and practices among Muslims. Drawing upon multiple definitions, particularly the one developed by Julian Le Grand, social exclusion could be defined as:

‘a condition where individuals or communities are geographically part of a society but *feel* that they cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens because, *in their perception*, a) conditions and institutions exist that actively limit or deny such participation, and b) where societal and/or governmental agencies portray them as ‘outsiders’.

Social exclusion may be perceived to be absolute or relative by the individuals and communities concerned. The *perceptions* of exclusion could be at variance with the reality of exclusion. Such a variance does not render the perception of being excluded meaningless: the feeling of being excluded remains significant as it contributes to how an individual and a community may relate to the wide society. Also, exclusion is not a unidirectional and uni-dimensional phenomenon. The ‘excluded’ minority are not immune to the phenomenon of excluding others: they may also relatively or absolutely exclude the majority or other members of the minority community.

The project team conducted qualitative interviews with 221 Muslims (111 males and 110 females). Of these, 99 are between 15 and 29 years of age. We also interviewed 108 non-Muslims (54 males and 54 females) to assess their views on Muslims in Australia. Primarily relying on ‘snowballing’, the respondents were selected from different ethnicities, age groups, economic background, professions and religious outlook, and educational backgrounds.

1. The interviews reveal a perception of relative exclusion among Muslims. The series of events since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 including the bombings in Bali (2002), Madrid (2004) and London (2005) have been the main contributors to this perception. The exclusion is apparent in increased incidents of harassment and the discourse on Australian values. Muslims feel that they can be both Muslim and Australian but perceive the wider community to be less accepting of this compatibility.
2. A large majority of Muslim respondents predominantly blame the media for its negative and sensational coverage of issues dealing with Islam and Muslims. But the Australian Government is also viewed as having contributed to the relative exclusion by design or inadvertently. The lack of knowledge about Islam held by non-Muslims, and the insular or negative attitudes adopted by some Muslims are also identified as factors contributing to the phenomenon of relative exclusion.

3. A mixed picture exists with respect to non-Muslim views on Muslims. With a very low level of knowledge about the religion of Islam, the respondents rely on a combination of sources to inform themselves of developments pertaining to Muslims. While they display scepticism of the information provided by the media, the media does shape their views on Islam and Muslims. Images of oppression of women as depicted through the wearing of hijab, and violence in Islam remain the main descriptors for a number of the respondents. However, these negative images coexist with either positive or nuanced views on Islam and Muslims. Hence not *all* of the respondents adopt exclusionary attitude towards Muslims in Australia.
4. The difference between the perception and the reality, however, does not alter the fact that Muslims are increasingly feeling relatively excluded. The sense of exclusion needs to be addressed as well as strategies devised that promote social inclusion of Muslims.
5. At the symbolic level, it is essential for the Australian Government, particularly its leaders, need to adopt *a new language of communal harmony* without ignoring the reality of countering militancy. This could be achieved by categorically stating that the Australian Government favours the notion of 'Building a Safe Australia for All' and that its participation in the War on Terror is not directed against Muslims. While a symbolic gesture, this could help reassure some Muslims that the federal and state governments are not contributing to their relative exclusion.
6. At the practical level, goal-oriented interaction among Muslims and non-Muslims needs to be supported and encouraged by federal, state and local governments.
7. In the process of devising strategies and engaging Muslims, it is important to take into account the diversity of views and practices among Muslims in Australia. Our research indicates that a variety of nodes of information are shaping the way Muslims understand and practice their religion. These range between orthodox ideas and related practices to modern/progressive interpretations of Islam and variants of these along the spectrum. While the process does include suggestions of de-territorialised Islam among some Muslims, cultural-specific ideas of Islam and Muslim practices continue to exist and be reaffirmed by many.

The spectrum of religious interpretations and their links with culture does not provide an adequate picture of social engagement by Muslims. It depends upon how texts are read and understood with the help of available nodes of religious knowledge on a continuous basis. The process is a dynamic one with individuals shifting along the spectrum and modifying their views on what it means to be a Muslim as their access to information changes or they feel the need to reassess their views on religion. In other words, while identifiable at a certain point in time, the frameworks used by Muslims do change as they come in contact with new information.

Within this continuously shifting context, some Muslims belonging to different ‘in-groups’ do adopt behaviour patterns that could be equated with excluding others (both Muslims and non-Muslims). Other Muslims continue to engage the wider community at different levels and in different spaces.

The strategies devised to promote social inclusion of Muslims need to be broad-based and engage representatives from communities who are feeling excluded and who do want to be included.

8. Research on experiences and views of Muslim men needs to be conducted. Our research indicates that the tendency to focus on subsets of Muslims (Muslim women, youth, Imams etc) ignores the interconnectedness of the lives of Muslims living in Australia. It particularly hides the sense of marginalisation and exclusion that educated (but unemployed or under-employed) men may experience. This, in turn, appears to shape the experiences and views of other members of their respective families. It also contributes to the oral understandings being transmitted by Muslims who feel excluded.
9. The perceptual context in which Muslims interact with other Australians is not completely negative. Nonetheless, the sense of Muslims being the ‘other’ has increased in recent years. The excessive emphasis on the War on Terror and Muslim extremism has created some fear among the wider society of Muslims. This fear contributes to mutual exclusion. This phenomenon needs to be addressed by enhancing an understanding of diversity of Islam. Education will play an important role in this process: our curriculum needs to reflect an acceptance of diversity within Australia. Exposure to these ideas at an early stage will contribute to harmony at a later stage. It carries the promise of new generations of Australians who share a vision of a country where they are all equal, accepted and included.

Understanding Muslim Identities in Australia: Dynamic Diversity

*The issue with which Muslims in Britain have had to contend has been the willingness of the state to accommodate their religious needs despite the fact that Muslims were not part of the historical compromises that led to the inherited religious establishment. (Joel S. Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper, **Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany**, 2005)*

In a book published in 2005 about the relationship between Muslims and three selected European states, Fetzer and Soper proceeded on the premise that Britain had been most successful in responding effectively to the needs and demands of its Muslim population. Before long, however, the London Bombings (7 and 21 July 2005) had established the limits of this understanding. While Trevor Phillips, the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, talked of Britain "sleepwalking towards segregation", a working group in the United Kingdom produced a report on *Preventing Extremism Together* that explored possible strategies for countering violent extremism with particular reference to young Muslim men and women. Essentially the London Bombings catapulted the discussion on Muslim militancy into a new stage of analysing the reasons for 'home grown terrorism' in Western democracies. Unlike the period following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 when discussions essentially revolved round the poverty, root causes and the inherent negativity of militant Muslim groups based in Muslim majority states, the attacks in London reinforced two dominant genre of analyses.

The first of these two genres, the counter-terrorism/terrorism school of thought, predominantly focuses on the process of militancy, i.e. *the pathways* an individual follows before he/she shifts into the space of accepting the logic of engaging in terrorism in the name of Islam. The identification of these processes, it is assumed, could help thwart planned terrorist acts *before* they pose a threat to others. This school draws upon experiences and practices of other terrorist groups that have operated at national and international levels in order to deal with the issue of Muslim militancy. It also relies upon some understanding of the formation of identities among Muslims living in Western societies. In addition to the plethora of books and academic articles, the report issued by the New York Police Department, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, reflects this school of thought. It argues that, against the background of Jihadist or jihadi-Salafi ideology, an individual goes through four stages identified as: pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and Jihadization. Through these four stages, the report traces the shift from being 'unremarkable' Muslims living 'ordinary' lives to one of accepting the duty to 'participate in Jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors'. It maintains that the journey through these stages could be swift or last over two or three years.¹

The other genre, which could be identified as the 'opportunity deficit' school of thought, builds on the poverty-induced theories which found currency soon after the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. It seeks explanations for the emergence of 'homegrown terrorism' within the context of the *actual conditions and experiences* of Muslims as citizens in the West. It highlights the relevance of socio-economic marginalisation combined with the prevalence of Islamophobia as a significant

contributor to the radicalisation of Muslims living in liberal democracies. The role of Islamisation, where young Muslims ‘discover’ or ‘rediscover’ Islam, shun their cultural traditions, access information through cyber space and other sources, and then develop a commitment to Jihad, emerges as a significant focus of these studies. They also focus on the institutions established by and for Muslims as the expression of Muslim participation in the wider society, including literature on the role of mosques, schools and identity formation among Islamic communities residing in the West. But the plethora of literature does not attempt to establish *the link between different experiences and institutions* through which Muslims interact with their respective communities.

Some exceptions to these two dominant genres do exist. The Dutch government’s report entitled *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands*, for instance, links socio-psychological and socio-political context of radicalisation with external factors that may contribute to the emergence of militancy among Muslim youth.² While still being more sympathetic to the terrorism/counter-terrorism genre, it indicates an appreciation of the role played by domestic contexts in radicalising Muslim youth.

The excessive emphasis on radicalisation and the need to explain militancy, however, suffers from a problem: it focuses on the minority phenomenon. While the need to explain the actions of the militant minority with the ultimate goal of providing security for the society is understandable, such an approach denies us the ability to appreciate the views and experiences of the majority of Muslims living in western liberal societies. A need exists to understand the dynamic and diverse nature of views, beliefs and meanings assigned to ‘being a Muslim’ *by* Muslims in western societies. This diversity of meanings needs to be linked to both local and international *conditions, institutions and structures* that introduce and/or reinforce these ideas and practices, as well as the multiple *manifestations* of resulting Muslim identities in western liberal societies. Through such an understanding, we can become aware of the areas that may contribute to radicalisation. But more importantly, such knowledge can help us identify positive spaces that can be capitalised upon to build and reinforce harmony and social cohesion.

This report aims to address this need by focusing on Muslim identities in Australia as gleaned through research on Muslims living in Western Australia. The research is based on the premise that Muslim identities, like those of others, are not fixed in nature. In addition to continuously evolving, they exist in a dynamic relationship to the structures and sources of information about religion and the world at large. With globalisation and access to multiple sources of information, individuals are exposed to and influenced by ideas on Islam and local/global situations that constantly shape and re-shape their relationship to their immediate environment. But instead of being mere recipients of information and ideas, these individuals also become agents in their own right: they contribute to the local and global pool of knowledge and ideas and in the process shape and re-shape the context in which others develop their ideas and identities as well. Hence, we cannot separate the views of Muslims and their identities in Australia from the developments outside the country, as well as the pool of ideas being communicated among Muslims through the cyber space, telephone lines, satellite television networks and face-to-face contacts.

This report is also based on the premise that, as in the case of other minority communities, Muslim identities in Australia and other western liberal societies cannot be fully comprehended without reference to issues of social exclusion and inclusion. A host of anthropological, sociological and political literature testifies to the contested nature of the concept of 'social exclusion'. Since its early use by the French as denoting those 'who slipped through the social insurance system', the term has come to connote a myriad of meanings. They include exclusion from the labour market, poverty, marginalisation, a denial of membership to the 'in-group', mechanisms that act to detach people from social mainstream, and barriers to the participation in the normal activities of citizens in a society despite an individual's preference for such participation. Drawing upon these definitions, particularly the one developed by Julian Le Grand,³ social exclusion could be defined as:

'a condition where individuals or communities are geographically part of a society but *feel* that they cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens because, *in their perception*, a) conditions and institutions exist that actively limit or deny such participation, and b) where societal and/or governmental agencies portray them as 'outsiders'.

Based on such perceptions, some individuals or communities may feel that the wider society and structures completely deny them the right to participation as citizens. Others may feel that such exclusion is limited to areas and/or situations but nonetheless exists for them to be aware of it. In other words, social exclusion may be perceived to be absolute or relative by the individuals and communities concerned. If we are to understand Muslim identities in Australia, therefore, it is essential to inquire if Muslims *feel excluded* from the wider Australian society.

The discussion of social exclusion, however, must also acknowledge that *perceptions* of exclusion may be at variance with the reality of exclusion. At the individual level, we may feel more excluded than the situation warrants. Alternatively, we may not be aware of the exclusion while it continues around us. At the community level, the dominant community may not be excluding a minority as much as the view entertained by those perceiving such exclusion. Such a variance does not render the perception of being excluded meaningless: the feeling of being excluded remains significant as it contributes to how an individual and a community may relate to the wide society. However, it is still important to ascertain the extent to which the idea of being excluded is mirrored by those who are perceived as the excluders. The need for such knowledge is relevant to understanding Muslim experiences in Australia.

It is also important to note that exclusion is not a uni-directional and uni-dimensional phenomenon. It is not always so that the wider community and structures exclude the minority. The excluded minority are not immune to the phenomenon of excluding others: they may also relatively or absolutely exclude the majority or other members of the minority community. Hence if we are to develop a holistic understanding of how Muslims experience and manifest their identities in Australia, it is important to ask

questions like: Does a sense of social exclusion exist among Muslims in Australia? Do Muslims feel a sense of absolute or relative exclusion? How widespread is this sense of exclusion? Does the wider community in Australia voluntarily exclude Muslims or not? Do Muslims themselves voluntarily engage in a process of excluding 'others'? What strategies can be adopted to promote a sense of social inclusion among Muslims in Australia? With whom does the responsibility for promoting such inclusion rest?

This report attempts to answer these questions with the help of qualitative interviews conducted in Western Australia. Chapter One establishes the context and methodology used for research. The second chapter presents information on the frameworks used by Muslims to develop ideas about their Muslim and Australian identities. The third chapter focuses on Muslim views on being in a Western environment, followed by Chapter Four which assesses the views of non-Muslims about Muslims in Australia. The concluding chapter provides ideas on how the overall picture developed from the research can be used to promote social inclusion (inverse of social exclusion) of Muslims by harnessing energies of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Chapter One: Islam in Australia

Islam and Muslims are not new to Australia. The history of Muslim contacts with Australia predates European settlement. Fishermen from Macasser regularly visited Australia's northern shores in December for four months to catch trepang. While self sufficient and non-intrusive, the regular contacts left their mark on the language and culture of the indigenous communities of the Arnhem Land and neighbouring areas.⁴ These indigenous communities borrowed words from the Macassans' vocabulary and depicted their influence in their paintings. The first *regular* settlement of Muslims in Australia, however, started in 1860 with the arrival of 3 camel-drivers from British India. Over the next fifty years, their number exceeded 2,000. Coming from the North Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan of the British Indian colony (which now forms part of Pakistan), and Afghanistan, these people were identified as Afghans, or Ghans.⁵ They provided the most reliable and efficient transport system between different colonies. At the same time they left a mark on Australian history. As devout Muslims, these Afghan cameleers built towns and mosques where they could practise their religion and coexist as tightly knit communities. Since they were not permitted to bring their wives from British India, these Afghans also married the women from 'peripheral classes of Australia' including widows, poor Anglo-Saxon women and Aboriginal women. Their off-spring were the first known Australian-born Muslims.

By 1921, the total number of Muslims living in Australia, including Afghans and others especially Malays, was estimated to be less than 3,000. With the arrival of Albanian Muslims, the number increased slightly after the First World War. Once the Second World War came to an end, Muslims from Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Poland, Hungary and Russia also arrived as part of the agreements concluded between the International Refugee Organisation and Australia. But the number of Muslims in the country remained small. In the early 1970s, a combination of the changed Australian immigration policy and political instability in Lebanon brought a new wave of Muslim immigrants to Australia. Thereafter, the proportion of Muslims in the population increased slowly but consistently. The events surrounding the Gulf Crisis/Gulf War created another wave of Muslim immigration into Australia. By 1991 the census showed 146,600 Muslims were living in Australia.⁶ Of these, 51,321 or 35% were born in Australia, whereas the remaining Muslims traced their origin to 67 different countries, 'making them one of the most ethnically diverse religious group in the country'.⁷ Thereafter, the immigration of refugees from Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan increased the total number of Muslims in Australia. By 2001, their number in Australia had increased to 281,586 (or 1.5% of the total Australian population). This reflected a 40.2% increase since the previous Census in 1996.⁸

According to the 2006 Census, 340,392 Muslims live in Australia comprising 1.71% of the total population. This reflects a 69.4% increase since the 1996 Census.⁹ Of these 37.8% (or 128,903) have been born in Australia with almost 48.7% under 25 years of age. Unlike the general Australian picture, the Muslim population in Australia consists of more males (52.2%) than females (47.8%). They are mostly concentrated in New South

Wales and Victoria with 81.6% of the total Muslim population living in these two states. Sydney and Melbourne are the two major cities accounting for 47% and 30.3% of the total Muslim population respectively. The number of Muslims in other capital cities has also increased with Brisbane and Perth registering 41.1% and 27.1% increase since the 2001 Census respectively.

Muslims living in Australia come from ethnically diverse backgrounds. After the largest cohort of Australian-born Muslims, those from Turkey and Lebanon constitute the two largest ethnic groups. Other countries contributing the bulk of the Muslim population in Australia include Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Iran and Fiji.

Muslims are relatively disadvantaged in the labour market: according to the 2006 Census, 61.2% of Australia's total population are employed and only 3.4% are unemployed. In contrast, only 44.9% Muslims are employed and 7% are unemployed. The picture is similar to that prevailing in 2001 when the unemployment rate for Australian Muslims was 19.1% in 2001 compared to the national figure of 7.4%. Specifically, the rate of unemployment among Muslims aged 15-24 years was 11.4% in 2001 compared to a national average of 8.7%. By 2006 Muslim youth unemployment among 15-24 year olds was 18.4%, compared to the national average of 9.3%.

Australian Muslims also tend to have less income than the national average: according to 2006 Census, 58.17% of Muslims earned less than \$399 per week compared to the Australian percentage of 41%. In contrast, 21.3% Muslims earned between \$400-799 per week compared to the national level of 24.2%.¹⁰ It is, however, important to distinguish between Muslims who came as skilled workers and those who entered the country as refugees. Earlier immigrants, for instance, had higher skill level and tended to occupy professional positions, but more recent immigrants have been less fortunate. This probably explains why in 2001 Muslims from countries such as Iraq (69.0%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (61.0%), Afghanistan (58.6%) and Lebanon (57.6%) had very high proportions with incomes less than \$15,600 indicating that a large proportion were unlikely to be in full-time employment. On the other hand, the highest proportion of those with incomes above \$32,000 came from Fiji (26.6%), Iran (23.2%) and Pakistan (22.6%).¹¹

As in other Western liberal democracies, Muslims have gone through the process of establishing social structures and institutions that reflect their Islamic identity. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) is an example. But at local levels, ethnic organizations with an Islamic flavour have also emerged that cater to the needs of the Muslim population. In addition, Muslims have also established schools and mosques that serve their respective communities.¹² The number of these schools and mosques has been proliferating with the increase in the total Muslim presence in Australia.

As in other Western liberal democracies, Muslims have also experienced negative attitudes from the wider community in Australia. Some signs of this fear of Islam were apparent at the turn of the 20th century: abuse of women in some Afghan households was explained in terms of their Islamic beliefs. But the incidence of such fear and distance from the Muslim community gradually increased during the post-Second World War era.

As discussed by Anne Aly, 'the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics marked the beginning of a pre-occupation with the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence in the Australian media. The Arab terrorist became the most prevalent image associated with the Middle East in Australia. In the 1980s the focus of the Australian media shifted to Islamic fundamentalism prompted by the Iranian revolution in 1979. Representations of Khomeini as a fanatical despot became synonymous with Islamic fundamentalism and progressively throughout the 1980s the images inspired by Khomeini's campaign against the United States as the "Great Satan" became the touchstone for understanding Islam. The media repeatedly invoked images of fanatical Muslims poised not only to cleanse their own societies but ultimately to Islamise the world, instil religious law and annihilate Western liberal democracy.'¹³ Specifically after the Gulf Crisis and Gulf War of 1990-91, Muslims increasingly reported acts of discrimination and harassment by members of the wider society.¹⁴ Independent analyses also suggested that Muslims in Australia were stereotyped as a 'dangerous group that performs all sorts of nasty things'.¹⁵

The terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 further altered the environment in which Muslims have been operating in Australia. This grew out of a series of developments that contributed to a heightened emphasis on Muslims as a distinct group in Australia. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the United States, the Bush Administration declared a War on Terror with the aim of targeting Al-Qaeda and preventing similar incidents in future. While the US administration sought allies in the region bordering Afghanistan, the Howard Government declared its support for Washington in its counter-terrorism efforts by invoking the ANZUS Treaty. The Australian Government also agreed to contribute to the international coalition designed to unseat the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and reconstruct the war-ravaged country. This declaration of support also extended to Australia's participation in the 'Coalition of the Willing' led by the United States which invaded Iraq to unseat the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003.¹⁶

While it could be argued that these foreign policy measures reflected a continuation of the US-Australian alliance, the articulation of the 'threat' in terms of 'Muslim militancy' against a series of terrorist events drew attention to the position of Muslims within Australia. The bombings in Bali (2002), Madrid (2004) and most importantly London (2005) contributed to a discourse about the possibility of similar incidents occurring in Australia. The discourse essentially reflected the difficulty of dealing with threats where the locale of militancy cannot be clearly established. With available evidence of emerging globalised networks among Muslim militants, it was inevitable that some concern would be expressed about Muslims in Australia. However, the media and some politicians contributed to the process by ignoring the inherent diversity of the Muslim communities in the country. Muslims were portrayed as a minority likely to harbour radical and militant elements in its fold that further contributed to concerns in some sections of the society about their loyalty to Australia.

The developments since 11 September 2001 also had some positive impact on Muslims. Guided by a need to stress that its counter-terrorism efforts were not directed against all the Muslims, the Howard Government tried to engage moderate Muslims. The Muslim

Community Reference Group (MCRG) was set up soon after the London bombings with the clear aim of countering radicalisation by harnessing support from moderate sections of the Muslim community. The Government also supported series of initiatives undertaken by the civil society, government departments, and the Muslim community in order to build bridges.¹⁷ Despite these positive steps, however, those already sceptical of Islam reinforced their anti-Muslim attitudes and increasingly identified Muslims as posing a threat to Australian security. The incidents of harassment and discrimination increased against some who could be easily (and sometimes wrongly) identified as Muslims.¹⁸

The Muslim community has publicly responded to this changed situation in different ways. At one level, some sections of the community have engaged in political and social activism designed to increase understanding of Muslim faith, practices and diversity. Operating in different spheres as analysts, academics and social workers, they have contributed to discussions that highlight the presence of ‘moderate voices’ among Muslims.¹⁹ Significantly, as women have emerged as the signifiers of difference with heightened references to those wearing *hijab*, Muslim women have become more active in civil society. They have participated in national and local projects that bring Muslim and non-Muslim communities together.²⁰ Other Muslims have opted for what could be identified as reinforcing culturally-determined boundaries with a view to ‘protecting’ the Muslim community. They have questioned the validity of claims that Al-Qaeda has masterminded terrorist activities,²¹ and have urged Muslims not to forget their Islamic identity in a predominantly non-Muslim environment. The divergence of responses has sometimes contributed to tensions within the Muslim community that has spilled over into the public arena. The debates among Muslims on the controversy surrounding the remarks made by Sheikh Hilali were a case in point: while some Muslims strongly opposed the remarks, others critiqued the critics for not siding with a fellow Muslim. Irrespective of the stand taken by individuals, such debates reflect attempts by a minority community (in this case, Muslims) to deal with the prospects of social/political exclusion at a stage in history when the discourse on Muslim militancy dominates discussion of terrorism and counter-terrorism.

If we are to go beyond these suggestions of a sense of exclusion among Muslims and get a deeper understanding of Muslim views in Australia, however, it is important to find out how ordinary Muslims feel about being in Australia and understand their views on the changing national and international environment. Essentially, we need to delve into the notion(s) of identities among Muslims living in Australia and develop an understanding of how these notions may be interacting with and affecting their participation in the society. Such understanding could serve two different purposes: first, it can help us develop some appreciation of the prevalence of feelings that could be channelled at some later stage into militancy. Second, it can also sensitise us to the prevailing views and thoughts that can be capitalised upon with the purpose of building harmony and cooperation. Ultimately, such knowledge can assist in creating a safer Australia.

Understanding Muslims Identities: Methodology

The literature on identities and identity construction abounds. The new millennium has witnessed further proliferation of such literature with specific reference to Muslims in western liberal democracies. Specialists in sociology, anthropology, political science and psychology, to name a few disciplines, have attempted to understand various factors that have contributed to the construction of Muslim identity (or identities) in these countries. The set of ideas emerging can broadly be categorised as those related to marginalisation, de-territorialised religious identities, institutional structures contributing to Muslim identities in the West, and the international environment. The literature on marginalisation of Muslim immigrants focuses on their relative lack of upward social and economic mobility, over-crowded or poor housing standards, proportionately higher unemployment rates, and the Islamophobia as the context in which Muslims live as citizens in these countries. Analyses specific to second and third generation of Muslims tend to be more focused on the process of de-territorialisation of religious identities. They explore the processes in which the youth are seeking a de-cultured Islam through information acquired in the cyber space as well as mosques and other institutions in their respective regions. The institutional literature assumes that mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim Students Associations play a role in shaping the ideas about Islam among younger (and often locally-born) Muslims. The fourth set of ideas link the emerging Muslim identities and ideas with the prevailing international environment including the Palestinian issue, the US War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq.

While drawing upon these studies, this research project is guided by the realisation that any understanding of religious or other identities among Muslims living in the West requires a holistic/integrated approach. It cannot be divorced from *their perception* of the prevailing national and international environment. Nor can it be separated from the experiences encountered at family and social levels. With a view to taking into account all these variables in developing an understanding of Muslim identities in Australia, this research project draws upon two sets of ideas: the Brecher Model and the ideas of citizenship as developed by Thomas Janoski, Barbalet and Giddens.

