



Muslims in Contemporary Australia

Edited by

Adam Possamai and David Tittensor

BRILL

Muslims in Contemporary Australia

Muslim Minorities

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Foreword

Islam has had a long history in Australia. Some scholars suggest that Australia's contact with Islam dates back to the 1600s or even earlier, particularly in relation to the interactions between Indigenous Australian communities in the north and people from what is now Indonesia, such as the Macassan fishermen. However, a significant presence of Islam in Australia only began with the arrival of Afghan cameleers from the Indian subcontinent. For close to 40 years, from the 1860s to the 1890s, these cameleers dominated the camel transport industry, playing an important role in the Australian economy by transporting goods. With the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia following Federation in 1901, immigration from non-white backgrounds was severely curtailed. Despite this restriction, several waves of Muslim migrants arrived in Australia: Albanians in the 1920s and 1930s, Turks in the 1960s, and Lebanese in the 1970s. Many of them lacked high-level skills or English proficiency and worked primarily in farms, construction, or factories. From the 1980s, there was a significant increase in skilled migrants from more varied ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the increasing number of Muslims living in Australia throughout the 20th century, research on Islam and Muslims in the country was relatively scarce until the 1990s. While Islam was present in Australia, it did not draw much attention either within the broader Australian community or among the research community during most of the 20th century. Islam and Muslims remained at best a curiosity or were treated with benign neglect. However, key global and local events helped shed light on Islam and Muslims, albeit negatively, particularly in the media. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Salman Rushdie affair in the 1980s, the 1990 Gulf War, and the rise of al-Qaeda, including the various bombings that took place in Western countries in the 1990s, began to draw unwanted attention to Islam and Muslims in Australia. These events were frequently perceived through the prism of violence, portraying Islam as a foreign religion that is incompatible with the values Australians hold dear. Journalists helped to perpetuate an association of Islam with violence. Local media coverage drew attention to Muslims through reports of 'Middle Eastern gangs' in places like Sydney and Melbourne, female genital mutilation, and Sydney gang rapes. These reports often conflated Muslims with Arabs, and tied Islam to violence, backwardness, barbarism, and anti-Western values.

Until the 1990s, the relatively few studies of Islam and Muslims were mainly sociological, focusing on issues such as migration, integration, and the socio-economic disadvantages faced by large sections of the Muslim community.

A few studies explored the history of Muslim presence in the country and their religious practices. This research was led by a small number of academics, some of whom are profiled in this volume, such as Riaz Hassan and Gary Bouma. They pursued their research interests often without much government attention or support. Similarly, the media were generally uninterested in Islam, except when covering major global events that might have an impact on or connection to Australia, or when sensationalising certain issues perceived to be Islamic or Muslim-related.

The events of 9/11 dramatically shifted this marginal position of research, creating a major turning point in the research of Islam and Muslims in Australia. Suddenly, Muslims became the subject of intense scrutiny, particularly in the media and by the government, and Islam was no longer a curiosity but rather a significant problem and a serious threat – a fear that came to be echoed in the broader Australian community. The number of terrorism-related laws that the Parliament of the Commonwealth has passed since the 2000s, now at 93, is just one indication of the government's heightened concern with the perceived 'Muslim threat'. Aiming to prevent terrorist attacks on Australian soil, politicians and security agencies were desperate to understand what they considered to be Muslims' propensity for violent extremism. This situation resulted in a surge of interest in Islam, not only from the government and law enforcement agencies but also from academia. The securitisation of Islam became central to this interest, as the government funded numerous research projects on radicalisation, violent extremism, and counter-terrorism strategies. There was also a new urgency to understand the contemporary context of Australian Muslim communities and the forces that could push or pull young Muslims towards radicalisation. Researchers began focusing on how extremist ideologies could influence young Muslim minds, and examining the political dimensions of Islam in relation to values such as secularism and individual human rights. During this post-9/11 context there was a boom in terrorism-related research in Australia for about a decade and a half: a development that mirrored a trend in the rest of the Western world which has been dubbed the 'terrorism research industry'.

This terrorism research industry that emerged after 9/11 was often criticised for its one-sided focus on violence. However, in my view it had a positive impact, too, on the broader Muslim community – albeit indirectly. The massive interest in Islam and Muslims from a terrorism research perspective also led to a broader familiarisation with Islam and Muslims within the Australian community. Such familiarisation was supported by various initiatives, including Islamic cultural awareness programs for journalists and security and police agencies; an increasing number of university courses on Islam and Muslims

to meet rising interest among students; community-focused events aimed at making the Muslim community feel they belong; interfaith gatherings and events designed to promote an understanding of Islam; and the increasing efforts of emerging young Muslim leaders to 'normalise' Islam in Australian society. Today, for example, a wide range of Islamic terms have become part of the average Australian's vocabulary. Terms such as Ramadan, halal, jihad, *Shari'a*, fatwa, imam, and iftar are now very familiar across Australian communities, such that they do not require any translation. Consequently, Islam is no longer necessarily seen as a 'foreign' religion but as part of the Australian social and religious landscape, one of the many religions now indigenous to Australia. This development indicates a kind of normalisation of Islam, where Muslims are now regarded as part of the broader Australian society.

Part of this normalisation can be attributed to the involvement of many young Muslims from various backgrounds in the research space. Research on Islam and Muslims in the early years was driven largely by researchers who were not necessarily Muslim. However, in the post-9/11 context, an increasing number of second- and third-generation Muslims, who were born and raised in Australia and consider Australia their home, also began to play key roles in this research, either through their research higher degree work or as commentators, researchers, and journalists. Against the background of Islam being vilified and Muslims being perceived as sympathisers of violent extremism, these new generations of Muslims asserted their Muslim identity and worked to counter the portrayal of Islam as a foreign religion and of Muslims as outsiders. Owing to their strong sense of pride as Muslims and their integral role in the Australian community, as well as the numerous role models in different sectors of the community – including Bachar Houli in sports, Ahmed Fahour in business, Ed Husic and Anne Aly in politics, and Waleed Aly in media – many university-educated second- and third-generation Muslims have also become part of the research community. They are contributing actively to further mainstreaming research on Islam and Muslims, broadening the focus beyond terrorism and violent extremism and playing a crucial role in 'normalising' Islam and Muslims within Australian society.

This shift in research from the narrow, security-focused approach to one that seeks a broader understanding of Islam and Muslim communities is now evident across the research community. This change is reflected in the diverse backgrounds of the contributors to this book, many of whom are Muslim. Research now explores the everyday lives of Muslims in Australia, including identity formation as a religious minority, changing religious norms and adaptation, socioeconomic disadvantages, discrimination, Islamophobia, and social cohesion. Other themes of interest include the history of Islam and Muslims

in Australia