The Brecher Model, developed in the 1960s, acknowledged the role of perceptions in formation of views about national and international developments and existing conditions. Placing the participant at the centre of the model, he argued that the operational environment is perceived and interpreted by an individual through an attitudinal prism consisting of ideology, historical legacy and personal dispositions. Hence, any two individuals could interpret the same information about international and national conditions differently. The differing perceptions contribute to these individuals assigning meaning to developments and also determine their decisions which, in turn, have implications for both domestic and international environment.²² The relationship of all the identified variables is depicted in Figure 1.

The ideas of citizenship developed by Thomas Janoski build on the notion of spaces of citizenship introduced by T.H.Marshall. Janoski conceives of citizenship in terms of an individual participating in four overlapping spheres: the state sphere, the private sphere, the market sphere and the public sphere.²³ The exact nature and form of this

participation, in his view, depends upon the choices made by individual citizens. Hence, one could opt for passive or active participation in a nation-state with certain universalistic rights and obligations 'at a specified level of equality'.²⁴ The participation, in the opinion of Barbalet and Giddens, cannot be divorced from a sense of belongingness: individual citizens need to *feel* that they are part of the nation-state and are *accepted* by others in this capacity. Absence of this sense of belonging reduces citizenship to mere legalistic identity with the absence of real identification with the country in question.

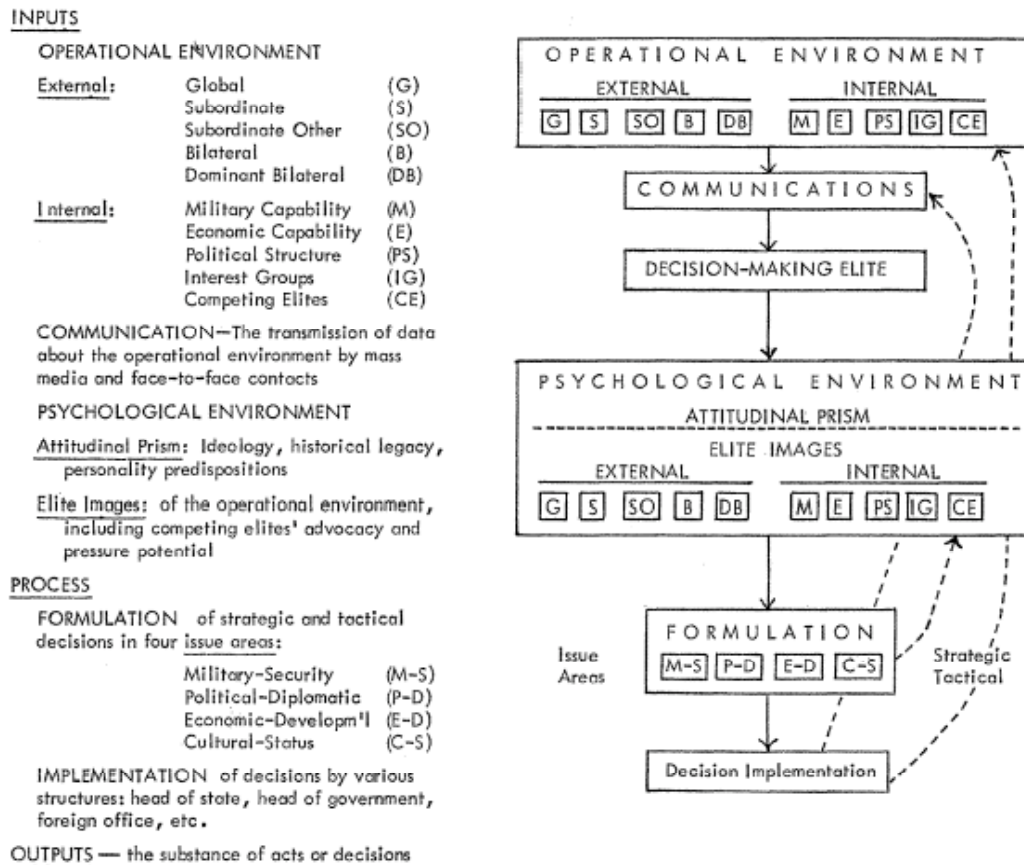


Figure 1.1: The Brecher Model

Combining these ideas against the backdrop of increasing transnationalism we have developed a model which assumes that, in addition to the spaces identified by Janoski, people also operate in religious/spiritual spaces which are not territorially limited. Also individuals increasingly operate in local, national, international and cyber spaces as both national and international beings. This provides them with access to ideas that were previously controlled by the state. Participation in these spaces, we assume, bring individuals in touch with institutions, nodes and experiences that contribute to their identity formation. Individuals develop *frameworks* of analysis that assist them in understanding, explaining and predicting the world they live in. These frameworks provide the context in which individuals develop views on what is happening in their

immediate environment and internationally, as well as their feelings about this environment. They can provide us with clues on how accepted or unaccepted a person feels in a given environment. In other words, they indicate the perception of inclusion or exclusion by the person(s) concerned. At the same time, they can also help us determine if the person(s) concerned view their world (locally and globally) in exclusionary terms or not. Effectively, therefore, we have replaced the *attitudinal prism* in the Brecher’s model with *frameworks* of understandings. These frameworks are closely linked and grow out of the spaces in which individuals operate including the religious, cultural, family and social spaces.

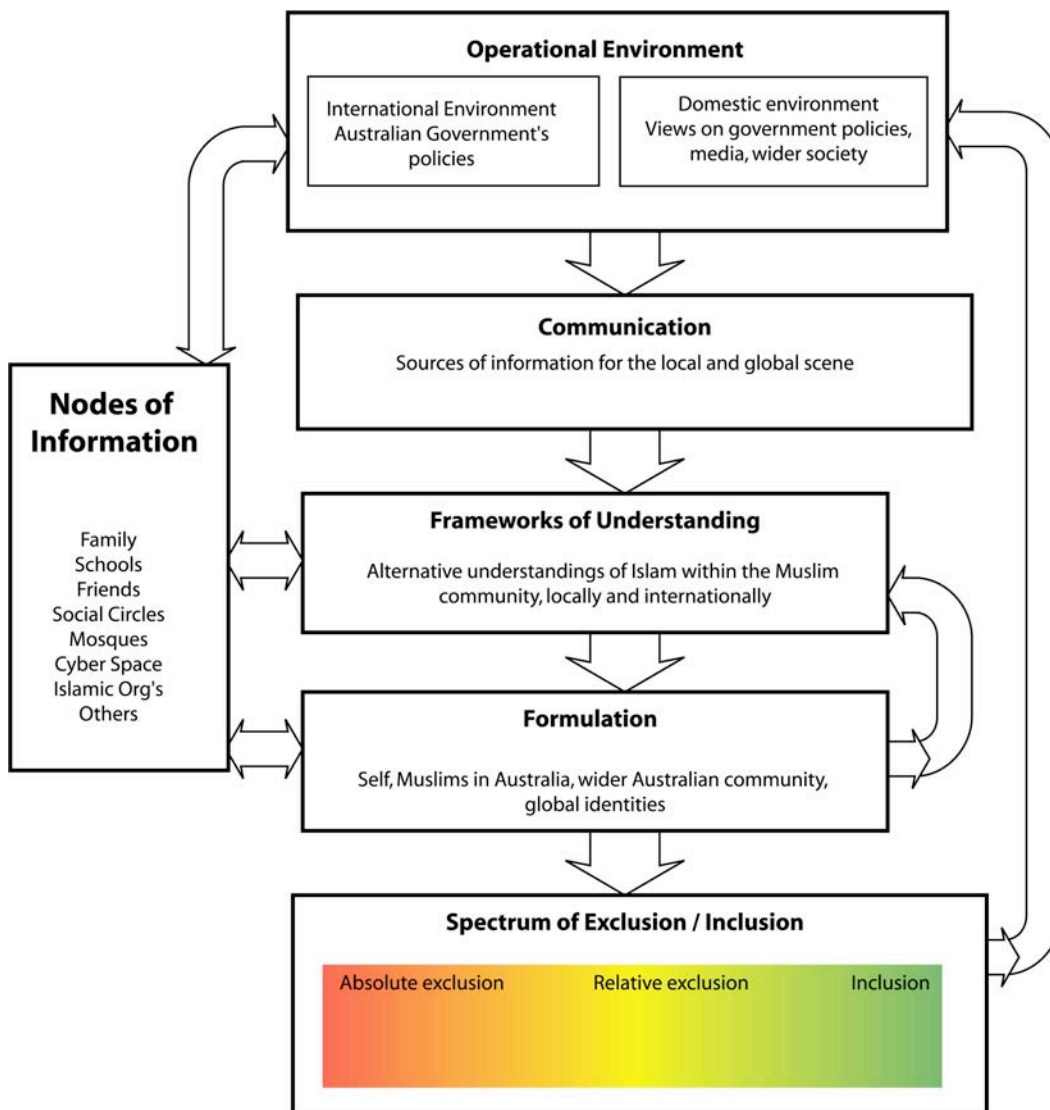


Figure 1.2: An Integrated Model to Understand Identities

The modified model (Figure 1.2) is used to assess the views of individuals on the national and international environments, their relationship to the wider society, their operation in the religious spaces and other identity-related spaces, and the contribution of these ideas and experiences to shaping their identity as Muslims in Australia. The information thus

gathered is placed along the spectrum of feeling acceptance, a sense of belonging, and inclusion/exclusion. On the one end are the respondents who, during the course of the interviews, discuss their relationship with the wider society in terms that suggest that: a) they feel a sense of belonging to Australia, b) feel accepted as both Muslims and Australians by the wider society, and b) *feel* that Muslims experience inclusion in Australia. On the other end are the respondents who indicate in their qualitative interviews that: a) they do not feel a sense of belonging to Australia, b) do not feel accepted as both Muslims and Australians by the wider society, and c) feel that Muslims experience exclusion in Australia due to their religious beliefs. The middle of the spectrum is allocated to those who may feel that they feel a sense of belonging to Australia but lack a sense of acceptance by the wider society. They may not feel absolutely excluded but may feel that attitudes of the government and/or society towards Muslims in general, or specifically towards their ethnic group, reflect a relative lack of acceptance.

We assume that the process of locating responses along this spectrum can give us a sense of relative exclusion or inclusion of Muslims. It can help us understand if Muslims feel absolutely or relatively excluded. It can also help us learn if the exclusion is uni-directional or not: are Muslims the excluded and never the excluders? Or do examples exist of some of them excluding the wider community? It can also give us indications of areas that need further investigation, and possible strategies that can be adapted to promote harmony and safety.

Western Australia as a Case Study

The modified model is used to develop an understanding of Muslim identities by interviewing respondents in Western Australia. With 24, 272 Muslims in 2006, Western Australia ranks as home to the third largest concentration of the followers of Islam in Australia. These numbers are in marked contrast to the small number of Muslims who lived in the state at the turn of the 20th century. Since then, their presence in the state has slowly and gradually increased with the influx of Muslims from Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa.

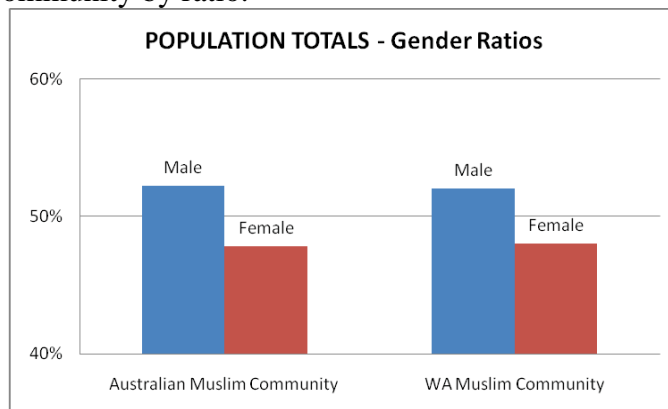
The ethnic composition of Muslims living in Western Australia is not necessarily the same as in New South Wales and Victoria in which a large proportion traces links to Lebanese and Turkish origins. As can be seen from Table 1.1, Muslims from Iraq, Indonesia and Afghanistan outnumber those from Lebanon and Turkey in Western Australia. Also, Turkey and Lebanon are the two top countries of birth for the majority of Muslims (other than those born locally) in Australia, but not in Western Australia. However, further analysis reveals that there are some similarities in the demographic features of Muslims in Western Australia and the total Australian Muslim population (Graphs 1.1-1.4).

Table 1.1: Top Twenty Countries of Birth for Muslims in Australia and Western Australia (2006)

AUSTRALIA			WESTERN AUSTRALIA		
	Total	%		Total	%
Grand Total	340393		Grand Total	24187	
AUSTRALIA	128904	37.9	AUSTRALIA	7712	31.9
LEBANON	30289	8.9	IRAQ	1470	6.1
TURKEY	23120	6.8	INDONESIA	1403	5.8
AFGHANISTAN	15958	4.7	AFGHANISTAN	1385	5.7
PAKISTAN	13825	4.1	MALAYSIA	1113	4.6
BANGLADESH	13357	3.9	SINGAPORE	963	4.0
IRAQ	10036	2.9	BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	789	3.3
INDONESIA	8657	2.5	PAKISTAN	751	3.1
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	7542	2.2	IRAN	647	2.7
IRAN	7307	2.1	SOUTH AFRICA	629	2.6
FIJI	5928	1.7	SOMALIA	592	2.4
INDIA	4889	1.4	TURKEY	532	2.2
MALAYSIA	4203	1.2	BANGLADESH	454	1.9
SOMALIA	4107	1.2	LEBANON	416	1.7
EGYPT	3454	1.0	SAUDI ARABIA	322	1.3
CYPRUS	3228	0.9	SUDAN	291	1.2
SINGAPORE	2486	0.7	UNITED KINGDOM	276	1.1
SUDAN	2479	0.7	EGYPT	272	1.1
SAUDI ARABIA	2452	0.7	INDIA	260	1.1
SOUTH AFRICA	2359	0.7	ERITREA	203	0.8
SYRIA	2267	0.7	KENYA	176	0.7

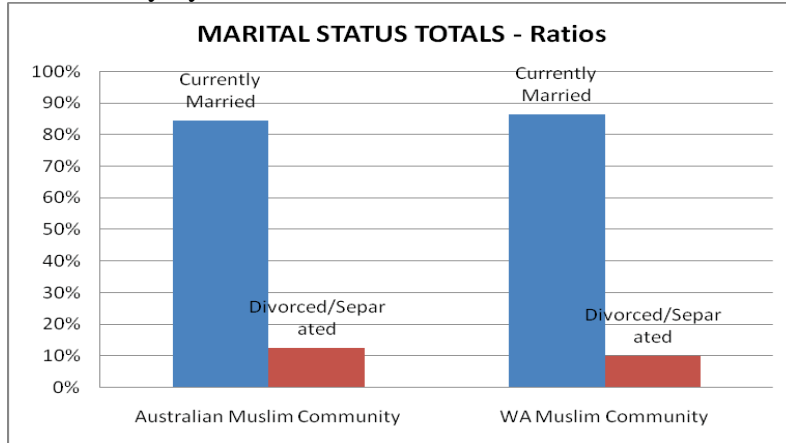
Source: The Australian Bureau of Statistics, Customised Data, Matrix Table C06-41,

Graph 1.1: Comparison of total Muslim Australian community and WA Muslim community by ratio.



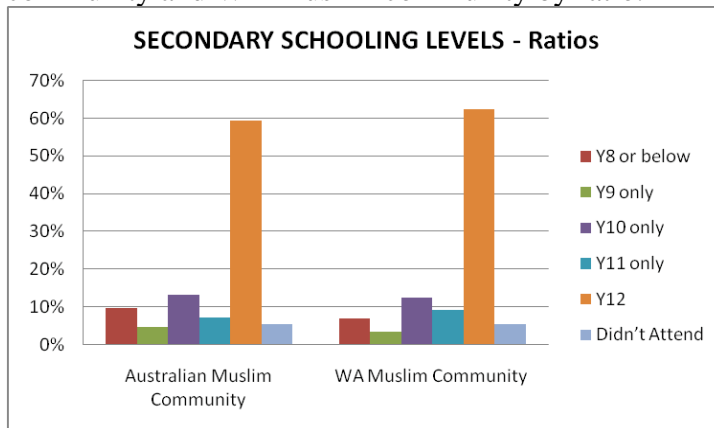
Source: 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Census (www.abs.gov.au).

Graph 1.2: Comparison of marital status within Muslim Australian community and WA Muslim community by ratio.

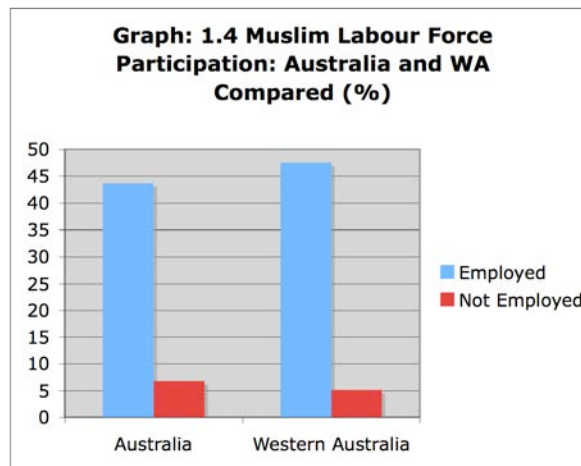


Source 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Census (www.abs.gov.au).

Graph 1.3: Comparison of secondary schooling levels within Muslim Australian community and WA Muslim community by ratio.



Source: Source 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Census (www.abs.gov.au).



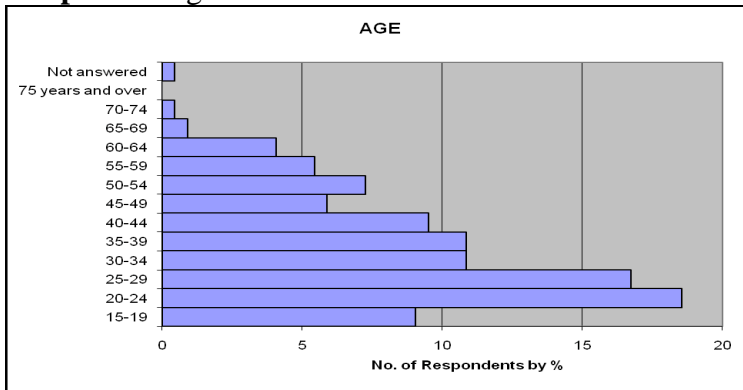
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Ethnicity Thematic Profile-Islam, Labour Force Status, Table E17

The similarity of trends also extends to the preference for capital cities for settlement. Of the total Muslim population in each of their respective states, 95.6% of New South Wales Muslims live in Sydney, while 94.4% of Victorian Muslims live in Melbourne. Of those living in Western Australia, 91.3% also live in the Perth Metropolitan Area. Rockingham, Katanning and Albany are other major centres of Muslim settlement but Perth remains their preferred destination in the state.

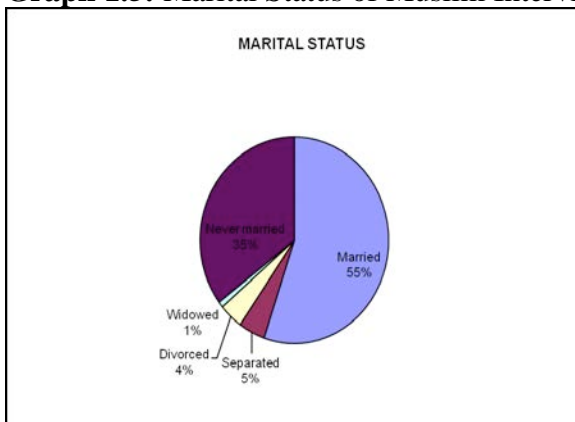
Reflecting the settlement pattern within the state, we conducted qualitative interviews with 221 Muslims. We were guided by the need to access as diverse a range of views as possible. This necessitated including respondents of different ethnicities, age groups, economic background, professions and religious outlook as well as those who had been educated in (or taught in) Islamic schools. Accessing Muslim respondents for the project, however, was not an easy process. Unlike in the early 1990s, when the Chief investigator conducted research on settlement needs of Muslims living in the Perth Metropolitan Area, the prevailing climate of fear, caution and mistrust among Muslims made the process of securing participation a difficult process. We had initially sent letters of information to community and religious leaders as well as other possible respondents, which did not elicit very positive responses. That the study was funded by the Federal and State Governments created mistrust and prompted individuals to ask questions for the motivations behind such research. This was despite the fact that *all* interviewers focusing on the Muslim Identities study belonged to Muslim backgrounds. To circumvent such concerns, we used 'snowballing' techniques. The technique has been widely used in social research: the 'gatekeepers' who introduce the interviewers to members of the community can help build trust and rapport with the prospective respondents.²⁵ In line with this methodology, we interviewed 'key persons' who could later affirm to others that the type of research and questions asked were not 'threatening' and that it was 'safe' to participate in the project. We also trained and used the help of interviewers who represented different ethnic and sectarian groups and religious outlooks. This enabled us to 'hear' from groups who would otherwise be reluctant to engage with academics interested in conducting research. However, whenever an issue surfaced which drew attention to Islam or Muslims, the relative willingness of respondents to participate in the project declined. This reluctance was apparent, for instance, during the Taj Hilali saga when he reportedly equated uncovered females with 'uncovered meat'. It was even more pronounced during the Dr Haneef case: some respondents, who had initially agreed to be interviewed, either politely apologised or avoided being contacted.

The sample of Muslim respondents consists of 111 males and 110 females. Of these, 99 are between 15 and 29 years of age. The ethnic, educational and other features of the entire sample are identified in Graphs 1.4 to 1.14. These respondents were asked to share their views on migration and settlement experiences in Australia, citizenship and identity, developments within and outside Australia, and their suggestions to the media, Muslims and the wider society, and government.

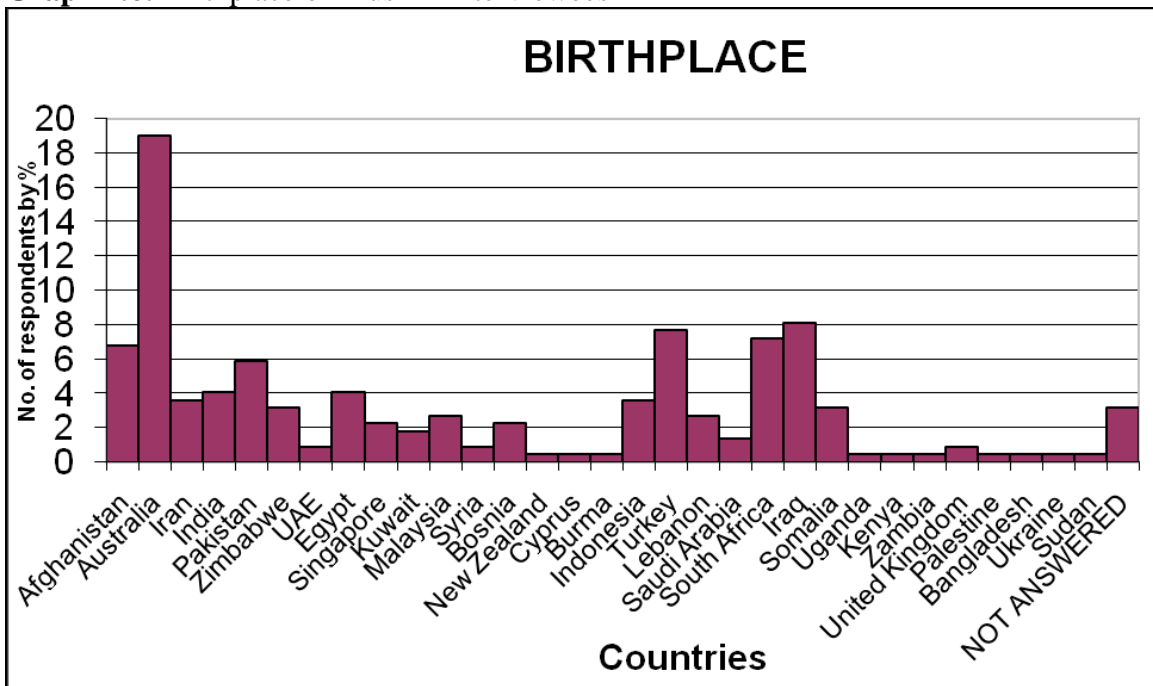
Graph 1.4: Age of Muslim Interviewees



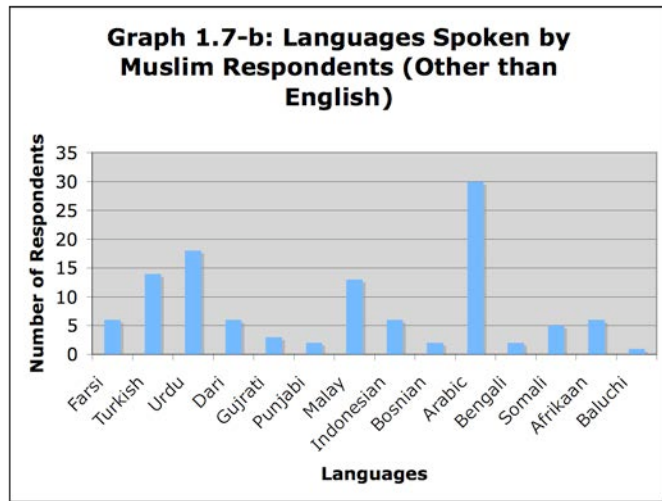
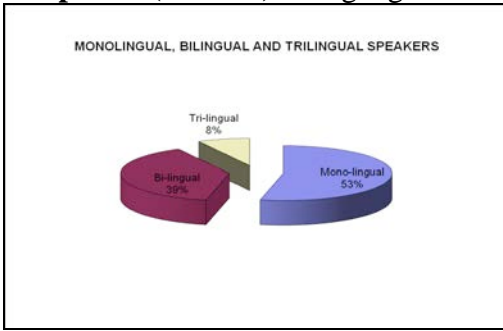
Graph 1.5: Marital Status of Muslim Interviewees



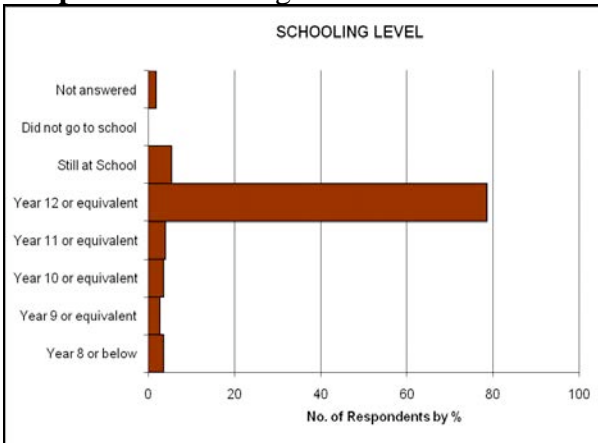
Graph 1.6: Birthplace of Muslim Interviewees



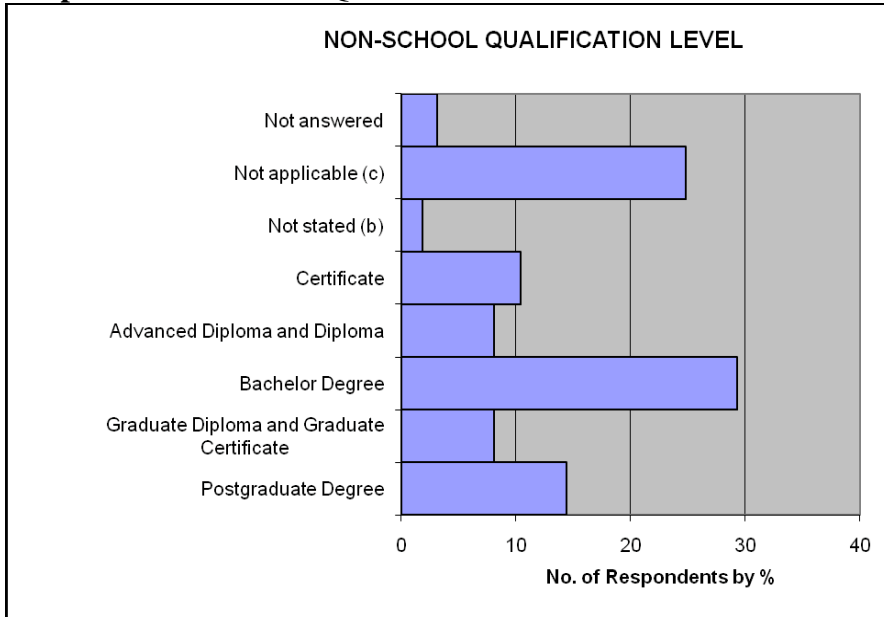
Graph 1.7 (a and b): Language Diversity of Muslim Interviewees



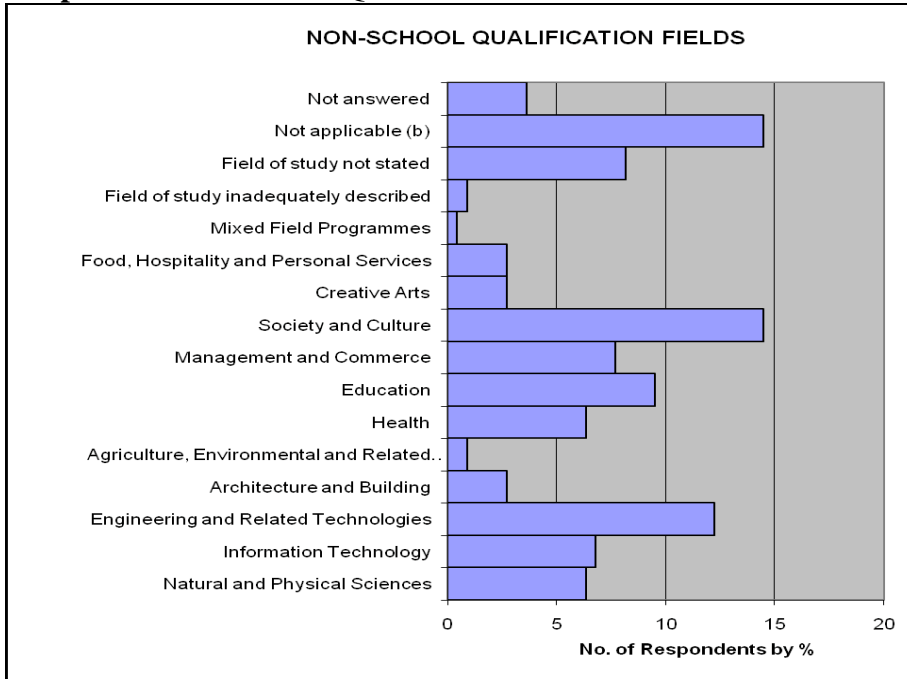
Graph 1.8: Schooling Levels of Muslim Interviewees



Graph 1.9: Non-School Qualification Levels of Muslim Interviewees



Graph 1.10: Non-School Qualification Levels of Muslim Interviewees

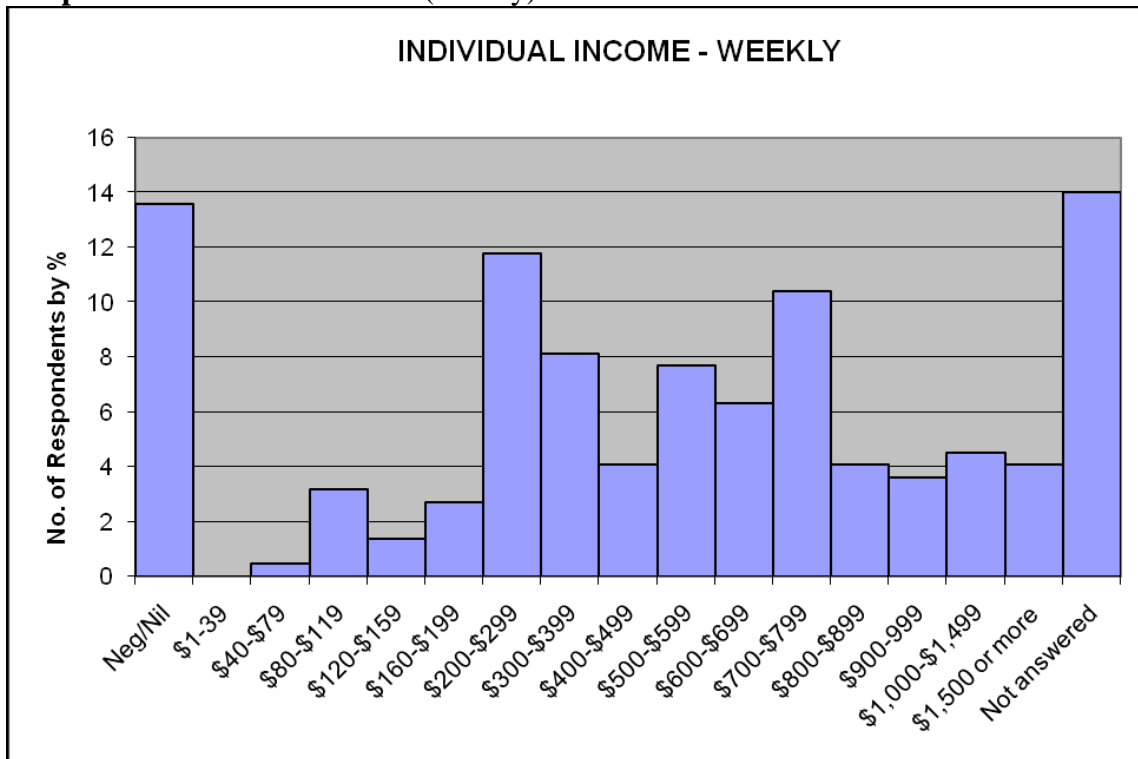


Graph 1.11: Employment Status of Muslim Interviewees*

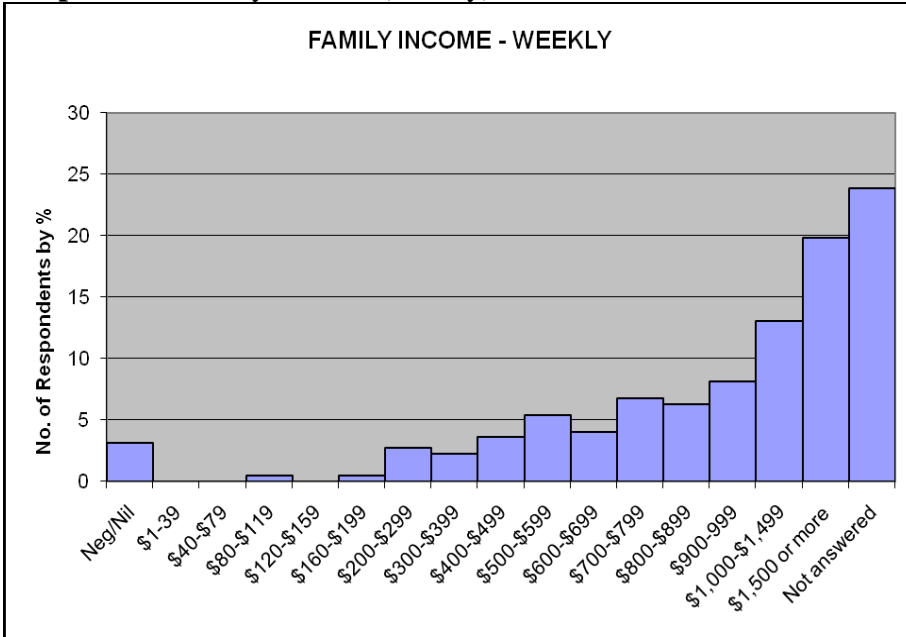


* Includes students who are not employed or not in labour force.

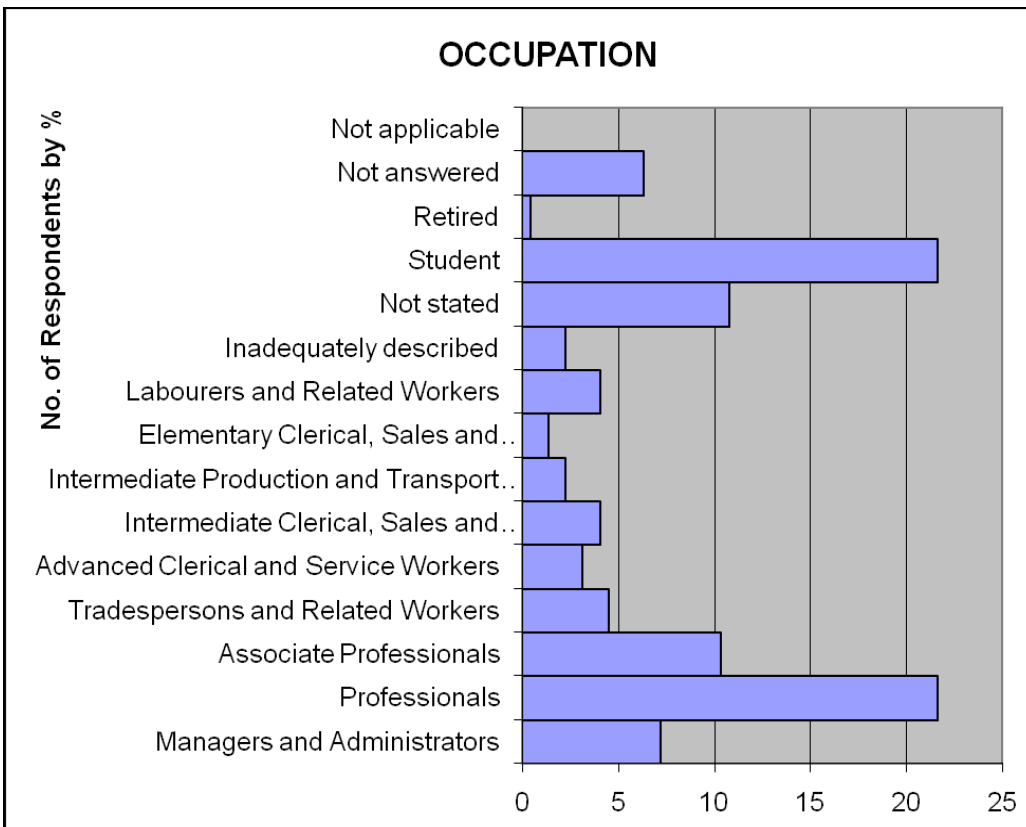
Graph 1.12: Individual Income (weekly) of Muslim Interviewees



Graph 1.13: Family Income (weekly) of Muslim Interviewees



Graph 1.14: Occupation of Muslim Respondents



Given that Muslim experiences and views cannot be divorced from the existing milieu in which they operate, the project also aimed at assessing the views of non-Muslims on Muslims living in Australia. To this end, we used the same model as the one for assessing Muslim identities. We asked questions to assess their relative knowledge of Islam, the extent to which they had been exposed to Islam or Muslims, their views on Muslim presence in Australia, and how they perceived and/or related to Muslims. Essentially, the process was aimed at assessing if the perceptions of non-Muslims about Muslims affirmed what Muslims felt were the attitudes of the wider non-Muslim community towards Muslims.

Securing respondents from the non-Muslim section of the community proved relatively easier. As in the case of 'Muslim sample', we endeavoured to access views of a wide cross-section of the community. The list included representatives from other religious communities, ethnicities, educational and economic backgrounds. Apart from a few rejections and queries, the majority of those contacted either volunteered or put the non-Muslim interviewers in touch with other respondents. Consequently, we conducted qualitative interviews with 108 non-Muslims. Of these, 54 were males and 54 were females. The demographic features of these respondents are presented in Chapter 4.

The data gathered through the qualitative interviews was analysed. Our aim was to assess the *relative (not absolute) presence of ideas and views* on the range of questions asked. At the same time, we analysed the data for ideas that were not frequently mentioned but were significant for pointing towards trends and ideas that could be useful in understanding Muslim identities. The following chapters discuss the findings of this analysis. We used the Atlas ti programme to establish the validity of our assessment by using auto-coding tools.

Chapter Two: Being A Muslim- Diversity of Frameworks

Religion resides in the space of 'fundamental commitment' where an individual believes in certain 'realities and givens' with ideas of their meaning for one's identity and life experiences. Not always open to logical and scientific analyses, this fundamental commitment guides the way in which individuals relate to their immediate environments and the world at large. Islam is no exception. Muslims believe in the unity of God, Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) role in communicating God's message (the Holy Qur'an), angels, life after death and ideas of heaven and hell. They also believe in the declaration of faith, daily prayers, fasting, *zakat* (alms-giving) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage) as the five pillars of their religion. This unity of faith, however, coexists with diversity in the Muslim community. In addition to the commonly known sectarian divide (Sunnis and Shi'ites and the related schools or *madhabs*), differences among Muslims also emerge along ethnic, social, cultural, political and economic lines.

Encapsulating this diversity and providing sets of categories to understand Muslim identities has never been easy. But the problems have been compounded since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Terms like Islamic or Muslim militancy, moderate and liberal Islam, militancy, extremism, Salafism, Wahabbism and Islamism have been employed to denote differences among Muslims. Academics and practitioners have often debated the use of these categories with less than satisfactory results: some question the use of terms like orthodox and moderate Islam/Muslims, while others point to the dangers inherent in equating fundamentalism with militancy.

While cognizant of these differences, this report employs a distinction between the primacy of *divine will* and *human will* to provide the starting point for approaching the question of Muslim identities. Developed within the context of debates on the nature of an Islamic state, this distinction places the views, opinions and practices of Muslims along a spectrum of ideas. Those who focus on the primacy of the divine will argue that Islamic injunctions contained in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition provide the essential basis for the functioning of Muslim societies. They believe in the fixed nature of the holy text and Prophetic traditions as determinants of their Muslim identity and experiences. They generally do not entertain the role played by human will in understanding Islamic injunctions. However, those who do accept some role for human will, restrict the right to interpret Islamic injunctions to religious clergy (ulema) only. Muslims at this end of the spectrum can be identified as orthodox and/or fundamentalists. While not unified in their understanding, those at this end of the spectrum adopt practices which in their view replicate the Prophetic tradition, *Sunnah*. A tendency to subscribe to traditional Islamic dress code by both men and women (particularly in the form of *hijab*) is one manifestation of such an interpretation.

On the other end of the spectrum, Muslims subscribe to the idea of primacy of human will. This does not mean that they detract from the basic tenets of Islam. Rather, they hold the view that Islamic injunctions do not limit choices available to human beings to determine the structures and contexts in which Muslims can live their lives. As such,

human will becomes an instrument for the manifestation of the divine will. Such an approach to religious identity permits a flexible understanding of the relationship between religious texts and the context. While remaining committed to Islamic beliefs (the essence), they accept the need for and the reality of multiple forms in which this essence can be expressed. Essentially, for them the essence of Islam can sit comfortably with a flexibility of interpretations and related practices over time and across geographical and cultural spaces. These Muslims can be broadly identified as liberal or progressive. Replicating the trend on the orthodox end of the spectrum, not all liberal and progressive Muslims approach the idea of human will and attendant choices in a similar fashion.²⁶

Between these two extreme ends of the spectrum are Muslims with views that acknowledge the relevance and applicability of divine or human will in varying degrees. This leads them to combine orthodoxy with moderation in determining their practices and views as Muslims. They may favour orthodox/traditional interpretations of religion in one context but could subscribe to modern/secular understandings in other areas. For example, women in this space may subscribe to traditional Islamic dress code without feeling that it limits their ability to operate in the public arena—a view that not all at the orthodox end of the spectrum may accept.

It is important to note that individuals can move along the spectrum during their life time. Someone who may be identified as a secular/progressive Muslim may shift in the opposite direction and vice versa. Similarly, individuals and groups can make minor modifications in how they see the relationship between religious texts and the context. The identification with a particular end of the spectrum, in other words, is not fixed and is open to modifications and shifts.

Available sources of knowledge about Islam play a major role in these differing orientations and any related modifications. Traditionally this knowledge was acquired *in situ* through the families, mosques, religious leaders, educational institutions, and oral transfer of knowledge. The available sources of information in the modern world, however, have expanded to include knowledge present in cyber space as well as other technologically determined channels of communication. Individuals can access this information and, therefore, learn about Islam in local, national, or international spaces.

While it is difficult to establish the extent to which these multiple sources of information shape the identity and beliefs of Muslims, the available literature on Islam in Western societies points to the presence of parallel understandings of Islam. The first generation immigrants continue to practice culturally-determined varieties of Islam. Research on second and third generations, in contrast, reveals a process of de-territorialisation of Islam; Muslim youth in these societies shun culturally relevant practices of Islam in favour of salafi or other orthodox interpretations. Such generationally-specific understanding of Muslim identities contributes to the perception that the emergence of salafi/orthodox ideas among Muslim youth tends to be a pathway to radicalisation. The question arises if these broad trends are replicated in Australia? Is the search or preference for orthodox Islamic views age-specific? Do alternative understandings of Muslim identities exist among Muslims in Australia? Do Muslims move across the

spectrum? How do these ideas (both orthodox and moderate) impact upon the meanings individuals assign to the idea of 'being a Muslim'? How do these ideas also shape their relationship to the spaces in which they regularly operate as citizens?

Context of Muslim Identities

The context in which Muslims learn about Islam in Western Australia today is markedly different from the one existing for a large part of the 20th Century. This difference could be discussed in terms of teaching about Islam provided within the *family* and *public* domains. For a number of years, younger Muslims were taught about Islam within their respective family spheres. This teaching was supplemented by the knowledge provided through the first mosque that was established in Perth on William Street in 1905. The Sunday school held at the mosque provided religious knowledge to Muslim youth born and growing up in the state. The increase in the number of Muslims in the state has gradually resulted in the emergence and proliferation of both formal and informal sources of Islamic knowledge in the public domain.

Islamic Schools: Formal Sources of Information

Islamic schools stand out in the category of formal sources of knowledge about Islam. Replicating the national trend, these schools operate in the non-government/ independent sector. In Western Australia, the Australian Islamic College pioneered the process: in 1986 Abdullah Magar (an immigrant of Egyptian background) established the college which currently operates from three different campus in Perth Metropolitan Area. The three co-educational campuses reported a student enrolment of 2,517 in 2007; of these the Thornlie and Dianella AIC campuses had 550 and 667 students from kindergarten to year ten. The Kewdale campus, with an enrolment of 1290 students, teaches up to Year 12 and also hosts an intensive English language centre.

Since the early 1990s, other Muslim groups have also entered the arena and set up schools. In 1993, *The Al Hidayah Islamic School* was established by the Al-Hidayah Islamic Education Administration Incorporated. Currently located in Bentley, the school had a reported enrolment of 230 students from kindergarten to year seven. In 2003, two Islamic schools were set up in Langford and Kenwick respectively. The *Langford Islamic College (LIC)*, was one of the five such schools established by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) around the country. In 2007, 264 students were enrolled from kindergarten to Year 9. In 2008, it also enrolled students in Year Ten. The Muslim Ladies College of Australia (MLCA) operated from Kenwick until 2007 when it was closed down by the Department of Education and Training. In 2007, it was the the smallest of Western Australia's Muslim schools with only 171 students, with only two students enrolled in Year 11 and none in Year 12. The Damla College is the most recent addition to the list of Islamic schools in Perth: established in 2006 by the Turkish community, the school reported nearly 120 students. Currently it has been operating from the premises of the old Kinloch Primary School in Ferndale and is looking for a larger and permanent location.

Table 2.1 displays the 2007 enrolment figures for Muslim schools in WA. As can be seen, the combined student population of five schools in 2007 totalled 3282.

Table 2.1: Islamic Schools in Perth Metropolitan Area-2007

School	Location	Pre-compulsory	Primary students	Secondary students	Total
AIC – Kewdale	Kewdale	115	478	697	1290
AIC - Dianella	Dianella	111	510	56	677
AIC - Thornlie	Thornlie	100	408	42	550
Al-Hidayah	Bentley	39	191	0	230
Muslim Ladies College*	Kenwick	12	108	51	171
Langford Islamic College	Langford	80	154	30	264
Damla College	Ferndale	N/A	N/A	N/A	120

Source: Information provided by Schools and the Department of Education & Training, WA Government.

* Closed since 2007

Despite some problems associated with getting accurate data on student enrolment, Table 2.1 suggests that the percentage of Muslim students attending these schools has increased from approximately 10% of all the Muslim children attending schools.²⁷ When considered in conjunction with the Census 2006, one could argue that nearly 40% of Muslim children were enrolled in Islamic schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area. The choice to send children in these schools is governed, as in other states, by the desire for maintaining religious identity of children.

That the Islamic schools meet this need is apparent both in the mission statements and curriculum taught at of these schools. In addition to teaching the curriculum prescribed by the State Government, they also add a religious component designed to provide knowledge of Islam. There is also an attempt made to ‘integrate’ Islamic knowledge into the mainstream curriculum so as not to keep it merely in a distinct stream. The Islamic Studies curriculum taught at Al-Hidayah, for instance, includes issues that may be faced by students in their daily lives including changes at puberty, relating to family and friends, and responsibilities to the wider community. Similarly, students enrolled in the Australian Islamic College are urged to reflect on, and integrate their knowledge of Islamic ideas and civilisation into other subjects. According to one teacher, students can develop plans for a mosque in their studies while studying mathematics. Similarly, the lessons on civic values are taught in a way that draws attention to the similarities between Islamic and universal values.

These schools generally encourage their students and staff to subscribe to the traditional Islamic dress code: girls are, for instance, required to wear the hijab.²⁸ The focus ultimately remains on creating an ‘Islamic environment’ in which children can grow to make their contribution to Australia as ‘confident, contributing Muslims’.²⁹

Informal Sources/Nodes of Information

The religious knowledge taught at Islamic schools in Western Australia is paralleled by information provided by a host of informal sources of information. Traditionally, only mosques were the locale of such information. This role has not been totally overtaken by other providers of religious knowledge. This is especially as the number of mosques in the Perth Metropolitan Area has increased since the early 1990s. In contrast to the early 20th Century when there was only one mosque in Perth, currently more than fifteen mosques and prayer rooms exist in the Perth Metropolitan Area only.³⁰ These cater to both Sunni and Shi'ite communities living in the city. The Bosnian Islamic Society has also applied for permission to build a mosque in Caversham in the Swan Valley.³¹ Other centres of Muslim population have also established mosques in Newman, Katanning, Geraldton, Port Hedland and Albany.

Some of these mosques have been organising informal or semi-formal religious education programmes for children in the afternoons. The sermons given by Imams also act as source of religious knowledge for those attending these mosques.

However, Islamic schools and the traditional role of the mosques are only part of the context in which Muslims are acquiring knowledge about Islam in Western Australia. Our research indicates that they access additional nodes of information about being a Muslim. These nodes are not just locally based: they have connections across the country and across international borders. Nor are they exclusionary along citizenship lines: they are open to Australian citizens, permanent residents, temporary residents and visiting Muslims. As such, they bring together a pool of knowledge that has its origin in both local and international ideas about Islamic identity. The list of these nodes includes the following:

Tablighi Jamaat

Founded in the Indian subcontinent in the late 1920s, *Tablighi Jamaat* focuses on educating Muslims to be “better Muslims”. With a tradition of *Amirs* leading groups, the *Jamaat* has followed a process of sending Muslims to other cities and countries to spread the word about the need to re-connect with one’s Islamic heritage. *Tablighi Jamaat* has been operating in Australia, as in other Western liberal societies, for more than two decades. It exists in Perth as well. Initially the activities of the *Tablighi Jamaat* were restricted to the Perth Mosque where members of the group gathered over the weekends. The interviews indicate that the *Tablighi Jamaat* has expanded its activities beyond the Perth Mosque with some of its members visiting other cities, for example Geraldton, with the aim of educating other Muslims about Islam.

Islam-Australia Inc.

Islam-Australia Inc. primarily focuses on promoting Islam among non-Muslims as part of its *Da’wa* activities (<http://www.islam-australia.net/>). It also provides information to new converts to Islam by maintaining a regularly updated website, and a magazine published every two months to inform non-Muslims about Islam. Primarily operating from Perth, the group also has supporters in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. In Perth,

members regularly present talks 'at the Speakers Steps at Forrest Chase Centre, Perth, on alternate Sundays, [sets] up a Free Islamic Literature Table in front of Art Gallery, Perth on every Sunday & [organises] a Free Islamic Literature Table at annual Multicultural fares/festivals in WA'.³² This organization came into the limelight with the controversy surrounding lectures by Sheikh Yassin in Australia. The group promotes orthodox interpretations of Islam by providing information through the internet and in person.

Daawah Association of WA (DAWA)

Based in Kent Street, Cannington, the group essentially subscribes to Salafi interpretations of Islam. It focuses primarily upon informing new converts to Islam. Its influence, however, also extends to born-Muslims who are convinced of the validity of Salafi/orthodox ideas. The Association claims that 'the Islamic Information Centre in WA. DAWA provides the *most* authentic information about Islam to Muslims as well to Non-Muslims.'³³

Jamiatul Ulama Western Australia

This group predominantly consists of Islamic teachers who came from South Africa to teach in Islamic schools. Having been educated in *madaris* in South Africa, and subscribing to traditional/orthodox understandings of Islam, these teachers established the *Jamiatul-Ulama* Western Australia. Some of the members patronise Thornlie mosque in the south metropolitan area and generally invite speakers from South Africa during Ramadan.

Muslim Students Associations (MSAs)

Muslim Students Associations operate at the University of Western Australia (UWA), Curtin University and Edith Cowan University. Originally set up to provide prayer venues for Muslim students, the Muslim Students Associations are emerging as the new nodes of information about Islam³⁴. Bringing together both local and international Muslims, these organizations hold lectures on Islam, provide the starting points for study circles and distribute information about Islam. The Associations, by their very nature, are open to influences from international students who can assume positions of leadership in these organizations. Indirectly, this contributes to influence from external actors on how students view their Islamic identities within educational and social environments. The MSAs, however, are equally susceptible to influences from within Australia. These associations have reportedly organised lessons/lectures by Imams who visit Perth on a regular basis. That members of other Islamic organizations/groups in Perth also participate in these activities opening up the space for mutual learning and shaping of identities. The three MSAs attempted to establish an umbrella organization in 2006 but according to one person, the effort has not changed the reality of relative autonomous existence of these groups. More recently, some members affiliated with the *Jamiatul Ulama* Western Australia appear to be establishing links with these students.

Informal Study Groups

Against the background of increasing emphasis on Islam, a number of study circles appear to be flourishing on an ad hoc basis. These groups cater to the needs of groups of

different ages. They can be broadly divided into two categories: first, local Muslims organise themselves and take on the responsibility of researching Islamic issues and then informing other members of the group of the results. They rely on internet sites, books and information from 'learned people' for this purpose. One such group operates south of the Swan River in which young women/girls take on the task of researching and preparing their briefs on Islam. In the northern suburbs, young Muslim males are also reported to occasionally come together to discuss social issues in the light of Islamic teachings. Other category of study circles emerges around certain events (e.g. Ramadan and Ashura) when Muslims generally invite speakers/clergy from overseas. These individuals provide the node around which Muslims congregate for knowledge about Islam. More recently, the Perth Muslim Youth Forum was set up through the initiative of some young Muslims. They organise lectures by different learned scholars with the aim of 'presenting Islam in an informative, non-confrontational and enriching way'. The forum maintains a regular website with recordings and transcripts of lectures and space for mutual dialogue.³⁵

Islamic Societies

A number of incorporated bodies/associations have emerged with a focus on Islam and Muslim issues. Some examples include the *Al-Hidayah* Islamic Education Administration Incorporated, which was officially registered in 1993 and manages the *Al-Hidayah* Islamic school in Bentley; *Noorul Islam* Society, Mirrabooka, (est. 1990) which runs the Mirrabooka mosque and is also engaged in providing religious education to children after school; the Bosnian Islamic Society Perth (established 1996); the Afghan Islamic Association in Western Australia (established 1997); WA Muslim Charity Association of WA (recently established); *Dar Al-Shifa* (1999) and Muslim Women's Support Centre (1987). These associations, in addition to providing settlement and social services for Muslims, are also emerging as providers of ideas about Islamic identities. They do so by providing information on Islam that promotes their preferred understanding of the religion, while also becoming the role models of these understandings. At one level, such an outlook enables these societies to reach those with similar ideas, but at another level they emerge as the trend-setters for Islamic identities which others feel need to be accommodated when thinking of their own Muslim identities.

Individuals with Influence

In addition to groups and organizations, the interviews indicate that some individuals in the community also emerge as providers of Islamic identity. The process generally starts with them establishing their religious credentials in a social setting. Gradually it feeds into their identification as 'people who really know Islam'. Such recognition as a source of Islam enables individuals to disseminate their ideas about Islam to others. They do not belong to a specific religious outlook or ethnicity. For instance, some women are respected for promoting a Sufi understanding of Islam in Perth, while others who subscribe to a more orthodox understanding of Islam are also gaining respect and support among sections of the Muslim community. The phenomenon is not limited to the capital city: it is present in regional areas as well, such as Katanning.

Multi-directional linkages

These different nodes of information, it is important to note, do not always exist independently. In fact a number of linkages and overlapping areas of operation seem to characterise the context in which Muslims operate in Western Australia. Individuals who manage organizations established for social services for Muslims, for instance, sometimes either promote or provide space to a preferred understanding of Islam. Similarly, some teachers employed in Islamic schools serve as Imams or religious guides as well. Still others help sustain informal study circles by linking up with nodes of information locally or outside Perth, and doing voluntary work for Islamic associations. As mentioned earlier, MSAs also provide space for such linkages as the prayer sessions and meetings are not necessarily restricted to students only. The students' search for information also brings them into contact with other groups: the lectures by Sheikh Khalid Yassin, for instance, were organised in 2005 by Islam-Australia Inc., but attended by those associated with the Australian Islamic College, some individuals in MSAs, individuals associated with the Muslim Women's Support Centre, as well as the wider Muslim community.

External Connections

The local nodes of information are connected to other groups/organizations and associations operating nationally and internationally. In the Perth Metropolitan Area, for instance, connections with South Africa are quite prominent. In addition to a number of teachers who were educated in Islamic institutions in South Africa, the country emerges as a source of textbooks for Islamic schools. Turkish influence appears to enter the scene via the Turkish mosque in the city, whereas the Iranian influence is apparent in the St. Mary's mosque. Similarly, links exist between local and national organizations: the Islamic Council of Western Australia (ICWA) is linked to the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). The Bosnian Islamic Society also forms part of the larger set of similar organizations set up in other major Australian cities.

Some Muslims also travel overseas to acquire knowledge about Islam. In Perth, for example, some young Muslims have been sent to South Africa, India and Pakistan for Islamic training. Similarly, some young Malays living in Katanning have travelled to Indonesia or Jordan to learn about Islam.

The net result of these different nodes and their links has been a situation where different interpretations of Islam are being promoted in Western Australia. These range from *Salafi*, *Sufi*, *Barelvi*, *Tablighi*, to progressive and liberal understandings of Islam. There is also evidence of some individuals subscribing to the ideas promoted by Arkam in southeast Asia. This results in a varied interpretation, for example, of the acceptable dress code for both Muslim men and women, the permissibility of playing musical instruments other than drums, and the spaces in which such activities can be undertaken. While some groups promote and subscribe to traditional dress code, others do not. Similarly, some groups/associations object to playing musical instruments other than drums on grounds that it is *haram* (not permissible) in Islam. Others support and actively participate in playing musical instruments of all varieties in gender-specific or mixed environments.

Being a Muslim: Multiple Ideas

The overwhelming majority of respondents articulated their notion of being a Muslim in similar terms. They identified their belief in Islam as the central core of their being, the guiding principle for their lives, a way of life, a moral code by which they live, and a sense of connection with the supreme being (God) that provided them with a feeling of confidence, comfort and stability.

The elaboration of these ideas and the process through which the individuals arrived at these conceptions of religion revealed a diversity of views and experiences. Based on the qualitative interviews, the respondents could be broadly divided into ‘practicing’ and ‘non-practicing’ Muslims. The category of practicing Muslims included those who subscribed to orthodox and moderate understandings of Islam as well as those who occupy the middle space characterised by a mix of orthodoxy and progressive/liberal ideas. The preference for a particular understanding of and approach to Islamic ideas does not appear linked to ethnicity, educational background or generational factors. Muslims from Afghan, Pakistani, Indonesian, Turkish, Persian and Palestinian backgrounds, for instance, could be found who either preferred either orthodox or liberal interpretations of Islam, or different combinations of these outlooks. The choice of a way of ‘being a Muslim’ also was not generational-specific. Interviews indicated that one could find first and second generation Muslims who either insisted on the fixed relationship between the religious texts and the context (an important feature of the orthodox understandings), or supported the notion of flexibility of interpretations in line with changing context (the defining feature of moderate/liberal approach).

The non-practicing Muslims included those who identified themselves as Muslims but claimed that their adherence to secular values meant they could not really be categorised as practicing Muslims. Notable in this category were some respondents from Turkish and Iranian background. The category of non-practicing Muslims also included those who had converted to Christianity but did not openly renounce their Muslim identity. As such, they appeared to be occupying a space where they were both Muslim and non-Muslim. Their total number was very small with less than ten respondents claiming to have converted to the Christian faith.

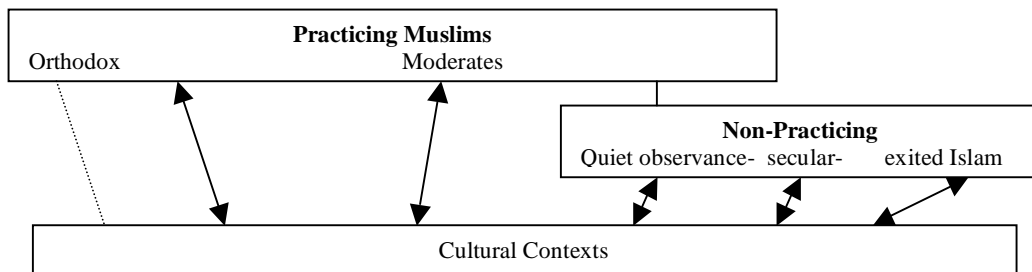


Figure 2.1: Multiple Layers of Identities of Islam and culture

As can be seen from Figure 2.1, an overlap exists between the categories of practicing and non-practicing Muslims. This area was essentially occupied by practicing Muslims who subscribed to moderate/liberal understandings, but they objected to their religious identity being the dominant marker. Not only can young Muslims be identified as belonging to this space, others over 35 years of age also fall in this category. Often this reluctance to be identified as a Muslim takes the form of changing or westernising their names so as to be less prominent as Muslims. It is also reflected in these Muslims opting for dress codes that cannot distinguish their ethnic or religious affiliations.

The interviews revealed that the religious identity (or the absence of it) closely coexists with an individual's cultural identity. Culture informs the ideas of what it means to be a Muslim as much as access to sources of information on Islam. This is probably due to the fact that in a large number of cases, family remained the primary source of information about Islam. Often respondents recounted stories of their father, mother, aunt, grandparents or siblings providing them with knowledge of Islam. The information was supplemented by knowledge gained at school, *madrassahs* or Sunday schools. The respondents who either lived in Muslim majority states before arriving in Australia, or visited these areas after immigration, also learnt about Islam through their interaction with local culture(s). This has created a situation where variations exist within the sub-categories of those who could be identified, for instance, as orthodox/traditional Muslims. Some respondents hold culturally-determined ideas of being a Muslim which distinguish them from Muslims from other ethnic backgrounds.³⁶

Religion and Identities: A Dynamic Relationship

The relationship between religious and cultural identities, however, is not static in nature. The interviews suggest a dynamic relationship between access to sources of knowledge, identity formation and its impact on cultural and social spheres. On the orthodox end of the spectrum, this occurs in the form of individuals coming into contact with groups/nodes that subscribe to orthodox understandings of Islam. Once convinced of the validity of these ideas, these individuals embark upon a process of further expanding their knowledge of Islam. They seek other possible sources that could provide them with answers to their questions. The level of their participation in religious spaces increases. They also start subscribing to traditional Islamic dress code. This change is often closely linked to a changed relationship with, and operation in, cultural spaces. Once convinced of the orthodox ideas, individuals have reported revising their views of the culturally-determined and articulated ideas of Islam. The processes either results in them completely shunning these understandings in favour of a more universalistic interpretation, or tolerating/ partially accepting them. The net result is that not only do some individuals adopt visibly different signs of being Muslim but also avoid spaces in which culturally-determined manifestations of Islam may take place. This, in turn, affects the social spaces in which these individuals operate. The tendency to learn, socialise and practice Islam along traditional lines changes their friendship circles. While they do not always ignore or stop relating to 'other' friends and family members, a change does take place in the relative significance attached to these relationships.

Some typical examples of this dynamic relationship were found through qualitative interviews. A 20-25 year old Muslim male, for instance, narrated the story of not being familiar with his Islamic identity. He came to realise this 'gap' in his understanding when he came across some international students who would go to the prayer room at the tertiary educational institution. A visit prompted by curiosity led to him spending more time in the company of these students and others. He learnt about Islam and came to subscribe to orthodox understandings. He changed his dress code opting for what he identified as the *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition) and engaged in a process of supplementing his knowledge. He also became active in the MSA and organised Islamic study events. Apart from local scholars, others from eastern states also shared their knowledge in these events. Although he did not shun other friends completely, the preference for orthodox understanding primarily shaped his ideas of what he would like to do and be. In his own words:

Well, one of the clear tenets of the religion of Islam is to pass it on. It is to invite people to the belief in God and to act accordingly. So that is something that is definitely a clear goal of mine in terms of being an active community member. Whether it be here in [...this institution] or in the wider community. That is the biggest part I see myself playing in this country, in this society. To invite people to the religion of Islam. (122)

Another 30-34 year old male from African background narrated a similar story. After being exposed to an orthodox understanding of Islam, he did not totally shun other Muslims from his country of origin. But he referred to a process of respectful distancing from the religious and cultural practices of his family and friends. - He also stated that his friendship circles had changed:

I don't keep in touch with any of my Australian friends. Not because of any particular reason, it is just because we have grown up in our own ways. They have gone their way(sic), most of them are not even in [my suburb]. And if I do see them then I will say hi, how are you, catch up. I had invited some friends over for coffee just to catch up. But of course all my friends now, maybe 100% or 99.9%, are Muslims, but I don't choose. They are everyone, but mainly in the Muslim circle.(126)

It is important to note that this dynamic relationship is not limited to young Muslim males. It can be observed across all age groups and ethnicities. Also, the degree of impact on cultural and social spaces varies but there is always a *relatively visible change* in the manner in which an individual relates to these spaces. The process is not gender-specific: females are equally likely to experience this process including those who have converted to Islam. A woman of Turkish background, for instance, did not wear hijab until in her 50s. This was despite the fact that some of her children had already opted for practices linked to orthodox understanding of the religion. But after a dream, she approached an Imam and opted for a symbolic break with her past understandings of Islam. In her own words:

Let me tell you the truth. I am a very open-minded woman. I used to do my hair, do my nails. I would never wear expose clothes but I used to like to dress well, wear jewellery. For me wearing a headscarf was an unlikely decision. I used to say that I couldn't do this before I was 60-70. All my friends in Perth know this as well. I could never wear a headscarf. If I wear something under my chin, I cannot breathe. I was saying that it was very difficult. But Allah showed me such a dream that, I interpreted this dream as Allah wanting me to cover my head. I decided I had to do it. I called an Imam, we renewed our marriage with my husband. ... And that evening I wore a headscarf. And from then on I had never opened my head thanks to Allah. (178)

The symbolic act of renewing her marriage and putting on the hijab did not shift her relationship to the social spaces. She had operated predominantly among Turkish community, and she continued to do so afterwards as well. However, she did not use the change to limit her daughter's relationship to her social sphere either: for example, she was quite supportive of the daughter mixing with her work colleagues and going out every week. While cautioning her daughter to be careful, the respondent insisted that she could not restrict a young woman in her 20s.

In marked contrast, a fifth generation Anglo-Celtic woman, who converted to Islam, reported a major shift in the cultural and social spaces where she operates. She embraced Islam after getting to know some Turkish young men. She started learning about Islam after getting married to a Muslim from the South Pacific. Her exposure to orthodox understandings has shaped her cultural practices. She does not send her children to birthday parties because, in her understanding, it is an un-Islamic practice. She feels sad for not being able to slaughter sheep in the 'Islamic way' during Eid-ul-Adha. Her friendship circles have also changed. In her words:

We have lost a few than what we had before. Sometimes people out grow sometimes new issues come up in the media that kind of persuade people's perceptions. (003)

The search for a *true* Islamic identity can also be triggered by the experience of migration with individuals adopting variants of orthodox understandings. Interviews with two males (one in his 40s and the other 25-29 years old) who immigrated from Pakistan are examples of this relationship. Of these, the older male arrived in Australia after being employed in the bureaucracy at the middle-ranking level in his country of origin. Although his family had played a role in teaching him about Islam, the immigration process triggered a need to learn *more* about his religion. He started acquiring books and regularly attending a local mosque with a view to learning about Islam. The 25-29 year old male arrived in Australia at a young age with his family. He stated that he had originally learnt about Islam from his parents and others in his social circles, as well as by reading books on Islam. However, he did not seriously practice Islam: for example, he did not pray five times a day. After arriving in Australia and some initial difficulties in getting a job, he was employed offshore on oil and gas rigs. During this time, he reported experiencing discrimination and being asked 'offensive questions' about his religion. He

utilised this time to start learning more about Islam. He studied the Qur'an and supplemented this knowledge with lectures and participation in religious gatherings. He described the process in the following words:

...So when I got this job and I was working ..., I had a lot of time to study. So that time I read Qur'an with translation. I asked my friend to give me Holy Qur'an with translation so I started reading. I started from the first page to last page during my work at offshore. Then I realised whatever they were telling you it was true. It is written in Qur'an. Because the Qur'an now is the only book which is not changed. ... Sometimes I go to the mosque as well to learn more about Islam. People come, we pray together then afterwards we talk about God. After the Jumma and Isha prayers in the Perth mosque. People from all over they come here, we all talk about Allah Ta'alla. ... The thing is the more we talk about Allah the more *azmat* (or greatness) will be in your heart.(018)

The adoption of orthodox ideas shifted the nature of his relationship to cultural understandings of Islam. He did not approve of celebrating birthdays, spent time in the mosque that determined the kind of information he acquired about other Muslims in the community. It also convinced him of the need to remind other Muslims of their Islamic identity. Interestingly, the preference for orthodox interpretations did not affect his friendship circles that included both Muslims and non-Muslims. But he did acknowledge commenting on his friends' conduct and referred to 'lecturing' them about appropriate behaviour.

In some cases, the initial stage of migration and settlement also brings people into contact with ideas that may result in them opting for orthodoxy. The choice is not made with a view to being an orthodox Muslim but more from the need to learn about and be a true Muslim. A 25-29 year old male of Indonesian background, for example, had learnt about Islam in Indonesia through the family and by attending afternoon madrassah. Upon arriving in Australia, he was assisted by some other Muslims of Indonesian origin. This opened the way to additional knowledge about Islam. As stated by him:

When the first time I was here, there's an ustadz (teacher) [He] was the one who helped me settling in and getting to know people here. I stayed at [the] apartments, where he also stayed. I really appreciate what he did, because I assumed that knowledgeable people were not easy to deal with. But he's not like that. [He] was very low profile, that's why I like him. He took me to Sunday market, that sort of stuff. I felt I was the youngest, still a boy, but he was willing to help me. There's also another ustadz [in the same suburb], but I forget his name. So in [our suburb], we had weekly session, from one unit to another, because there were many Indonesians there. This Saturday night at this guy's unit, next move to another. I was there for two years. *And I feel that I learn more religion in Australia than in Indonesia.* From those sessions. Slowly I learn many things, like halal food, finding halal jobs. I also attend the religious sessions at [a university] musala. I remember at one of the sessions, [an] Imam told us that our jobs determine our income, in a sense that the halal-ness of our income is also

determined by what company we are working to. If the company sells bacon, alcohol, or it's a gambling company, our income is haram.(085- Emphasis added)

The interviews, therefore, corroborate the evidence of de-territorialisation of religion occurring among some Muslims. However, in contrast to the accepted wisdom, the process does not appear limited to youth. Nor is it gender-specific. At the same time, its impact on operation in social circles is not uniform: while some Muslims who opt for orthodox interpretations of Islam gradually tend to exclude others (both Muslim and non-Muslims), the tendency is not shared by others on this end of the spectrum. In fact, ethnicity may provide the channel through such information is acquired and disseminated.

A similar variety of experiences and outlook exists on the other end of the spectrum as well. Both moderate/liberal Muslims as well as those who engage in quiet observance also reported learning about Islam through multiple sources. While their respective families remained the primary source of such information, they also used the internet for gaining additional information. Some had also been to madrassahs at some stage in their lives, whereas others participated in local study circles to learn about Islam.

These individuals were generally comfortable with the level of their knowledge of Islam. Some of them commented that their understanding may not be 'perfect' but maintained that they were comfortable with *their* sense of being a Muslim. A young 21-24 year old male of Iranian background exemplified this attitude. In his words:

We are not as strict. When I say strict I mean we, me myself and I consider myself a very good Muslim. I might not practice every bit of the religion, like any other sort of young bloke, ...but I do respect the whole idea, sort of mentality, ideology [of] Islam. My family had a great impact on me obviously my grandpa, my dad's father. He is a very what do you call it, religious person. Every time we'd go to his house he talks about Islamic history and sort of Prophet Muhammad and what happened back in the day when Prophet Muhammad was around. So every day or time I visit his house, I learn something new from him. And mum and dad, they were born before the [Islamic] revolution so they, they were sort of a bit less bombarded with the Islamic teachings at school. But at the same time, I would consider them good Muslims as well. They you know, sort of what do you call it, respect and love Islam a lot... (021)

Another young man of 25-29 year age shared similar ideas. With a mixed European and Middle Eastern heritage, he had never read the Qur'an. But he still emphasised the role of Islam in his life and likened learning about Islam to a process of osmosis and developing ethos for living life. In his words:

I would say both my parents taught me [about Islam]. My dad was a convert to Islam, he converted at the time he married my mum. For me its very difficult to separate my Islamic education from the general moral/social education I would have gotten from my family. They are all very much integrated into one thing. It

is not like I was being taught, separated religious rights or religious practices. It was always something that the family just did, its all very much connected to how I think my family operates and we all function with each other. It is a very natural, it was like an osmosis sort of process, it just happened, its not like it was forced or something that required effort.... What I have taken from the religion, that there is a very strong moral and existential element to it. You are in control of your destiny and you can make choices and the act of choosing really determines your future. (022)

A 20 year old female student of South Asian background echoed similar views. She claimed that her father was not 'that practicing' whereas the mother was more practicing. In her words:

So it [the religion] is in my family and I do see it that I am a Muslim. But it's not a big part of my life at the moment. *But I would say I am a Muslim of course.* (206-Emphasis added)

As could be expected, the majority of respondents on this end of the spectrum did not identify the traditional Islamic dress code as an essential condition for being a Muslim. One respondent, for example, argued in favour of modern interpretations of Islamic teachings. He stated:

I look at Islam from a very modern point of view, I personally believe, that even though it is a 1400 year old religion, you should never look at a religion as it was back in 1400 or 1600 years or whatever. You should modernize it to an extent that it would suit your daily life and your sort of personal situation. So that is how I sort of look at it. And that is how I sort of deal with it. Some people say no you cannot modernize a religion or you cannot update a religion. I did not say that I have updated my religion but I look at it from slightly different point of view from some other people. (021)

When asked to give an example, he said:

An example, like the hijab. You know if a woman does not want to cover her whole hair, you know as long as she does not act inappropriately or as long as she sort of respect herself, if she does not want to cover herself, that is fine. It is not a problem, I've got nothing against that. (021)

A large majority of Muslims subscribing to moderate ideas or engaged in quiet observance also referred to Islam in culturally-specific terms. They even distinguished between Islamic practices being observed by members of other ethnic groups. For instance, one young 20- 24 year old Muslim female of Malay background was adamant that the Islam being practiced by her and her family was very different from the 'Middle Eastern Islamic practices' (227).

Together, these attitudes result in a number of Muslims being comfortable participating in the cultural spaces reflective of their ethnicity. This choice is not age or ethnicity-

specific. Young Muslims of Somali origin, for instance, reported befriending other Somalis. Similarly, Muslims of all ages from other African countries also associated primarily with members of their own background. But they do not always limit themselves to socialising only with these cultural groups. In fact, a very small minority in this group were actively seeking information on moderate/progressive interpretations in Islam. This search appears to have guided them along the path of de-cultured Islam but of a progressive variant. They were prepared to discuss, share ideas and question established orthodoxy by aligning themselves to Muslims across the ethnic and age divide.

A relatively higher degree of willingness and practice of socialising across religious and cultural spaces is apparent among this category of Muslims. As on the other end of the spectrum, this connection between religious, cultural and social spaces creates the conditions for these individuals reinforcing their moderate ideas. Islam remains a major marker of identity but not the only marker.

It is important to note that the membership of select social circles related to preference for religious understandings does not remain fixed. The nature of the 'in-group' and its membership can change: Individuals can and do move from one end of the spectrum to another. Alternately, they become more moderate or more traditional in their understanding of Islam. The interviews indicate that this shift occurs due to a tendency to 'shop for Islamic knowledge'. Sometimes chance encounters or membership of friendship circles also leads to the shift in Islamic understandings. Given the presence of the nodes of information, individuals seek knowledge and then, depending upon their experiences, either they are reaffirmed in their belief or shift to other sources of knowledge. Depending upon the node that most appeals to them, they may opt for an orthodox or moderate understanding of Islam. The choice is not always permanent and is subject to continuous change or modification.

Islamic Schools and Identities

The flexible nature of identity formation and its relationship to social and friendship circles was apparent in interviews conducted with Muslims who had been educated in Islamic schools for all or part of their student life. Some in the wider community consider Islamic schools as promoting exclusionary tendencies. The interviews indicate that often parents choose to send their children to Islamic schools for the dual purpose of getting them educated while becoming aware of their Islamic heritage. This stems in some cases from the perception among parents that they are not fully conversant with religious ideas and traditions. In others, the experience of having grown up in Australia as a child of difference has prompted the parents to find a place where their children can grow up in an accepting environment. Some parents are also worried that sending their children to public school would expose them to drugs and the 'western way of life'. Keen to maintain an Islamic identity, they opt for Islamic schools as the insurance mechanism.³⁷ This conscious choice has led, as mentioned earlier, to an increase in the overall percentage of children being educated in Islamic schools.

The cultural environment of the Islamic schools and the sources of information on what constitutes an appropriate and good Muslim do indicate a preference for orthodox understandings of Islam. The dress code adopted for girls is an example of the construction of such a culture. There is a distinct preference in favour of girls wearing hijab. In case of the AIC, so strong is this preference that even non-Muslim female teachers at the college are required to wear hijab. Al-Hidayah follows a similar practice. The Langford Islamic College, established by the AFIC, adopts a more relaxed attitude with the teachers and students retaining the freedom to decide if they need to wear hijab. Such attitudes are reinforced through curriculum which encourages students to think of Islamic identity in a particular manner. A 'good Muslim woman', for instance, is presented as someone who follows the traditional Islamic dress code. The curriculum taught in one Islamic school also introduces the idea of 'sinful Muslims' or 'semi-Muslims', which allows judgemental attitudes vis-à-vis other Muslims who may not be subscribing to the culture(s) being adopted in the schools.

The orthodox reading of Islamic texts is often encouraged and promoted by the teachers employed in these schools. This is not to suggest that no moderate/liberal/modernist teachers can be found in these schools. In fact, our research put us in touch with some very modern and progressive teachers in Islamic schools. However, probably for reasons associated with the commitment to providing an Islamic environment, the moderate views are not privileged in these schools. This appears to have contributed to a strong sense of orthodox Islamic ideas among the young students interviewed for the project. They viewed the symbolic manifestations of being a Muslim an essential part of 'being a Muslim'. It also appears to impact on their friendship circles that are often limited to those selected by their parents. Together, these create a sense of exclusion and separation from the wider Australian community.

The sense of exclusion, however, does not appear to be permanent. We interviewed individuals who had studied in Islamic schools as children. They did not always adhere to the orthodox understandings learnt in their school days, and often modified their views on what it means to be a Muslim. Two sisters in their 20s, for instance, narrated a story of growing up in a family where religion did not play an important part. They were exposed to Islamic knowledge when they arrived in Perth and joined an Islamic school. During this time, the elder sister went through what she described as 'phases' of identity. After exploring Sufism, she adopted a staunch salafi outlook at one stage and then moved to a more relaxed form of orthodoxy. The younger sister was influenced by her sibling but followed a slightly different path to Islamic knowledge. Apart from learning and sharing ideas with other friends, she also enrolled in informal study classes that provided her with more structured knowledge of Islam. In both these cases, their social sphere did not exclude non-Muslims or Muslims who do not subscribe to orthodox ideas.

Searching for Islamic identity

The search for Islamic knowledge is not necessarily a function of family backgrounds where religion was absent. The interviews reveal that individuals from very orthodox/practicing families as well as moderate/practicing families availed themselves

of the nodes of information on Islam. Three young women, including a daughter of a religious leader, a woman with a family subscribing to Salafi ideas, and a young woman with commitment to moderate understandings, went through the process of acquiring *additional* knowledge about Islam.

Learning about Islam is also not linked to the choice of educational institutions. The interviews indicate that individuals who have been educated in public schools or Islamic schools are equally capable of engaging in a search for greater knowledge. Interestingly, Imams made fewer references to the need to learn about Islam. They occasionally mentioned 'being an alim' or 'my congregation' which suggested a sense of leadership and a belief that their primary task is to impart knowledge of Islam.

Non-Practicing Muslims: A Minority Phenomenon

Among the relatively smaller cohort of non-practicing Muslims, some respondents were happy labelling themselves as non-practicing. A male of Iraqi origin in his 50s openly discussed his 'secular' leanings with other Muslims. He maintained that he had continued along this path since arriving in Australia. He said:

I was born Muslim so I am Muslim. ... When I was a kid I used to practice my religion because I used to live in a very religious city. When I grew up I found out that life is not only about religion. Praying and going to mosque and doing all religious activities don't allow time for work, study and have a normal life so I saw it is more natural if I hold the religion inside my heart. Look what is happening today with religion not bringing anything but hatred. You get to hate that person because he is a Jew or the other person because he is different. That is why you need to put the religion in your heart. That is why also I do not practice religion and understand it because, to be honest, every single religion's ideology is to say everybody and everything is wrong except them. Christianity, Judaism and all other religions are like this that's why I stopped practicing and being religious. (106)

Those who converted to Christianity or ceased to believe provide an interesting example of the link between social, religious and cultural spaces. These respondents identified themselves as non-Muslims but did not always tell their family and friends of the conversion. Their participation in the cultural and social spaces did not change after the conversion either. While it was partly to avoid hurting their families, the continued participation also seems linked to their continued identification with Muslim practices at one level. The comments made by a respondent who arrived as an asylum seeker, stayed in detention centre for four years and then converted to Christianity, provide an interesting insight into this situation. He distinguished between his 'work friends' and those from the detention centre and reported being more comfortable with friends from the detention centre as he could communicate with them in Farsi (Persian). When asked as to how would he identify himself, as a Muslim or Christian, he responded:

From a cultural point of view I am Muslim because I was born a Muslim and people look at me as a Muslim. (101)

Identity and Advocacy

The pattern of subscribing to different understandings of Islam has contributed to a sense of differentiation among Muslim respondents. Those occupying the orthodox end of the spectrum (or its variations) identify themselves as ‘true Muslims’. Interestingly, they differ among themselves as well on who truly represents Islamic values. Difference of opinion, for instance, exists between those who support Daawah and those who follow *Tablighi Jamaat’s* ideas. Similarly, some Imams also differ on what it means to be a good Muslim.

Those occupying the moderate/liberal end of the spectrum also engage in such differentiation. Quite comfortable in their understandings of Islam, they view more traditional Muslims as not representing the true picture of Islam. In some cases, respondents in this category also self-identify themselves as ‘less pious Muslims’ but are comfortable in their allegiance to Muslim ideas.

I know what Islam is, I want to learn so much about Islam. Not just to practice or grow a beard or do those kind of practice but human practice. I don’t want to be related to any of those Muslim community parties, I don’t want to be involved, nothing. I just want to be a good Muslim myself. Even if I practice or don’t practice. I mean even if I go to a mosque, the first they ask you is are you practicing, have you prayed? I mean that’s not any of his business that’s between me and God. (004)

The process of distinguishing oneself from ‘other Muslims’ is not restricted to the local scene only. Some respondents also applied a similar yardstick in judging Muslim relatives and friends living overseas.

The process is significant as it contributes to the need to promote one’s particular sense of Islamic identity. Those convinced that they know the real Islam often feel the need to propagate their ideas to other Muslims. They do so informally in their respective social circles, including in educational institutions. This tendency is more apparent among subscribers to orthodox understandings but also exists among some on the moderate end of the spectrum. But, overall the orthodox groups demonstrate a higher level of organization and advocacy. It could partly be explained by their belief that good Muslims are enjoined to engage in *da’wa* (call or invitation to Islam) and not simply spread the word to non-believers but also communicate true Islamic teachings and practices to other Muslims. This, in turn, increases their potential to engage governmental agencies and to seek funding. While traditional ideas about Islam appear to dominate, however, the alternative understandings continue to exist, albeit with less public recognition.

Concluding observations

It could be argued that the interviews indicate that a variety of nodes of information are shaping the way Muslims understand and practice their religion. These range between orthodox ideas and related practices to modern/progressive interpretations of Islam and variants of these along the spectrum. While the process does include suggestions of de-territorialised Islam among some Muslims, cultural-specific ideas of Islam and Muslim practices continue to exist and be reaffirmed by many.

The spectrum of religious interpretations and their links with culture does not provide an adequate picture of social engagement by Muslims. It depends upon how texts are read and understood with the help of available nodes of religious knowledge on a continuous basis. The process is a dynamic one with individuals shifting along the spectrum and modifying their views on what it means to be a Muslim as their access to information changes or they feel the need to reassess their views on religion. In other words, while identifiable at a certain point in time, the frameworks used by Muslims do change as they come in contact with new information.

Within this continuously shifting context, some Muslims belonging to different 'in-groups' do adopt behaviour patterns that could be equated with excluding others. The process of exclusion is not limited to the wider non-Muslim community and may also be directed towards members of one's own ethnic community or other Muslims. Such exclusionary tendencies, however, are not linked to the type of educational institutions attended by the individuals.

Chapter Three: Being a Muslim in a Western Environment

This chapter investigates the relationship between multiple notions of Islamic identity and living in a Western environment. It argues that the qualitative data indicates the predominant acceptance of the difference between Muslim and Western civilisations, a critical view of the US policies towards Islam and Muslims, portrayal of the Australian government as following the US lead in the international arena and a sense of increased anti-Islamic feelings since the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. These opinions contribute to a perception among Muslims of relative exclusion in Australia. While convinced that they can be both Muslim and Australian, they feel that the wider society does not always share this view.

Islam and the West: Locating Identities

Since the early 1990s, the 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis by Samuel Huntington has provided the framework for debates on the similarities, compatibility or incompatibility between Muslim and Western civilisations. A number of scholars have argued that presenting Islam and the West in oppositional terms ignores the rich history of cooperation and coexistence between Muslim and Judeo-Christian communities. It also ignores the presence of multi-directional economic, political and social relationships between Muslim and Western societies in the contemporary world. The criticism of the thesis also centres around the notion of universal values to which Muslims and Western societies adhere. Nonetheless, others support the thesis suggesting value-based differences and the manifestation of these differences in how Muslims and non-Muslims live their daily lives. The thesis has also been adopted by some militant groups who highlight the irreconcilable differences between the Muslim and Western way of life as a means of attracting support for their militancy.

The qualitative interviews reveal that similar debates exist within the Muslim community living in Western Australia. The respondents were asked if, in their opinion, differences exist between Muslim and Western ways of life. A relatively smaller group responded to the question in the negative. They approached the issue from the vantage point of universal values, arguing that Muslims and Western societies subscribe to values of fairness and social justice: they opposed the notion of difference.

But the preponderant view remained one of distinguishing between Muslim and Western societies as distinct from each other. This group could be divided between two sub-sets: those who considered Western civilisation to be superior, and others who couched their responses in terms of difference and not as superiority/inferiority dichotomy. The cohort of opinion that identified the difference in terms of the superiority of the Western way of life was relatively smaller. Their references to the superiority of the West did not suggest that they viewed the Islamic way of life as inferior. Instead, their understanding of Islamic teachings guided them to argue that Western societies (particularly Australia) provided the environment in which Muslims could really practice their religion. They felt that the societies that identify themselves as Muslim were pursuing un-Islamic

policies and, therefore, were not at par with Western societies. One respondent, for example, stated:

I consider Australia more Islamic than [other Muslim countries]. If you take ...[the Qur'anic verse "we have created the mankind with dignity"]- ...as a basis of human dignity as a precept and a premise of Qur'anic teaching that all human beings are the same, whether it is 100 per cent so in Australia one might debate that. But if I am unemployed Australian government will maintain my dignity by giving me roof over my head and clothes for my body and something to eat and educate my children. What more can a country do in order to be Islamic ? From that point of view and regardless of what might be said about western social-democratic countries they are more Islamic than ... hundreds other so called Muslim countries. (186)

The larger cohort of the respondents, however, accepted the notion of difference between Islam and the West. These differences were seen as existing within the realm of social and spiritual practices. The elaboration of these points indicated two trends: some respondents combined their religious and cultural notions of values to argue that Muslim and Western ways of life are different. Others combined secular views with cultural notions draw these comparisons. This indicates that the notion of difference was not determined by the relative degrees of orthodoxy or progressive interpretations of Islam by the respondents. Often these differences centred round the notion of family life, hospitality and feeling close. The following quotes indicate such assumptions of difference. A young divorced woman of Iraqi background, for instance, elaborated on the idea of difference in these words:

Europe and Middle East culture are different. All countries in the Middle East have similar culture. First for example, as a woman you need to wear scarf in Middle East but this is a religious rule. However religion is a part of culture. Their religion is different to ours so that makes having different cultures. Even though we both believe in the same God, their Prophet's teachings is different to our Prophet's. For example the rules governing marriage is different from Islam to Christianity which makes a difference in cultures. There are lots of examples out there proving we are different to each other. I am talking about the geographical location and the Western way of life. In Iraq and Syria, because they belong to Middle East, they are somehow similar. But, for example, Germany and the US belong to Western world even though they are worlds far from each other. It is not the same. (105)

Another respondent of Turkish background, who was quite philosophical about the place of religion in one's life and favoured mutual tolerance, discussed the difference between Muslim and Western ways of life in the following terms:

Western society is oriented towards materialism, money, power, wealth. Whereas the Muslim way of life is more orientated towards family, much more so towards family and towards maintaining the Muslim culture or the culture from where we

came from, from various countries. Those things we hold dear to our hearts that those Western so called modern man, Western man. Western man has become very selfish and his main purpose in life is aimed at himself, getting ahead, getting forward, getting wealthy, getting everything he wants. It's all aimed at ... they've lost.. they've lost the plot. Pretty much my opinion in a nutshell... You can go.. if a Muslim family invites you to their home, there's hospitality, there's a closeness, there's friendship, ... hospitality is genuine first of all. Which is actually you don't see in Western people. You go knocking on somebody's door, they open the door. It is: "what do you want?" You go knock on the Muslim door, and even though they don't know you, they have never met you before, ... the first thing they are quite likely to say is, "come in.. come in". Yeah? (laughs) ... Muslims do not seem to view people too much with suspicion whereas Western world does. Everybody is viewed with suspicion until they know what they are there for, what they want. (161)

Another respondent of African-Indian background (40-45 year old) identified some similarities but then suggested the differences along religious lines. He said:

I think there is a vast difference [between Muslim and Western way of life]. There are many similarities but then again there is a difference. For example Islam and the West can come together on certain levels, lifestyle, and yet in many ways it is different. For example the way a person dresses, I don't think there is a western and an Islamic way of dressing, so a person can dress in a shirt and pants and still be a good Muslim, a practising Muslim. So in that sense Islam and the Western way of dress can come together to a certain extent. Where as values might differ, the Western and Islamic value system. For example, the commonalities as far as the values that we uphold in Islam are very similar to what Australians say Australian values, like integrity, fairness, freedom of speech, respect of each other. But when it comes to tolerating certain things like sex before marriage, homosexuality, and all those things that Islam is supposed to, then I don't think we can come to terms with that. So in that sense they are very different where in a western way of life you would accept these things. It is something you just live with. But in Islam doesn't clearly mix well in that sense. (124)

This assumption of difference, it is important to note, did not impede interaction between Muslims and the wider society. A number of those propounding these views talked of interacting in different cultural and religious/secular spheres. However, it does appear to determine the 'inner circles of friendship and interaction' for a number of respondents. Individuals often either interacted more with individuals from their own ethnic background or other Muslims on the grounds that they felt they had more in common with these groups. For instance, a 20-24 year old male respondent stated:

Yeah I still have contact with these people [Australian friends] but now I'm around a lot of Afghan boys but I think these boys have a lot of the same views of Islam that I do. Not just them, their families as well and how moderate they are,

its very similar. I think that's why I'm getting a long with them better than if someone was an extremist. I couldn't get along with, I don't think I can spend a day with someone like that. I mean I respect the religion, its ok like that but I like to keep it moderate. (002)

This trend, one could argue, may further reinforce the 'in-group identity' resulting from the interaction between social, cultural and religious spaces. It could also reinforce the idea of a difference between Muslim and Western ways of life. However, it also needs to be borne in mind that such views are not limited to Muslims only. A sense of difference vis-à-vis the 'other' and its role in determining lines of friendships and identity can be found in non-Muslim immigrants as well.³⁸

Looking at the World: The United States, Australia and Muslims

The relative agreement apparent in relation to Muslim and Western ways of life also extended to opinions on the policies pursued by the United States towards Muslims and Islam. The respondents were asked their thoughts on 'the US policies towards Muslim countries and Islam'. The aim of keeping the question general was to elicit their views on the aims, nature and impact of American policies on Muslims.

The responses suggest perceptions of an American 'grand strategy' motivated by the need to dominate the world. Muslim majority areas are portrayed as victims of this strategy but one in which local authoritarian regimes are equally culpable. In the process of implementing the grand strategy, the responses suggest, the American government is perceived to have put aside consideration of justice and fairness. The Bush Administration is assigned a special place in this analysis of American strategy, with criticism centring round President Bush's perceived anti-Muslim attitudes.

These views were elaborated with reference to the US policies towards Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and to a lesser extent the situation in America. For some, this presence was motivated by the need for resources in the Middle East. Others linked this to 'unfair support' for the state of Israel. The critical view of the US policy also revolved particularly around President Bush's religious views. He was seen as being motivated by his Christian ideology. It is important to highlight that these views were not restricted to a particular end of the faith spectrum, nor were they ethnicity-specific. Muslims subscribing to orthodox or progressive ideas, irrespective of their ethnic background, were equally vocal about the anti-Muslim policies pursued by the United States. The following statements are examples of the views presented:

Ok for instance, the Bosnian war, did they go in when the war was happening? They've got nothing there, they took their time to go in and help the people. The Iraq war, what do they have to do with that? Yet they go straight in for the oil. They want the money, they want the land. That's how I see it, if you compare other countries what's going on. Afghanistan and stuff... they want the money, that's how I see it. (138)

The main thing about the U.S. is that they are just not fair. The main driving force with the U.S., what they've done towards Palestine and Middle East has not been fair. The Palestinians had been in their country since the time of Jesus Christ and they were driven out by a race, by the Jews who had been staying in the Soviet Union and Germany and all that. They came and said this is our country and they took the Biblical narration as the gospel truth that this is their country and yet they are denying the same thing. There's no fairness, that's the reason why. Putting religion aside, those people have more rights than the Jews to stay in Palestine, the Palestinians. The Russian Jews were Russians, the German Jews were German. They were only Jewish by religion. Just like me I'm Indian by ethnicity and I'm Muslim. I cannot go claim my homeland in the Middle East and say oh my grandfather from ten generations ago had a place there and this is my country. That's how I look at it. Those Jews have no right to be there, they have forcibly taken the land there. And the Americans are the ones who supported them to the hilt and they didn't do any justice to the Arabs, to the Palestinians. (017)

Why did they go to war with Iraq in the first place? The reason they went to war with Iraq was weapons of mass destruction and they haven't found any. Now they changed their tune that they are fighting terrorism. There's no terrorism there. Afghanistan the same thing. I know the Taliban said we will take Osama bin Laden to court if you give us the evidence but they went to war. There are double standards. They invaded Afghanistan, they didn't even give a chance to the people running the country, they just wanted them out. Even the Northern Alliance which makes up the majority of the government, they were as cruel as the Taliban. They are using the same rules and laws and Karzai I think he was part of the CIA before he became President so what democracy is that? (017)

The explicit or implied references to 'conspiracy theories' were also apparent in discussions of the US foreign policy towards Muslims. This caused some to question if Al-Qaeda was really behind the attacks on the United States in September 2001.

One could argue that such analyses are not limited to Muslims only. Even non-Muslim analysts have questioned the logic of US policy in the Middle East and South West Asia. The problems encountered by the coalition forces in stabilising Iraq since the invasion of March 2003 has prompted strident criticism of the US invasion from within the United States as well as other countries. The designing and implementation of the Bush Doctrine has been a particular target of such criticism.

However, it is important to note that this characterisation of the US appears to be developing through access to a combination of sources of information on global developments. In addition to using the available sources of information (TV, radio and print media) in Australia, individuals rely on satellite televisions in their respective ethnic languages to get a 'view from home'. To some extent it reflects their need to remain connected to the country of origin and receive news on a continuous basis as they happen on ground in their countries of origin.³⁹ But it is also prompted by scepticism of the

information provided by local Australian media. This scepticism also prompts them to rely on a variety of internet sites to learn of national and international developments.

More importantly, the oral transmission of ideas contributes to this negative picture of the United States. A continuous exchange of information appears to be taking place in which individuals recount their own experiences or those of others around the world in terms of the US policies towards Muslims. This leads to the portrayal of the US Government as less than sympathetic and fair to Muslims. For example, one respondent said: 'I am not saying there is a conspiracy or anything like that but, I mean the horror stories I hear from kids from going back to Iraq on holidays is really either repulsive or just disgusting what is happening.' [013] Another young male of Lebanese origin talked of the horror stories he heard when some of his acquaintances returned from Lebanon after the Israeli attacks of July 2006. This may partially explain why some young respondents were also aware (if not extremely vocal against) the US policies towards Muslims. A 17 years old woman of Fijian ethnicity, for instance was asked her opinion on 'US policies towards Muslim countries as Islam'. Her response was:

Umm I think it's quite... I'm not sure... *I think it's quite biased and racist.* (204)

Others voiced similar ideas by referring to American policies in Muslim countries and vis-à-vis Muslim *in* the United States.

I think that maybe they are a bit too harsh sometimes. I think the American policies are too harsh towards Muslim countries. (152)

I think America is against Islam... Because they are going into the Muslim countries, first they went to Afghanistan and then Iraq, then they are trying to get Iran. That's the clear message that they don't want Muslims. (153)

They don't like us, they don't like the Muslim countries... How they treat Iraq and Palestine, they think Palestine... and especially the Muslims in America, they don't treat them well. (154)

I think they've only seen one type of Muslim group which you could call them extremists. But they cannot judge all Muslims on what they have just seen because their policies are really strict. If you go to the airport there, I have heard from my friends they even strip search you and they look through your luggage just because of your name. Even if you are not Muslim and you have an Islamic sounding name they do that. They judge you as soon as they see your name whether you are Muslim or not because they think you are a Muslim. It is just not right for them to judge people like that whether they are Muslim or not. But I think their policies are harsh because they haven't seen what Muslims really are like. (156)

I don't think they have to go that far with their policies. I think they are trying to generate paranoia like they did with communism. It's kind of like national security in a way. I wouldn't agree with it but you can understand where they are coming from. (232)

The theme of racism and bias towards Muslim societies was less apparent with reference to the policies of the Australian Government. The respondents were asked to comment on 'the Australian government's policies towards Muslim countries/people'. Their responses suggest a general agreement that the Howard Government followed the US foreign policy preferences with reference to Muslim states. This was not seen as necessarily being motivated by anti-Muslim feelings but rather a function of the alliance relationship with the US. A small number also personally held former Prime Minister, John Howard, responsible for walking in the footsteps of the United States. For example, a female convert to Islam claimed that 'Howard really does not have a mind of his own. I am sorry I have got to say that! And that is a polite way of saying it.' [003] Another respondent said:

I think that John Howard just wants to suck up to Bush, he wants to be part of the super power. He sees America as the future and he wants to be part of the future. What has Australia got to do with the war in Iraq? Nothing, Iraq's not going to attack Australia. I think there's something going on, there's a whole conspiracy thing. (138)

In one case, this reference was combined with cautious hope that Kevin Rudd might change the direction of Australian policy (013). The need for such a change in Australian foreign policy was considered important for the country's own national interest. An immigrant of Kurdish background, for instance, criticised John Howard for following the US lead in foreign policy and said:

Whatever America tell them they do for them. You know that is what I think because like you are very far away country. Why you gonna bring trouble for yourself? Listen to the people... You are very far away country. Stay in your own, don't worry about no one. They left this hundreds of kilometres to Iraq for what? For a little bit of petrol? (020)

It is, however, important to note that the negative analysis of the Australian Government's foreign policy vis-à-vis Muslim states was not overwhelmingly viewed as *directly* impacting upon Muslims living *in* Australia. This is not to deny that some Muslims voiced concerns of such an impact being felt. One respondent, for instance, expressed fear that the need to follow the US policies might prompt the Australian Government to 'throw out all the rules and regulations.... Even as a citizen, they will rather put me in and not give me justice if it is to suit America' [017]. The relative silence on the domestic implications of Australian foreign policy for Muslims may be partly due to the 'fear factor' which may have prevented the respondents from categorically criticising the Australian Government. But it also suggested the absence of a perception

that the Australian Government's alliance with the United States had not contributed to their absolute exclusion in Australia.

Living in Australia and Being a Muslim

However, the interviews reveal that a perception of relative exclusion exists among Muslims. The perception of such exclusion has increased since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. This is not to discount some references to the cultural/religious divide they experienced prior to the events of 2001. An Anglo-Saxon Australian female who converted to Islam in the early 1990s, for instance, discussed how she delayed informing her family of the conversion for almost a year due to a possible negative reaction. When she told them of the decision, her family and friends (with the exception of her father) reacted in a way that she described as 'horrible and ...not nice...' [012]. Another female under 25 years of age of Middle Eastern background recounted the story of her mother (who wore hijab) being denied a job in a public school as a teacher despite initially being informed that she was employed. However, the events since 9/11 have heightened perceptions of relative exclusion among Muslims. The discourse on the compatibility between Australian and Muslim values and the negativity encountered by Muslims since 9/11 provide an insight into this sense of relative exclusion.

The discussion of manifestation of this negativity indicates a diversity of experiences among Muslims. Some respondents have directly experienced negativity as a result of heightened focus on Islam and Muslims. This is especially the case for women who wear the hijab and, therefore, obviously look Muslim. One respondent narrated the story of his wife being harassed in public space by an Anglo-Saxon male. Another female respondent recounted being exposed to a similar experience from a female. A young Muslim convert, who was in Sydney at the time of the terrorist attacks, described the environment for Muslims as 'awful'. She said:

You could not walk outside... you couldn't be human to a certain extent. If you wear the hijab and you look like a Muslim, your life is cut slightly because the fear of walking outside was awful. Especially if you had to take your children anywhere in Sydney. Just taking your kids to school was a feat in itself. (012).

Other Muslims have been spared direct physical harassment. However, they have heard stories of Muslims being discriminated against either in Western Australia or the eastern states. This communicated notion of negativity has contributed to a sense of being 'focused on' as Muslims. In one case, a young woman was so affected by the fear of being targeted that she was reluctant to venture out of her home on her own.

I don't really feel comfortable when I go outside because of the people, a lot of things happen when we go out... I hear stories, there was actually a lady who went to the shopping centre once and somebody pulled her scarf. Sometimes when I'm walking in the shops I feel uncomfortable. But when I'm with the Iraqis I feel comfortable outside with them... (154).

One could argue that both *direct* and *indirect* experiences have led to heightened sense of relative exclusion among Muslims. They continue to operate in the public and market sphere but do not always feel safe from a possible negative reaction linked to their identity as Muslims.

A number of opinions are offered by Muslims to explain the perceived exclusionary attitude on the part of the wider community. Some hold the Muslim community responsible for the negative attitudes among the wider community. In this context they refer mostly to the actions of those who have engaged in terrorist acts since 2001. However, they also refer to incidents within Australia where some Imams have made inflammatory statements.

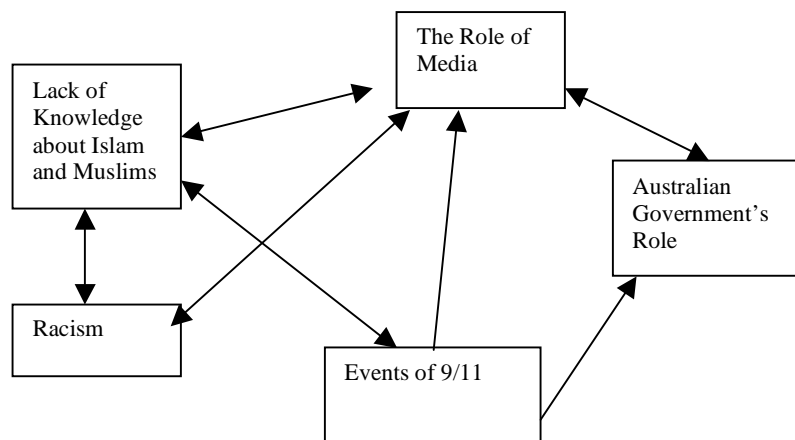


Figure No. 3.1: Muslim Explanations for perceived relative exclusion since 9/11

The majority, however, locates the causes of this negativity within a wider framework of national and international developments. Figure 3.1 identifies the factors most commonly mentioned by Muslims and the links between these factors. Muslim respondents accept that the events since 9/11 have contributed to negativity about Islam and Muslims. Some of them question the validity of claims that the attacks were perpetrated by Al-Qaeda. Such references are not peculiar to those interviewed: similar voices have been heard among some other Muslims and non-Muslims outside Australia. That they have emerged in the course of interviews indicates a trans-national sharing of information which can impinge upon how individuals view their respective environments.

Others accept Al-Qaeda's culpability but argue that the negativity also reflects the lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in the wider Australian community. In their opinion, the knowledge deficit about Muslims has prevented the wider community from distinguishing between a minority that engages in militant activities and the majority of Muslims who shun such practices. At the same time, the events since 9/11 have further adversely affected the image of Islam and Muslims among other Australians.

The media is perceived as an active contributor to this negativity and exclusion of Muslims. Respondents argue that media is motivated by the need to make profit by

sensationalising issues. Hence, the argument goes, the media in Australia does not provide the true picture of what is happening to the detriment of Muslims. A woman of African-Indian background (45-49 year old) suggested that the coverage in media could be blamed for harassment meted out to Muslims. She said:

And whatever is profitable and makes the ratings is what will sell, and sensationalism sells, but if sensationalism sells right? Are people willing to look at the consequences of the sensationalism... See people, whatever happened post 9/11? Immediately post 9/11, women were looked at or spat at... all sorts of vilification. And in part I would seriously say that the blame lies with the media in terms of how they portray, that is why I have never seen any program with a positive portrayal of Muslim contributions into the country. (028)

It is important to note that the references to the media's negative role are found across all age groups, ethnicity and educational background. That a number of Muslims also access alternative media through satellite channels or by reading information from other Muslim majority states adds to this view of Australian media as a contributor to an unfriendly environment for Muslims.

The Australian Government, in this narrative, emerges as both a victim and an instigator of negativity. At one level, it is as much exposed to the negative imagery promoted by the media as other societal groups. At another level, some individuals argue that the Government has consciously contributed to this situation by playing what one respondent identified as the 'wedge politics'. Political leaders issue negative statements about Muslims which are reported by the media that, in turn, contributes to the societal lack of understanding of Muslims living in Australia. Importantly, this narrative referred to the activities and policies adopted by the federal government and not the state government. For instance a respondent accused the Howard Government of 'trying to butter its bread on both sides... On the one hand, [it] says there is a minority of Muslims and they call them fundamentalists.... And on the other hand they seem to be particularly targeting those who want to portray themselves as Muslims' (186). The State Government was spared such critical assessments by the respondents.

The explanation of negativity is not always divorced from references to racism. The wider Australian society, it is considered, essentially adheres to the 'White Australia' ideas. Historically immigrants from other ethnic backgrounds have experienced similar discrimination in Australia. The tendency of reacting negatively to those visibly different has not disappeared. In the case of Muslims, it is argued, Islam provides an additional layer of discrimination. Such references are made not just by recent African immigrants but also some from other ethnic backgrounds, for example, Turkish and Pakistanis.

Being an Australian: Meanings of Identity

Despite the perception of prevailing negativity, a large number of Muslims argued that they could be both Muslim and Australian. This idea of coexistence of identities needs to be placed within the context of different meanings assigned to being an Australian. These meanings have bearings on how individuals affirm their Australian-ness and Muslim-ness

being compatible. The notion of being an Australian is viewed in racial, behavioural, experiential and value terms. The race-based understandings assume that Australian-ness is derived from and linked to Anglo-Celtic heritage. It is essentially synonymous with 'being white'. The behavioural understandings identify beer drinking, partying, sexual freedom, having friends from the opposite gender, acceptance of homosexuality, sports and barbeques. The experiential understanding refers to the everyday act of living and being in Australia. It connotes a sense of being able to choose, the freedom to do what one wants to do, and being an Australian with rights and responsibilities. The value-determined notions refer to ideas of freedom, justice, fairness and equality of human beings.

The interviews indicate that a large number of Muslims approach the idea of being an Australian in experiential terms. This is particularly true of younger Muslim respondents who were either born or have grown up in Australia. They consistently mentioned that they only know of Australia as home, and that while happy and comfortable visiting countries of their original ethnicity, they could not think of being anything other than an Australian. Others focus on the act of living and paying taxes in Australia as a proof that they *are* Australians. The following is an example of such an experiential based understanding of being a Muslim in Australia.

I know that when I leave and I go away on holiday and I'm away for long periods of time, I miss it (Australia). I miss the skyline, it's home. It's where I was raised and you can't escape from that and you don't really want to. It's where all my memories are, both good and bad and it's shaped me into who I am today. I think it's given me a sense of ownership, of home and the possibility of maybe trying to mesh the two together, to be an Australian Muslim or Muslim Australian, whichever way you want to look at it. (091)

The relative emphasis by individuals on other assigned meanings of Australian identity determines the qualifiers they attach to being both a Muslim and an Australian. Those who focus on racial aspects as the dominant meaning and come from non-Anglo Saxon ethnic backgrounds tend to distinguish between themselves as 'Australians' and 'Australian-Australians'. For them, colour and race are the ultimate determinant of Australian identity. An interesting insight to such a perception was provided by a respondent who felt that 'a pretty big chunk [of the population] ... view white Australians as superior and [that] they are quite nationalistic'. He even felt that the support for bringing David Hicks back to Australia was racially determined. He wondered if people would have 'supported him that much if he was an Australian of Middle Eastern background?' 'I think it is cool what comes first', he said, 'it is not his religion that they look it is the fact that he is a white Australian, it is not that he is a terrorist' [182]. Such perception of race-based exclusion is not limited to Muslims of visibly different ethnic backgrounds. The research on notions of citizenship conducted at the University of Western Australia in the 1990s indicated such conceptions Australian identity existed among non-Muslim immigrants as well.⁴⁰

The focus on behavioural dimension also results in qualifiers being attached to the idea of being both an Australian and a Muslim. Some Muslims have argued that if being an Australian is equated with drinking, partying and sexual freedom, they could not be both Muslim and Australian. However, they argue that if the behavioural aspects focused on sports and barbecues, the two identities could be easily affirmed. One respondent, for instance said:

I love Rugby League actually... My friends and I used to come together to watch the State of Origin, my uncle used to drive ... from Mildura to Sydney and we used to all get together in one house and watch State of Origin. That's Australian but I'm doing it with my Turkish friends, we were all born and raised here so we like the Australian sporting events. We follow a certain lifestyle of being Australian I guess... Oh yeah, you can be Muslim. I'm Muslim and I'm Australian. But if they're saying to me in order for me to be Australian I must go to the pub and drink beer every Friday, then I guess I've got a bit of a problem don't I? ...As much as I love living in Australia and the lifestyle and everything, I can't do that because it interferes [with my Muslim identity]. (014).

The value-based notions of being an Australian also opened the space for some qualifiers to the idea. The respondents who approached the issue in terms of universal values and held that both Islam and the Australian system subscribed to these values did not see any difficulty in being both Muslim *and* Australian. Others were keen to point out that if being an Australian meant 'giving up on their religious beliefs' then they could not be both Australian and Muslims. Otherwise, the respondents felt there was no tension between the two identities. In fact, some respondents clearly exhibited signs of unease and frustration at the current debate on Australian values. They felt that it indicated a lack of understanding of what Islam and Muslims stood for. As stated by a respondent:

Media all the time saying oh this people come here, these Muslim people they don't acknowledge our Australian values, they don't... What is Australian values, do you know what is Australian values? I've been living here for four years. Do you know what Australian values is... So are these human values Muslim values, of course so what is different? (018)

A Sense of Relative Exclusion

However, the discussion surrounding the compatibility of Australian and Muslim identities also indicated prevalence of a perception of exclusion of Muslims. Despite feeling that they could be both Muslim and Australian, a large number of respondents felt that the wider society failed to appreciate or accept that these two identities could coexist. For example, one respondent pointed out:

No I think that the society in general sees that there is a clear distinction between being Australian and being Muslim, I think if you ask or survey people what it means to be Australian? I don't think that being Muslim would be an answer.

(022)

To some extent, this lack of acceptance is explained in terms of the perceived predominant ethos in Australia that ignores the role of religion in the society, as well as identification of Islam as a 'non-white' religion. One respondent, for instance, said:

...[A]t the moment what the general perspective is of an Australian is not what I'd like it to be. I'd like to be able to say everyone is Australian that is born here or live here. But unfortunately it's just a blue eyed blonde, that's what an Australian is, somebody who is not Muslim at all, who doesn't follow any Islamic practices. Who lives their life according to their desires and enjoys that side of freedom, and doesn't really take religion too seriously as long as they live in accordance with the law. But to understand Australians as a people who follow many religions whether it is Buddhism or Hinduism or whether they are Sikh or Muslim, I don't think society is ready for that. I think society still sees all these people as foreigners, as people who are migrants. Even if you are born here, raised here you could be a second generation Australian or third generation, you are still labelled as a migrant because society wants to look at you as a migrant because you don't fit that ideal that they want you to fit. (097)

Others attribute this perceived reluctance for the wider society to accept coexistence of Muslim and Australian identities to the lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims among ordinary Australians. They refer to the role played by events since 9/11, the role of the media and the governmental policies in creating such a perception among the general public. This perceived lack of acceptance, in turn, appears to reinforce the views that the post-9/11 environment is less than positive for Muslims living in Australia. Individuals draw comparisons between their life in Australia as Muslims before and after 2001 to underscore the impact on their sense of being accepted. One young female (17 years old) articulated this feeling by stating: 'I don't feel as though we're out-casted (sic) but I do feel different. I guess if there's a circle I feel right on the edge of it. [204] Another respondent stated:

No they don't [accept me as an Australian and a Muslim]. The main and continuous comment is, you're in Australia now dress like an Australian. That's the least insulting of the comments you get. And when you say I'm living in Australia because Australia is a democratic country, and as a democratic country I can choose how I dress. I don't tell you how to dress, you don't tell me how to dress. And if you get that far they get all ... it's all too hard... then they'll just take off. Having meaningful dialogue with some of these people is not always easy. (099)

The perception of relative exclusion, it is important to mention, is not shared by all Muslims. Some Muslims, who have been interacting with the wider society for economic, social or cultural reasons, acknowledge the positive relations existing between them and others of non-Muslim background. Others are more philosophical about the

longevity of such relative exclusion: more exposure to and information about real Islamic ideals, for them, could pave the way to more acceptance of Muslims by the wider society.

Concluding Observations

A relative sense of difference between Muslim and Western ways of life provides the context in which majority of Muslims live in Australia. Despite this difference, they feel that they can be both Muslim and Australian. However, since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, Muslims have increasingly perceived a sense of relative exclusion from the wider society. They feel that the society does not always accept that the Muslim and Australian dimensions of identities are compatible. A few Muslims hold their own communities responsible for perpetuating such notions. However, the media is identified as the major agent responsible for creating the environment of relative exclusion. The Australian Government is also held responsible for this exclusion, though to a lesser degree: it is perceived to be both a victim and an instigator of policies that have heightened concerns about Muslims among the wider Australian community.

That the perception of being relatively excluded is apparent among Muslims across educational, ethnic and economic backgrounds raises a question: To what extent do the perceptions held by Muslims reflect the reality of opinions held by the non-Muslims in Australia? The next chapter will attempt to address this question by drawing upon the qualitative interviews held during the course of the project.

Chapter Four: Non-Muslim Perceptions of Muslims

This chapter deals with non-Muslim perceptions of Muslims in Australia. Based on qualitative interviews, it argues that a mixed picture exists with respect to non-Muslim views on Muslims. With a very low level of knowledge about the religion of Islam, the respondents rely on a combination of sources to inform themselves of developments pertaining to Muslims. While they display scepticism of the information provided by the media, the media does shape their views on Islam and Muslims. Images of oppression of women as depicted through the wearing of hijab, and violence in Islam remain the main descriptors for a number of the respondents. However, these negative images coexist with either positive or nuanced views on Islam and Muslims. Hence not *all* of the respondents adopt exclusionary attitudes towards Muslims in Australia.

The chapter places a sample of non-Muslim respondents within the context of the demographic profile of the wider community in Australia. It provides basic information on the nature of the non-Muslim sample, and then outlines the results.

The Wider Australian Society: A Profile

The demographic profile of the Western Australian non-Muslim community is representative of the wider Australian non-Muslim community on key indicators such as gender, age, ethnicity, employment, income and education.

According to the 2006 Australian Census, the state and federal gender profiles are similar as the female populations in Western Australia (50.2%) and Australia (50.65%) are larger than their respective male (49.8%/49.35%) populations. The youth cohorts, those aged under-25 years, for Western Australia (34.3%) and Australia (33.4%) is also comparable in size, representing approximately one third of the total population groups.

The majority of non-Muslims in Western Australia and Australia are Australian-born. The national Australian-born cohort is 14,072,944 persons (71% of the total population), whereas for Western Australia the figure is 1,279,233 (or 65.3%). The migrant communities of Western Australia and Australia have similar regional origins; the largest migrant groups originate from North Western Europe, South East Asia and South Eastern Europe.

The national and State picture is also similar in terms of weekly income, employment and occupation. The largest income bracket for both groups is \$400-599 per week (approximately 16%). Employment rates for the Western Australian and Australian non-Muslim communities are also similar, although the Western Australian community has a slightly higher employment (64.5%) and slightly lower unemployment rate (2.5%). The primary occupation types of Australian and Western Australian non-Muslims are 'professional,' 'clerical and administrative,' 'management,' and 'technicians and trades.'

Educational attainment figures for the Australian and Western Australian non-Muslim communities are also comparable, with similar numbers completing Year 10 only

(approximately 26.5%), Year 12 (approximately 47%), and attaining non-school (Tertiary/TAFE) qualifications (approximately 31.5%).

Accessing Non-Muslim Views on Muslims

Against the backdrop of this demographic picture, we conducted qualitative interviews with 108 non-Muslim Western Australians. The choice of sample was guided by the need to access the views of as many different groups and opinions as possible. This necessitated accessing respondents of different ethnicities, age groups, economic backgrounds, professions, and education levels. Accessing non-Muslim respondents was relatively easy once initial contact had been established via personal relationship circles, i.e. direct contact by interviewers with friends, acquaintances and colleagues, who were then referred to other interviewees, via direct mail and email, and through poster advertisements calling for volunteers placed in public spaces, such as libraries, community and shopping centres. Some respondents who received direct mailing were suspicious of our intentions and declined our invitations in writing, but included in these letters their personal opinions on Islam and Muslims.

The majority of interviewees expressed a preference for 'scripted' interviews, preferring to respond to set questions as prompts for discussions. Individual personalities were clearly a defining feature in the interviews, with some participants more willing to respond at length without further prompting or questioning. Overall, participants were willing to be questioned and there were no obvious signs of hostility or discomfort with the questions posed. The majority often found opportunities to express their own sense of humour through personal reflections and anecdotes. Participant willingness to give their time to an interview was dependent on the timing of the interview and on the circumstances of the interviewee. Interviews were arranged around the respondent's schedule, and conducted either during or after business hours, and at the venue of the respondent's choice; home, workplace or the CMSS building at the UWA Claremont campus. Participants who were retired/unemployed/casually employed were generally more willing to extend interviews beyond one hour, with most running to around 1.5 hours. The remainder, who were either fully employed or full time students, the majority of whom were participating during working/school hours, were keen to keep interviews and answers brief, with interviews rarely exceeding more than 1 hour.

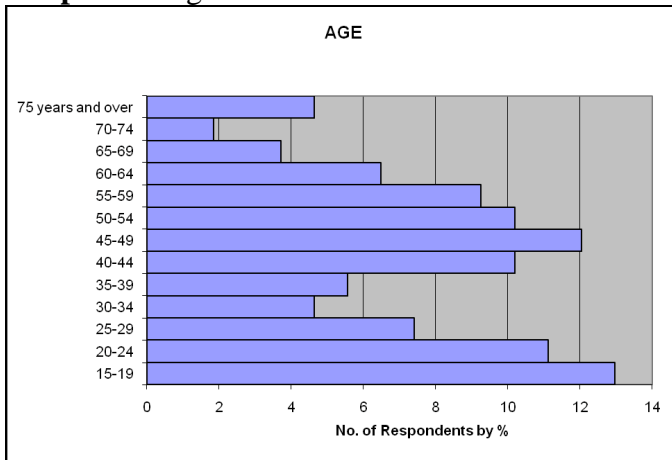
The primary aim of the qualitative interviews with non-Muslims was to assess the extent to which the respondents held a negative and/or exclusionary view of Muslims. To this end, we attempted to understand their views on Islam and Muslims in general, about Muslims living in Australia in particular, the media and government discourse on Islam and Muslims and its effects, and their suggestions on fostering relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The sample of non-Muslim respondents consists of 54 males and 54 females. Of these 34 (24.07%) are aged 15-29 years, 56 (51.85%) aged 30-59 years and 18 (16.66%) aged 60+ years. Their ethnic, educational, employment, income and education features are outlined in Graphs 4.1-4.11. The majority of non-Muslim respondents 48 (44.44%) are Australian

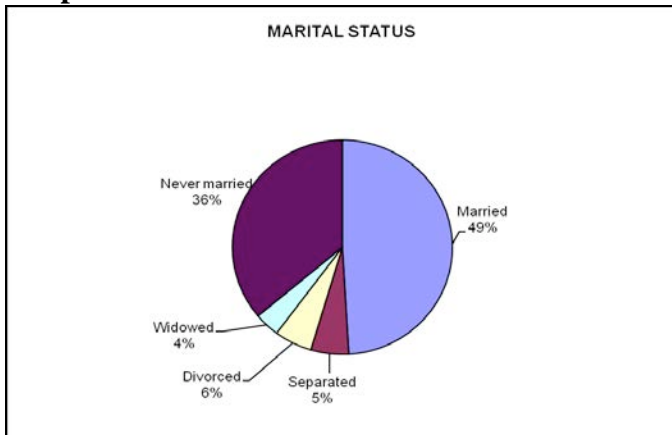
born. The next largest cohorts were 14 (12.96%) born in the UK, and 10 (9.26%) born in Former Yugoslav Republic.⁴¹ 74 (68.5%) respondents are the children of migrants; either one or both of their parents being born overseas. Of the 60 (55.55%) overseas born respondents, 49 (45.3%) arrived in Australia before 2001, and 46 (42.6%) have Australian citizenship.

Of the total, 86 (79.6%) respondents completed school to Year 12, and 7 (6.48%) were still attending high school. 66 (61.1%) respondents hold a non-school qualification; 24 (22.2%) hold Bachelor’s degrees, 14 (12.9%) post-graduate degrees, and 14 (12.9%) graduate diplomas or certificates. Of the total respondents, 78 (72.2%) are employed; 54 (50%) fulltime and 24 (22.22%) part time. In our sample, the largest income groupings by number of respondents are; 13 (12.03%) earning \$1500+/week, 12 (11.11%) earning \$1000-\$1499/week, and 12 (11.11%) earning \$500-\$599/week. With regards to occupation types in this sample, the largest cohorts are; 27 (25%) professionals, 23 (21.29%) students, and 18 (16.66%) managers and administrators.

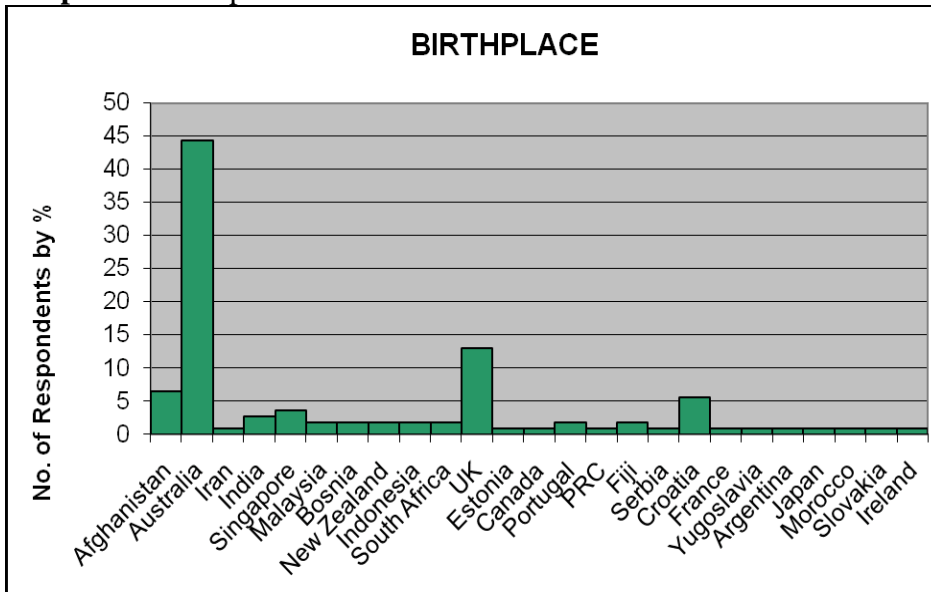
Graph 4.1: Age of Non-Muslim Interviewees



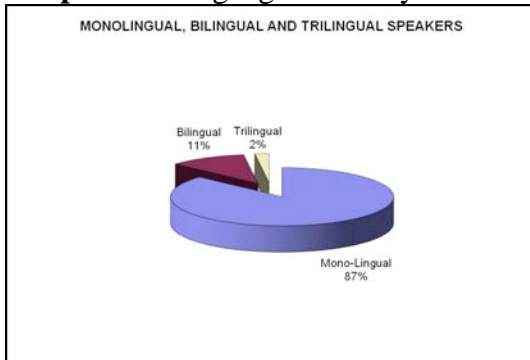
Graph 4.2: Marital Status of Non-Muslim Interviewees



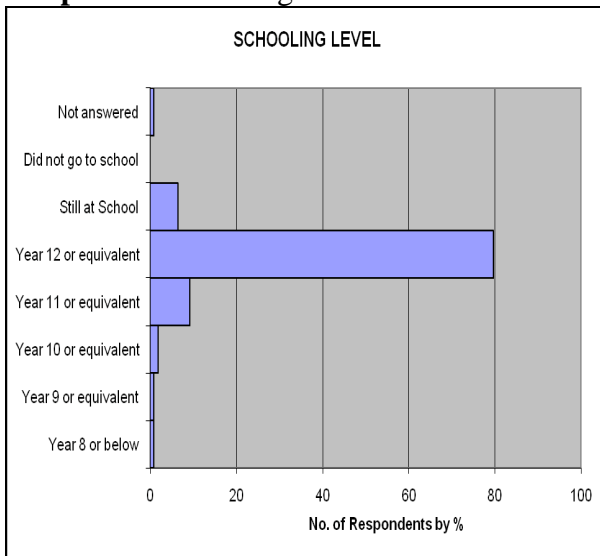
Graph 4.3: Birthplace of Non-Muslim Interviewees



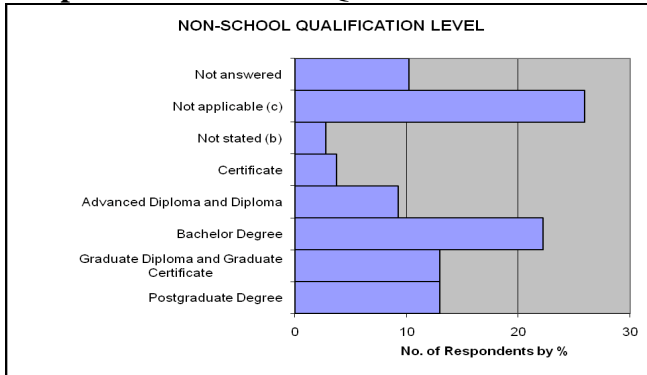
Graph 4.4: Language Diversity of Non-Muslim Interviewees



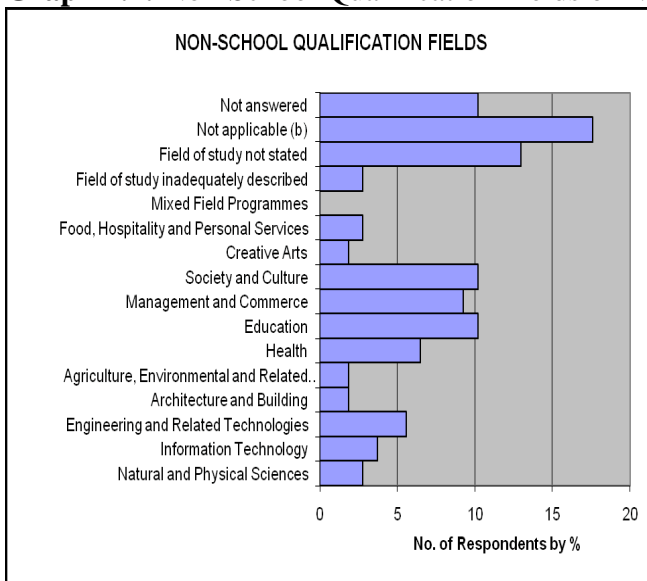
Graph 4.5: Schooling Level of Non-Muslim Interviewees



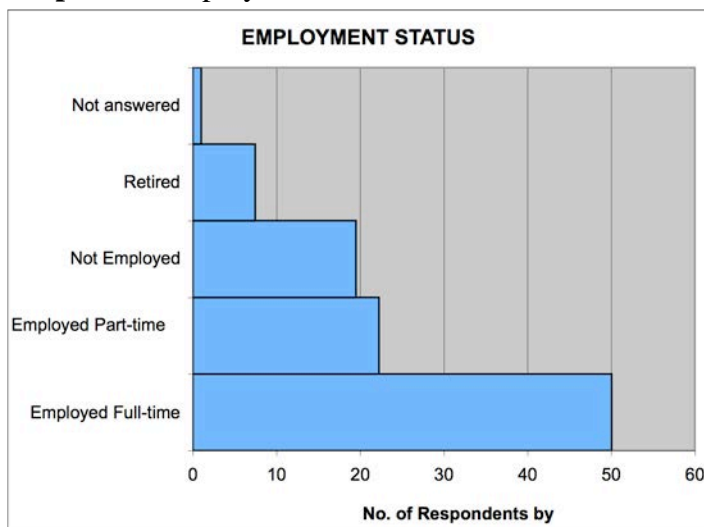
Graph 4.6: Non-School Qualification Levels of Non-Muslim Interviewees



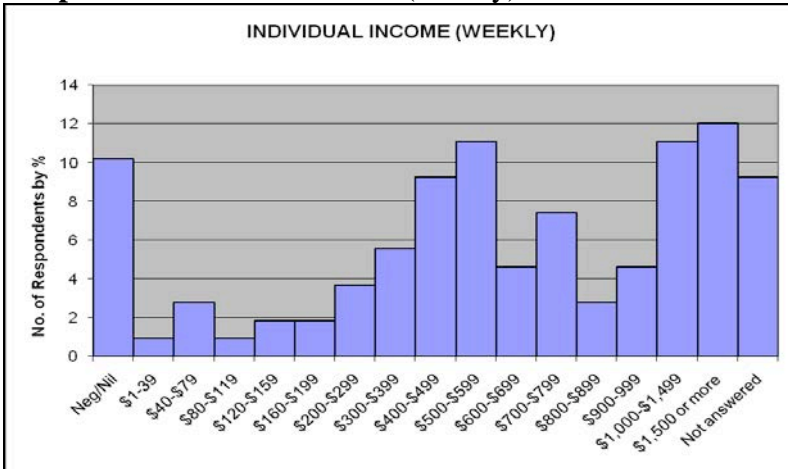
Graph 4.7: Non-School Qualification Fields of Non-Muslim Interviewees



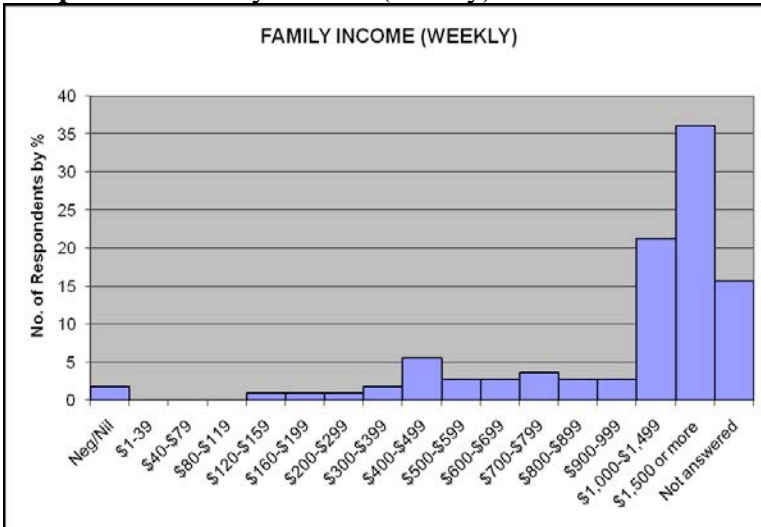
Graph 4.8: Employment Status of Non-Muslim Interviewees



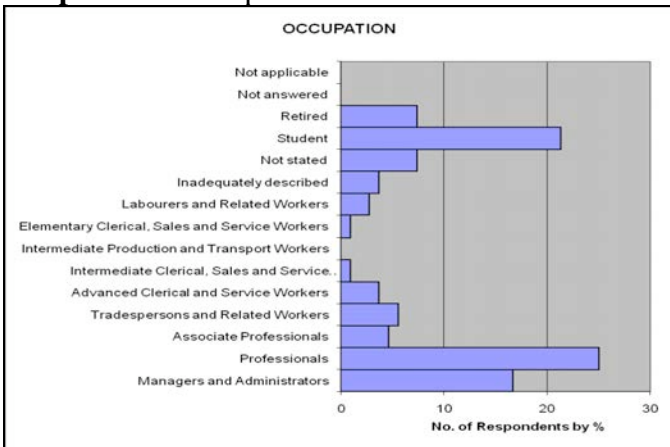
Graph 4.9: Individual Income (weekly) of Non-Muslim Interviewees



Graph 4.10: Family Income (weekly) of Non-Muslim Interviewees



Graph 4.11: Occupation of Non-Muslim Interviewees



Sources of Knowledge about Islam and Muslims

The qualitative interviews reveal that some knowledge of Islam and Muslims exists among the non-Muslim wider community. This knowledge is acquired through a combination of sources including Qur'an, internet, books on Islam, media and personal contacts.

Table 4.1: Sources of Knowledge of Islam for Non-Muslims

Qur'an	13
Internet	24
Books	26
Contacts	77
Media	108

As evident in Table 4.1, 13 respondents identified Qur'an as a source of their knowledge of Islam. Approximately 22% of the respondents have accessed internet for such information, whereas 24% have read books related to Islam and Muslims. Nearly three in every four respondents have had personal contact with Muslims.

The detailed discussions indicated that while the respondents may have read the **Qur'an**, they were not always familiar with the different meanings assigned to the verses. One respondent, for instance, insisted on only accepting the most rigid and orthodox reading of the verses.

The references to the use of **internet** indicated a greater awareness of the subtleties involved in the kind of information being received. Of the 24 respondents who referred to the use of internet in one manner or another reported using information from a wide variety of sources such as academic research, international news organization, as well as non-Muslim and Muslim organizations, think tanks and blogs. Some of these respondents expressed a concern that the openness of the forum allowed for extremist and damaging viewpoints from both sides to be made available and that this might cause some trouble in the future if people using the information were not capable of thinking about it critically. The majority of internet users believed that it had the potential to be a useful tool for people wanting to learn more about Islam and Muslims, but were aware of the pitfalls of accessing uncensored and highly subjective information and the need for consumers to critically assess it. For example:

Because of the work I do I read a lot on the internet. I tend to try to read different sources rather than just pick somewhere that is going to support the view that I have or agree with me...I think the views that are taken on board come from a wide variety of people and I sort of sift through that and think 'well I agree with you and I don't agree with you.' I think that's the only way you can really learn anything. (332)

...I guess I get that from websites that I have looked at such as jihad watch, and ok I know that's not a Muslim web page, but the stories from what I gather are all

factual, so when you read stuff like that then it is troubling. And you think that if half the world read stuff like this, there would be terror everywhere. (328)

There were also individuals who had undertaken independent research into Islam for a variety of reasons ranging from a genuine intellectual, political or religious interest and simple curiosity. This led them to read books on issues relating to Islam, Islam's relations with the West and the place of Muslim women. Such preference for books as a source of knowledge was apparent in statements like:

Today I would probably go and read some of the history books that I have got at home. I would probably go and read the Koran if I can find an English language translation because it tends to be in Arabic, unfortunately. (324)

I read a lot of books and I choose my books very carefully. I will read some of the best books by Robert Fisk and Ayan Hirsi Ali who as you known is Somalian. (372)

Personal contacts and interactions were also identified as the source of information about Islam and Muslims. As apparent in Table 4.1, approximately 71% respondents mentioned having some contact and/or interaction with Muslims past or present. There were variations in the level, scope, and depth of this interaction. Most contact/interaction is work, education or community based; most people have or have had Muslim colleagues, cohorts or neighbours. One of them, for instance, stated:

I have a lot of colleagues who are Muslim and we do get on very well and we have a lot of chats, but it doesn't have anything to do with religion...we have a lot of Muslim staff here and its no big deal, they are like all the rest of us. (329)

Some respondents were unsure as to whether they had any contact with Muslims, for example reporting that to their knowledge there are no Muslims living in their area, or that if there are they are unaware of them because the subject of religion had never been broached or because they could not easily identify if Muslims lived in their area.

They may be living in my area, but I don't know that they are Muslims...I didn't have a religious conversation to check that up. (356)

There are...certain individuals who are Muslims and I know about it. There are a number of people who could well be Muslim but I have no idea. And it doesn't particularly concern me one way or the other. So I have never felt the compulsion to ask... (339).

Of those who identified contacts as the source of their knowledge of Islam, some met Muslims through sport or other social forums. Others had Muslim neighbours or colleagues, and some had formed friendships with Muslims. A small number of these non-Muslims were or had been in relationships with Muslims. There were also some whose family members in the past had close relationships with Muslims. Others had

come into contact with Muslims through tourism or work in Muslim countries. The following statements indicate the existence of such contacts;

Our best friends are in Tehran. I lived with my family-in-law in Tehran. (372)

Yes I have many Muslim friends because I am from Bosnia and Muslims are mostly from Bosnia. (301)

I've got two close friends...actually I could probably say three or four close friends who are Islamic. They are Islamic, they're not Muslim because they're drinking but they still hold on to their Islamic faith. (346)

Most of it has come through Muslims I have known, and that was when I grew up in Scotland. There were lots of Muslims where we were. And the thing that struck me then was that they were nice people and we hung around with them but they weren't so much allowed to be with us, to hang out with us. (328)

A small minority of respondents had also acquired knowledge of Islam and issues relating to Muslims through education and training. These included lectures by Imams in interfaith discussions, or work-related exposure to such knowledge, as well as at educational institutions.

The primary source of information on Islam and Muslims, however, remains the news **media** in various forms and formats. Television appears to be a more accessed source of knowledge about Islam followed by print media. The discussions suggest that a perceived credibility gap exists between the non-commercial and commercial news channel stations. A number of respondents appeared disdainful of the quality, integrity, and subjectivity of the commercial networks, and considered the ABC, SBS and some foreign networks such as the BBC, as being reliable, credible, informative and objective. The findings may appear surprising as the share of commercial channel is greater than the ABC and SBS networks. But this attitude was evident in statements such as the following:

My own view, if I was to compare current affairs rather than straight media, so something on the ABC compared to other current events shows on the other channels, I would probably consider the ABC program to be more reliable or even handed...If I was to pick an example, for example Channel 7's current affairs show called Today Tonight, I would not consider it a very reliable source of information (339).

...I am very selective about which ones I actually view...(mainly) the ABC and SBS...because they tend to be a little more objective and less sensationalized. (324)

The media was the main source for information on how the Australian Government dealt with Muslim issues as well.

The respondents indicated a certain level of cynicism of the media and its reportage of Muslims. The majority suggested that the media sensationalises stories relating to Islam and Muslims for the sake of being sensationalist, because of a hidden editorial or political agenda, or for profit. Moreover, there were references to the fact that the media focused on topics such as terrorism, violence, extremism and war, and that in overstating these the media was contributing to stereotyping all Muslims as violent or extremists. Like the Muslim respondents, such perception was linked to the view of the media being guided by profit motive and not accurate reporting of news. The following are some examples of the views expressed:

Typically they do report their issues fairly except for ...[some commercial channels]. But by only choosing stories about terrorism and violence in connection to Islam, the only thing people associate with Islam is violence...I guess it's the same as all sorts of news but all these pictures join together and its negative, based on violence and oppression. (378)

With the media you can never say that they are fair because they all have their own agenda and want it to be as sensational as possible to grab and audience, so I don't put much weight on it. (329)

There is a small minority who perceived the media to be objective in its reporting. For them this objectivity stems from being in a democratic and open society. The predominance of negative stories in the media, in their view, merely reflected the reality in Muslim states and societies. As one respondent said:

I don't think ...[the media] is biased, I think it is completely objective, this is what they [Muslims] did and this is what we are reporting. (302)

Views on Muslims and Islam

Cumulatively, the sources of information on Islam appear to have provided minimalist knowledge about the religion and its followers. The respondents appeared to know the basic information about Islam. They were, for instance, aware of Qur'an as the Islamic religious text, the significance accorded to Prophet Mohammad, prayers, fasting, Zakat and Hajj. This included respondents who had not read the Qur'an and merely referred to it as being the main source of Islamic teachings.

Despite this limited knowledge, however, the level of anti-Muslim feeling was not predominant among the respondents. Instead, a sense of uncertainty prevailed: while some were clear about their feelings as positive or negative, others consistently qualified them indicating a certain sense of unease or lack of clarity of what Muslims could do. This became apparent in discussions on *hijab* and the issue of violence in Islam.

Women as the signifiers of difference

The interviews indicated that at least half of the respondents considered women to be the signifiers of Muslim identity. A simple content search, for instance, revealed that at least 54 respondents considered *hijab* to be the defining feature of Muslim womanhood.

... You can say by dress, that's maybe the commonest of all. (390)

Well the only way you can recognise if someone who is a Muslim female is if she is wearing burqa or covering. That is the only way I would recognise a Muslim. (302)

Not all those who referred to *hijab* considered it to be a negative signifier: for some it was an evidence of religious devotion. In contrast, others considered hijab to be problematic: it was seen as being symbolic of (mis) representation of Muslim aggression and female oppression. This caused some to say, for example:

I don't know that I would be comfortable with people walking around in niqabs. I'm not a fan. I saw it once and I felt very confronted...I found it quite disturbing. (332).

I mean why do these women cover themselves up? Are they are so ugly that they think they are going to frighten my dog? What's wrong with seeing a man or anybody's face? Because you look in somebody's face, and look in their eyes, you can tell whether or what sort of person they are. (321)

Well the impression I get is that they don't really want to be here. They really don't want to be assimilated, be the same as we are. They don't want to be like us. The men want to wear their little things and the women want to wear their hijabs, and probably that's become more... become more prevalent since 9/11. Now they see themselves as being on one side. (322)

Islam- A Violent Religion?

The same variety of opinion was also apparent in the discussion on violence and Islam.

As can be seen in Table 4.2, only 9 of the 59 respondents who referred to the issue of violence considered that Islam was promoting violence. Others had qualified responses to the question.

Table 4.2: Non Muslim Views on Islam Promoting violence

Islam Promotes Violence	9
Islam does not promote violence	17
A violent minority among Muslims	24
Situation dependent	9
Total Responses relevant	59

They developed these views through the media, interaction with some Muslims or by reading books which convinced them that Muslims were determined to wage Jihad. As one respondent said:

I am not anti-Muslim, I am probably anti-Islam and that's only from what I see of where it is going in the world... (328)

Another non-Muslim respondent said:

War and hatred...and violence and all the negative things...I do not trust them because their leader Allah is a liar, deceiver, he is fake. So if you are the leader your followers will do exactly the same...I am going to be very, very mild, they are a bunch of troublemakers, they are extremists, they are terrorists, they have absolutely no respect for the word 'life' or for people. (302)

For others, contemporary events, global and national, such as terrorism and images of Muslim celebration of such acts, and violent reactions by Muslims to the Danish cartoons in 2005⁴² and the comments by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006,⁴³ were indicative of Muslim hatred toward the West and willingness to act on this in an aggressive manner. The following are some examples of such views:

Oh yeah, you see their kids holding guns and as the kids will always listen to their parents, if the parents can hold guns, then they are going to hold guns. (391)

It is always a bomb or something going off. They haven't been in the news for a few months so obviously something might be brewing at the moment. (302)

Their intention is to spread all over the world, and to get everywhere and then simply evaluate (*sic*) and grow in number. (307)

In contrast, others either acknowledged the presence of a violent minority, suggested that the use of violence was situation-dependent or unequivocally disagreed with the notion of Islam promoting violence.

Islam promotes the same values as Christianity and Judaism; modesty, humility, sharing possessions. It's the same values: Islam is a great religion. (372)

Its nonsense, no religion has ever been a threat, the people are a threat. No religion has ever been a threat. (351)

Living in peace, I've heard that quite a bit [about Islam]. Tolerance. (373)

This suggested that some of the respondents had a nuanced understanding of Islamic/Muslim states and societies. They recognised and acknowledged that events and

developments in Muslim states and societies are as heavily influenced by temporal factors as those in non-Muslim states and societies. Respondents holding such views were often critical of reductive terms such as ‘Muslims’ and ‘Muslim world’ which they considered problematic because it obscured the reality of religious, ethnic, geographical, geo-political, economic, developmental, and political diversity and division. The following statements are examples of such carefully considered views on Islam and Muslims:

...there are so many different sects of Islam. Islam goes from Yemen, the birthplace of the prophet, to France. It’s so huge that you cannot have an image of a Muslim. (372)

I know that Islam is far more diverse than people think and that it stretches from Morocco to Indonesia, and that you can’t talk of this community in general as being any sort of bloc, although there are some in the Islamic world who might like to think that a bloc is realistic. It’s an enormous part of the world. It’s almost like trying to describe people as Christians, and then somehow comparing South America to Sweden. (332)

The respondents also made distinctions between Islam and Muslims, recognising the separation between religion, politics and terrorism, and also the separation between different subsets of Muslims, for example fundamentalists, terrorists and ordinary people. This prompted some to argue that even in the post 9/11 era, they considered militancy to be *limited* to a section of Muslim communities. As two respondents said:

You have to differentiate between Islam and the Islamists. I think the media tends to confuse Islam and Islamists. That Islamists can be radical, while Islam is just a religion. I think the media is confused and is tarring the terrorist and the Muslims with the same brush. (357)

No I don’t think it [Islam] encourages violence. I think there are people who use religion and misinterpret it and they use it as a goal to achieve their ends such as terrorism. So I don’t think the religion itself promotes violence. (329)

Muslims in Australia

This multiplicity of views on Islam and Muslims was paralleled in the way the respondents viewed Muslim presence in Australia. Muslims were invariably described as ‘just ordinary people’. They were perceived to be quiet, humble, respectful, peaceful, and family and community oriented — traits that were invariably ascribed to their Islamic faith. There was also a positive perception that Muslims have a heightened sense of religiosity as compared to non-Muslims of other faiths.

Good family values. They seem to have good family values, that’s the most important thing. You see them out with their wives and children. (395)

I think they are lovely people and they are kind, and I think they are really badly represented. It's a shame really because the people I know, even people who have come to the house to do work...they were really thankful and polite. (328)

The only perception or generalization that I would say is common to all of them is that, by comparison to the majority of people I know that I could identify as Christians, the religion and religious faith is very essential to their lives because of their families. (332)

The question of compatibility of Muslim identity with Australian identity resulted in the respondents analysing the motives behind such discourse. The debate on Australian identity was considered problematic by the majority of non-Muslims who saw it as the product of a politicised discourse designed to demarcate Australian from un-Australian. Such demarcation was seen as deliberately excluding certain groups from the mainstream society. However, there was a general consensus that 'being Australian' means freedom, fairness and sense of community.

All that has been politicised in itself, and that's the problem. And I cringe every time I hear Howard talk about it...it has been hijacked by a political party...everyone has a fair go and you look after your mates. (324)

I think Australian values are just basic decent human values and I hate to repeat what they say, having a fair go, as if other people don't have a fair go. Its having the same rights as anyone. (337)

Such universalistic view of Australian identity contributed to an understanding among more than half of the non-Muslim respondents that Muslim and Australian identities are compatible. It also contributed to a declared sense of being comfortable with the idea of having a Muslim family member (although often perplexed as to how this might eventuate). They were comfortable with the idea of, if they did not already have, having Muslims as friends, neighbours and colleagues, although some added the caveat 'as long as they don't try to push their views on me, I don't mind.' Such an understanding of Islam and Muslims could be seen as indicating that more than half of the respondents did not entertain or support exclusion of Muslims on the basis of their religious identity.

However, this relative absence of exclusion coexisted with the concern that there might be some incompatibilities in lifestyle that could contribute to Muslim exclusion, such as dress codes, alcohol consumption, and the free mixing of the sexes.

Muslim means a religion and Australian means a national identity...(but) I guess some of the more stringent practices that the Muslim people might have, like the way they dress, the way they deem the values to dress sense, they can have more difficulty fitting into the club scene and the more popular Australian mainstream practices. (346)

I mean it may well be that the differences are acceptable, it's just the tip of the iceberg. Well, what else is different? It is difficult, what about music? How can a Muslim take up music, because he is not allowed to have it? How can they do sports? How can they go to the beach? (357)

Some also viewed Muslims an insular community. They were seen as deliberately isolating themselves from the non-Muslim community due to a perceived sense of religious and cultural superiority. Such statements indicated a perception among some non-Muslims of *Muslims being the excluders* who did not want to be part of the wider Australian community.

Realistically they are hostile, not in Australia but in other places. In all other countries, they are hostile. If you go to Malaysia, if you're not a Muslim, you're an outcast. (351)

...you know Muslims, they come to this country - It's the greatest country in the world as far as I'm concerned - that they don't want to, I think they consider us a bit tainted and I feel sure they've think that if say their children associate with Australian children, they might catch something, Westernised or Westernisation. (322)

The view that Muslim and Australian identities are incompatible was not completely absent. For some respondents, this was informed by a perception that Muslims do not want to be part of Australia and that they are trying to make Australia *Muslim*. Others were of the opinion that Australian identity should be primary and that it should be clearly articulated by mentioning the Australian identity before any other identities: i.e. Muslims should be *Australian-Muslims* and not *Muslim-Australians*. Such perceptions led them to argue that those who do not subscribe to their notion of Australian identity, should not be living here.

Yes, exactly. Exactly. You hit the nail on the head. Their Australian identity should come first, religion should come second. And if you can't live that way, you shouldn't be here. (321)

I think, my personal opinion is that Islam does not respect the Australian. If they can, they would turn this place to be exactly like the Middle East. They would not respect current Australian values. If they could they would cover all women, that would mean that they would introduce all their religious laws. (307)

An Anti-Muslim Environment?

These different images and views on Muslims in Australia suggest that the assumption of exclusion of Muslims may not be as prevalent as generally assumed by Muslims and others. As such these findings may appear counter-intuitive. The results may reflect the

sample that is slightly skewed towards higher levels of education. That the size of the sample is smaller than that used for Muslims may have also contributed to these findings.

However, the interviews do suggest that while the respondents have become more aware of Islam and Muslims, and are exposed to information identifying Muslims as violent, their responses are not shaped entirely by such information. There definitely exists a strong cohort of individuals who not only are open to Muslim presence in Australia, but also consider coexistence of these two identities possible. These findings appear to replicate those of the Griffith University Islamic Research Unit (GRIU) in 2006. Their research suggested that 'over two-thirds of Queenslanders surveyed [in 2006] did not regard Muslims as a threat to the country'.⁴⁴

At the same time, however, the concerns regarding a minority subscribing to violence creates a sense of unease among some respondents. This is not to discount the presence of some who exclude Muslims and/or think that Muslim and Australian identities are incompatible. At the same time, however, some non-Muslim respondents also hold the view that Muslims are excluding the wider community. Such perceptions suggest that those assumed to be 'excluders' are feeling 'excluded'.

Chapter Five: Muslim Identities in Australia- Promoting Inclusion

This chapter draws upon the information gathered to offer suggestions for reducing the level of perceived exclusion by Muslims in the country, and for promoting their inclusion. To this end, it argues that the perception among Muslims of relative exclusion by the wider community coexists with a mixed set of views on Muslim presence in Australia. Both sides engage in different levels of exclusion and inclusion vis-à-vis the 'other' that leaves the room open for building bridges across perceptual divides. The chapter ends with a set of recommendations that could capitalise on the potential for bridge-building.

Linking Local with International: Muslim identities

The interviews with Muslim respondents indicate that there are cross-linkages between their identities as Muslims locally and internationally. Acting as both religious and cultural beings, these Muslims reflect varying levels of inclusion and exclusion vis-à-vis the wider community. While some subscribing to extreme orthodox Islamic ideas shun cultural identity in favour of a clearly demarcated and exclusive Muslim identity, others continue to deal across the religious boundaries with ease. At the same time, the respective cultural identities of other less orthodox and/or practicing Muslims also induce a variety of responses towards and interaction with the wider society.

These identities actively interact with and are shaped by developments in, and news from, eastern states as well as overseas. As individuals and communities come to learn of what is happening locally and globally, they draw conclusions about the nature of the national and international environment for Muslims. Against the background of international events since September 2001 and the US-Australian cooperation in the War on Terror, the dominant perception among the respondents remains one of not being accepted. Combined with the ideas that Muslim and western ways of life may not always be compatible, these perceptions appear to create parallel tendencies: *Muslims can both be excluders and the excluded. While excluding others, they can experience perceived and/or real exclusion from members of the wider community.*

A parallel process is occurring among the wide society as well. Drawing upon the easily available sources of information and experiences, and against the background of the events since 9/11, non-Muslim communities have also developed ideas about Islam and Muslims. Some of these reflect local experiences, whereas others draw substance from previous experiences, current information from international media, and information from informal channels overseas. Not all the non-Muslims interviewed appear to hold a negative view of Muslims. However, there are clear indications of some subscribing to anti-Muslim views. A combination of views exists: Muslims are seen worthy of being excluded by some whereas others favour a greater understanding of Islam and Muslims. In other words, *some in the non-Muslim community also subscribe to ideas of excluding Muslims. These views are expressed either clearly or indirectly thus creating a sense of exclusion among Muslims.*

One could argue, therefore, that exclusionary and inclusionary tendencies are present among both Muslim and non-Muslim sections of the community. However, the numerical inequality (with Muslims comprising only 1.7% of the total national population) and the increased focus on the Muslim issue both internationally and locally has contributed to a situation where Muslims feel more excluded and uncomfortable. This contributes to a sense of being excluded by the wider community, targeted by the media and the Australian Government. If unchecked, this sense of relative exclusion could lead to increased marginalisation and isolation among sections of Muslim communities.

The interviews indicated this sense of isolation among students enrolled in Islamic schools. Predominantly belonging to recent immigrant and refugee families, these children were sent to Islamic schools so that they could learn about Islamic values and beliefs. While happy in their own 'in-groups', they indicated a sense of difference vis-à-vis the wider community. One could argue that such sense of difference could be reinforced by the fact that a large number of these students belong to relatively less affluent suburbs in Perth Metropolitan Area. Cumulatively, it could lead to a sense of marginalisation and exclusion unless the children are assisted with building links with the wider community, and are reassured of their acceptance as Australians.

The possibility of a heightened sense of exclusion and marginalisation is not restricted to Islamic schools. It may also exist among those who do not subscribe to orthodox Islamic ideas, or those who are not practicing but who identify with Islam and/or Muslims. As discussed in Chapter Three, Muslims who subscribed to moderate/liberal understandings and practices of Islam also indicated a perception of relative exclusion in the post 9/11 era. Some in this group may experience heightened feelings of marginalisation through what could be termed a sense of *double exclusion*. This is linked to a perception among some of them that they are looked down upon or excluded by other 'more pious Muslims'. But they also experience varying degrees of exclusion from the wider society due to their Islamic identity. On occasions, their Islamic identity is also denied on grounds that they do not 'look Muslim'. If combined with economic marginalisation, such perceptions of being excluded could lead these individuals to 'learn about Islam'. As mentioned in Chapter One, this could cause them to practice de-territorialised Islam that may in turn contribute to their disengagement with wider society. The need to be part of a group could also result in them joining 'local gangs' thus sending them down the vortex of delinquency. Alternatively, it could also cause them to turn inward and experience psychological and social alienation. Importantly, the process may occur at any age and may not be limited to Muslim youth only.

The question arises as to how this possibility could be checked and the prevailing perception of relative exclusion among Muslims addressed?

The absence of a perception of absolute exclusion among Muslims, and the less than exclusionary attitude among the respondents provide the starting point for strategies designed to achieve these twin goals. The interviews provided a number of clues to this possibility. Both Muslims and non-Muslims suggested ideas that could improve the

interaction and cooperation among Muslims and the wider Australian community. They addressed the question of who needs to shoulder this responsibility of building bridges. These suggestions revolved round the agency of state and other social and ethnic/religious groups in taking initiatives to bridge the gap.

The views around the agency of the state differed along the lines of activism and distance. A number of Muslim respondents favoured the idea of governments being active agents of change and building bridges. References to this need do not assume inaction on part of government agencies in the past. In fact some respondents acknowledge that the Australian government is aware of the issues being faced and is in the process of putting policies in place to promote inter-cultural and inter-faith harmony. Instead, such references to the state agency highlight the assumption that government (both at federal and state levels) has access to resources that can facilitate this process.

This view was contested by a very small minority of Muslims who preferred federal and state governments to stay out of the space of inter-communal relations and engaging with religious issues only when necessary. One respondent, for instance, was hostile to the very idea of producing a report based on the interviews to build harmony and cohesion. He argued that the state and society could best deal with the issue by simply keeping quiet and not making too much of the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. He preferred to engage the state only on limited matters that necessitated its intervention, for example, in seeking permission to slaughter animals on the occasion of Eid al Adha. But for other issue-areas he preferred a neutral and silent stance instead of active involvement (162).

A difference of opinion also exists on who needs to take the first step. While some have argued that Muslims as 'the outsiders' have a responsibility to make the first move towards the society they have move into, others favour the idea of those in the position of power to make such gestures. These views are not limited to non-Muslim respondents. Muslim respondents also acknowledged that the Muslim community does not always take the initiative of breaking down the myths about Islam and Muslims.

The interviews revealed that some respondents have already participated in activities designed to bring Muslims and the wider community closer. The liaison officer at the Shire of Katanning, for instance, has actively engaged Muslims for various social and administrative activities. In addition to encouraging Muslims and non-Muslims to interact through sports activities, he has also encouraged Muslims to serve on committees dealing with local issues. Some Muslim respondents have also been active in interfaith dialogues, and have interacted with governmental and civil society agents to find ways of building links.

Drawing upon these suggestions and the observations made during the project, we would suggest some strategies to promote social inclusion of Muslims. These suggestions are guided by the view that we need to identify areas and groups that can bridge the perceptual gap between Muslims and non-Muslims at more than purely declared level. Action-oriented activities that bring people together would do more than simple interfaith

dialogues. The emphasis needs to remain on the diversity of Muslim lives and experiences in this process.

1. The Australian Government, particularly its leaders, need to adopt *a new language of communal harmony* without ignoring the reality of countering militancy. This could be achieved by categorically stating that the Australian Government favours the notion of 'Building a Safe Australia for All' and that its participation in the War on Terror is not directed against Muslims. While a symbolic gesture, this could help reassure some Muslims that the federal and state governments are not contributing to their relative exclusion. The need for such gestures was apparent in the course of the interviews with Muslim respondents often displaying suspicion of the real motives behind this research project. Even some non-Muslims suggested that excessive declared emphasis on counter-terrorism could be counter-productive. For instance, one respondent said: 'Sometimes people act out of being hurt: "You think I'm a terrorist? Then I'll act like a terrorist". [The Government] needs to be careful and watch for terrorist activity, but they do not need to be so vocal.' (394)

A shift in the language would address such concerns. It would also give Muslims a *shared ownership* of the project of keeping Australia safe.

2. Beyond the symbolic space, the federal and state governments need to actively engage Muslims. The engagement, however, raises the issue of authenticity of representation. The search for 'moderate Muslims' as partners needs to be replaced by a preference for engaging Muslims who are willing to be part of the agenda of making Australia safe. This would take into account reservations expressed by some Muslims about the processes government adopted in selecting representatives for national organizations and events including the National Imams Conference (2006) and the Muslim Community Reference Group (2005). It would also shift the onus on those who may be willing to engage the federal and state governments despite feeling a sense of relative exclusion.

3. The engagement strategies also need to transcend the limits established by the stereotypical image of who needs to be engaged. The emphasis on Muslim women as signifiers of difference and youth as the locale of potential militancy has resulted in some un-intended consequences. Government agencies have indicated their acceptance of Muslims by engaging women who subscribe to traditional Islamic dress code. Often promotional material depicts such women as an evidence of governmental activism in promoting social inclusion. The importance of such symbolism cannot be ignored. However, it has inadvertently created a sense of double exclusion among those who do not subscribe to orthodox understandings of Islamic teachings. At the same time, it enables some non-Muslims to direct their anger towards commonly accepted symbols of Muslim identity: women wearing the *hijab*. The emphasis on Muslim youth in parallel has also inadvertently created a sense of 'being focused upon' by the wider community. Such a feeling is not limited to those who occupy the orthodox end of the spectrum and is also apparent among secular/non-practicing Muslim youth as well.

With a view to promoting more broad-based representation and avoiding the sense of marginalisation linked to excessive focus on Muslim women and/or youth, we would suggest the following:

- a) While the federal and state governments continue their support for women who subscribe to traditional Islamic dress code, they need to adopt parallel strategies that:
- emphasise the possibility of transcending these visible markers of Muslim identity, and
 - promote understanding of diversity among Muslims in terms of accepted dress codes.

This could take the form of supporting societal groups that bring women from different backgrounds together. One suggestion offered by a respondent is to establish playgroups where Muslim and non-Muslim mothers can bring their children and interact.

The focus on diversity among Muslim women could take the form of conscious efforts by government and non-governmental agents to engage Muslim women who do not subscribe to traditional dress code. This would not only help these women feel more accepted, but would also assist them in engaging in more interaction across religious and cultural divides.

- b) The emphasis on understanding Muslim youth needs to be played down in favour of learning about youth from culturally diverse backgrounds. Our research and discussions reveal that Muslim youth do identify with others from diverse backgrounds. By conducting research on their experiences and views as Australian youth, and not just Muslim youth, we may gain better insight into their feelings and ideas.

Such research is particularly needed in the case of African immigrant youth. The interviews reveal that African Muslim youth feel excluded on both religious and racial grounds. They experience racism, as do other African young males, and feel 'targeted' by law enforcement agencies. Research into the sense of exclusion among African youth and possible strategies to promote their inclusion in the wider society would help promote a sense of ownership of Australian citizenship among them.

Meanwhile, the federal and state governments need to devise strategies that address the perceived sense of exclusion on religious/racial grounds among the youth. This is especially important in view of the recent focus on radicalism among some Somalis. The youth need to be reassured that not all African Muslims (and Africans) are suspects in the eyes of law enforcement agencies. This could be achieved by encouraging interaction between these youth and law enforcement agencies, particularly local police.

4. Research on experiences and views of Muslim men needs to be conducted. Our research indicates that the tendency to focus on subsets of Muslims (Muslim women, youth, Imams etc) ignores the interconnectedness of the lives of Muslims living in Australia. It particularly hides the sense of marginalisation and exclusion that educated (but unemployed or under-employed) men may experience. This, in turn, appears to

shape the experiences and views of other members of their respective families. It also contributes to the oral understandings being transmitted by Muslims who feel excluded. While we got some glimpses of these dynamics, it is important to conduct more in-depth and comparative research which aims to understand the concerns of Muslim men but does not single them out as the 'subjects of concern'. The emphasis must remain on the end goal of enhancing their sense of inclusion.

5. Muslim schools have emerged as the locale where Islamic identity is fostered and perpetuated in an organised manner. The choice of these schools, as already mentioned, is prompted by parental interest in ensuring that their children are aware of their Muslim identity. But the promotion of this identity can be reduced to orthodox understandings which feed into the idea of difference between Islam the West, as well as a more defined sense of 'us' vs 'them'.

The establishment of Muslim schools has also given rise to the perception among some in the wider society that these schools signify Muslim unwillingness to integrate into Australia. A small minority of respondents, for instance, categorically suggested closing down Muslim schools.

Together, these images and construction of identity creates a situation where Muslim children are experiencing both the phenomenon of 'othering' and 'being othered'. There are some efforts made to bridge the perceived gulf between these children and those from the wider society. These efforts take the form of exchange of visits between students in Muslim schools and other private and public schools. The occasional visits, however, only provide a taste of similarity to both Muslim and non-Muslim students.

We would suggest that Muslim schools be encouraged and funded to engage in joint volunteering projects with other schools. Working together to achieve a goal that makes a contribution to the society would serve two purposes: it would bring the children together and help them realise that religious differences can be accommodated in Australian society. These projects would also help the youth have a joint ownership of these projects and, by extension, the future of Australia. It would also reward teachers in these schools who have been active in promoting interaction between Islamic schools and the wider community.

The recent allegations of fraud and excessive emphasis on Islamic curriculum at the expense of other subjects in the Australian Islamic College and the closure of the Muslim Ladies College also suggest that government departments need to *be willing to listen to complaints when they begin circulating in the Muslim community.* While these complaints may be sometimes motivated by self-interest, an early response could prevent situations where students enrolled in these schools are denied the same rights as other children.

We would also suggest that Muslim schools that promote moderate ideas and outlook be rewarded for their efforts. This suggestion grows out of the refusal by the Department of Education and Training to allow Langford Islamic College to offer Year 11 and 12

classes in 2008. While such a decision could be understood purely in terms of enrolments, it runs counter to the long-term objective of promoting moderate ideas. Based on our observations, we found the Langford Islamic College to be the most willing to engage with the wider community.

6. The process of building bridges across the perceptual divides between Muslims and non-Muslims needs to be extended beyond school-age children. The federal and state governments have already initiated such programmes. However, funding opportunities for action-oriented programmes designed to bring together Muslims and non-Muslims in the agenda of 'helping all Australians' need to be enhanced. Diverse groups within the Muslim community, as well as cross-section of the wider community could be encouraged to participate in such programmes through appropriate selection criteria. Supporting projects where Muslims and non-Muslims work together to achieve a goal, for instance, of helping elderly people would help address a sense of exclusion among Muslims. It would also bring non-Muslim community groups into working relationships with Muslims and foster a sense of joint ownership of Australian citizenship.

7. Promoting Muslim cultural activities can also highlight the diversity among Muslims. Given the prevalent tendency to reduce Islam and Muslims to religious practices, orthodoxy and militancy, the wider society either ignores or is unaware the wealth of different cultural traditions among Muslims. The Muslim community has contributed to the process by often restricting cultural events to those with similar backgrounds.

Our research in Katanning indicates that when Muslims are given opportunity to occupy the public space and share their religious and cultural activities, it contributes to mutual acceptance and understanding. In Katanning, the Muslim community annually celebrates Mawlawn-un-Nabi (Prophet Mohammad's Birthday), and Eid is openly acknowledged with posters in the centre of the town.

Building on these ideas, we would suggest that Muslims (and other religious communities) be provided more access to the public space. This would add to their sense of acceptance by and a place in the society. In 2007, for instance, Eid-ul-Adha was celebrated four days before Christmas. But the public space glaringly ignored it by only focusing on Christmas celebrations. *We would suggest that local shires and State Governments encourage businesses that acknowledge cultural and religious diversity.*

We would also suggest that an annual Muslim Cultural Festival be held which showcases traditions from different Muslim societies.

The Federal or State Governments may also support programmes that celebrate Muslim identities in Australia. One example could be producing a book on Mosques in Australia.

8. A register of best practices could be established drawing upon the experiences and policies adopted by local governments in promoting inclusion of all sections. In Muslim majority areas, it would naturally involve greater emphasis on the Muslim population. However, even in areas where they are in a minority, local governments may be pursuing

policies that assist with their inclusion. Such a register would enable people at the grass roots level to learn from each other in building stronger communities.

9. The perceptual context in which Muslims interact with other Australians is not completely negative. Nonetheless, the sense of Muslims being the 'other' has increased in recent years. The excessive emphasis on the War on Terror and Muslim extremism has created some fear among the wider society of Muslims. This fear contributes to mutual exclusion.

This phenomenon needs to be addressed by enhancing an understanding of diversity of Islam. Education will play an important role in this process: our curriculum needs to reflect an acceptance of diversity within Australia. Exposure to these ideas at an early stage will contribute to harmony at a later stage. It carries the promise of new generations of Australians who share a vision of a country where they are all equal, accepted and included.

Endnotes

¹ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, (NYPD Intelligence Division, 2007), pp. 5-7.

² *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands*, (The Hague: General Intelligence and Security Service, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands, March 2006), (http://www.aivd.nl/actueel_publicaties, accessed 27 November 2007).

³ Julian Le Grand suggested that ‘an individual is socially excluded if a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society and (c) he or she would like to so participate. Cited by Tania Burchardt, Julian Le Grand, David Piachaud, ‘Social Exclusion in Britain 1991-1995’, *Social Policy & Administration*, September 1999, Vol. 33, Issue 3, pp. 227-244.

⁴ Mary Lucille Jones, Muslim Impact On Early Australian Life, in Mary Lucille Jones (ed.), *An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, (Victoria Press in association with Museum of Victoria, 1993), pp. 31-37

⁵ Philip Jones & Anna Kenny, *Australia’s Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland 1860’s- 1930’s*, (South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2008); and Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, (London: Kegan Paul, 2005).

⁶ 1991 Census Matrix Table CSC6015,

⁷ Gary D. Bouma, *Mosques And Muslim Settlement in Australia*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service for the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994), p.23

⁸ Information supplied by Leanne Gundry, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007.

⁹ ‘Table 1. Change in religious affiliations (1996 Census - 2006 Census)’, in *Census shows non-Christian religions continue to grow at a faster rate*, 27 June 2007, Australian Bureau of Statistics,

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/6ef598989db79931ca257306000d52b4!OpenDocument>, accessed 28 November 2007.

¹⁰ ‘Ethnicity Thematic Profile-Table E12-Individual Income by Sex-Islam’, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, Australian Bureau of Statistics,; and ‘20680-Gross Individual Income (weekly) by Age by Sex – Australia’, *2006 Census Tables: Australia*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/>, accessed on 1 April 2008.

¹¹ Information supplied by Leanne Gundry, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007.

¹² Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims*, (Western Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2003)

¹³ Information supplied by Anne Aly, 2006.

¹⁴ *Documentation of Incidents of Harassment of, and racism Towards, Australians of Arab Descent and Australian Muslims*, (Committee of Discrimination Against Arab Australians, 1992), and J. Wakim, ‘The Gulf War Within the Australian Community and Arab Australians: Villains, Victims or Victors?’, in G. Bird, *Racial Harassment*, (Melbourne, 1992), pp.41-61, both cited by Romi Susskind, *Representation of Muslims*

in the Australian Print Media, no date, mams.rmit.edu.au/q1hjn8jgweyz.pdf, accessed 3 April 2008.

¹⁵ Gary Bouma, *Mosques and Muslims Settlement in Australia*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994), pp.85-86.

¹⁶ John Lee, 'Issues in Australian Foreign Policy', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Dec 2007, Vol. 53 Issue 4, p600-613; Scott Poynting, "'Tolerance, Freedom, Justice and Peace"?: Britain, Australia and Anti-Muslim Racism since 11 September 2001', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Nov 2006, Vol. 27 Issue 4, p365-391; Frank Frost, 'Perspectives on Australian foreign policy 2006', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, v.61, no.3, Sept 2007: p(403)-426

¹⁷ For details of some projects supported by the Australian Government, Janet Phillips, *Muslim Australians*, E-Brief, 6 March 2007, (Canberra: Parliament of Australia, Department of the Parliamentary Library), accessed 30 March 2008.

¹⁸ *Ismae-Listen: National consultation on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians*, Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, Australia, 2004, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial%5Fdiscrimination/isma/report/>, accessed 3 April 2008; and Scott Poynting, *Living with racism: the experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001*, Report to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 2004, accessed 2 April 2008.

¹⁹ See, for example, Anne Aly, 'Australian Muslim Responses to the Discourse on Terrorism in the Australian Popular Media', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 42 Issue 1, p27-40; Waleed Aly, 'The clash of ignorance', *Australian Rationalist*, no.72, Summer 2005-2006: 28-33; Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Does My Head Look Big In This*, Pan Australia, 2005; Jamila Hussain, 'Islam and the West: the Australian experience', *Religion and Culture in Asia Pacific: Violence or Healing?* 2001, pp 93-101; and Nahid Kabir, 'Muslims in Australia: The Double Edge of Terrorism', *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, Nov 2007, Vol. 33 Issue 8, p1277-1297

²⁰ Samina Yasmeen, 'Muslim Women as Citizens in Australia: Diverse Notions and Practices', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 42 Issue 1, p41-54

²¹ See, for example, Melissa Kent, 'Perth Muslims doubt proof of September 11', *The West Australian*, 12 September 2005, p 7

²² Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg and Janice Stein, 'A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behaviour', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, March 1969, pp.75-101

²³ Thomas Janoski., *Citizenship and Civil Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.12-13

²⁴ Thomas Janoski, p.9

²⁵ See, for example, Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (1993). *Researching social life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; and Judith Sixsmith, Margaret Boneham and John E Goldring, 'Accessing the Community: gaining insider perspectives from the outside', *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 13, No.4, April 2003, pp. 578-589.

²⁶ See, for example, Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, (One World, 2003).

²⁷ The assessment was provided by a Principal of an Islamic school in Perth drawing upon his experience with enrolments prior to 2006.

²⁸ Langford Islamic College is an exception in this case: it does not insist on girls wearing the hijab.

²⁹ Mission Statement of Al-Hidaya Islamic School, 2007. Similar mission statements are provided by other Islamic Schools in WA.

³⁰ Pak Oz Poortal, <http://www.pakoz.com.au/Default.aspx?tabid=115>, accessed 9 May 2008.

³¹ Daniel Hatch, 'Furore over plan for \$4m mosque in Swan Valley', *The West Australian*, 17 January 2008, p 3.

³² Information provided at the organisation's website, <http://www.islam-australia.net/>, accessed 9 April 2008.

³³ Information provided at www.aussieMuslims.net, accessed on 9 April 2008. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Nayeefa Chowdhury, 'Presenting Islam: The role of Australia-Based Muslim Student Associations', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Aug 2006, Vol. 26 Issue 2, pp.205-224.

³⁵ Perth Muslim Youth Forum, <http://perthmuslimyouthforum.com/about-the-forum/>, accessed 9 April 2008.

³⁶ Some of these culturally determined notions of Islam are discussed by Daniel Vujcich, 'Faith, Flight and Foreign Policy: Effects of War and Migration on Western Australian Bosnian Muslims', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol 42, No. 1, Autumn 2007, pp71 – 86

³⁷ These findings are corroborated in a study of choices of schools made by Somali parents. Barbara Giles, *"They think we are terrorists...and that's unbelievable!": Somali Narratives on Islam, Education and Perceptions of Difference*, Honours Dissertation submitted to Political Science and International Relations, University of Western Australia, 2007.

³⁸ See, for example, Erica Lewin, 'Perceptions about Skin Colour and Heritage: The Experience of Anglo-Indian Women in Western Australia', *Social Identities*, November 2005, Vol. 11, Issue 6, pp. 631-651; and Danielle Drozdewski, 'A place called 'Bielany': negotiating a diasporic Polish place in Sydney', *Social and Cultural Geography*, December 2007, Vol. 8, Issue 6, pp. 853-869; and Greg Noble, et al., 'Respect and Respectability amongst second generation Arab and Muslim Australian Men', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, August 2007, Vol. 28, Issue 3, pp. 331-344.

³⁹ Anne Aly, 'Australian Muslim Responses to the Discourse on Terrorism in the Australian Popular Media', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Autumn 2007, Vol. 42 Issue 1, pp.27-40

⁴⁰ See for example, Cheryl Lange and Diana Nisbet, 'I myself think I'm Australian', experiences of being Vietnamese-Australian women', *Studies in Western Australian History*, no.21, 2000, pp.89-100.

⁴¹ Shown in the tables as Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

⁴² On 30 September 2005, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve cartoons of Prophet Mohammad depicting him in negative light. The publication eventually led to

both diplomatic and violent street protests among some Muslim majority countries in early 2006.

⁴³ The Pope referred to the exchange between a Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam. He quoted the emperor as saying: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached”. The remarks offended a lot of Muslims and led to rioting in some Muslim majority states. For the details of the Papal statement, see ‘Papal Address at University of Regensburg’, *Zenit: The World Seen From Rome*, <http://www.zenit.org/article-16955?l=english>, accessed 6 June 2008.

⁴⁴ ‘The Griffith University Islamic Research Unit (GIRU)’, *National Centre of Excellence For Islamic Studies Australia E Bulletin*, Issue 01, April 08.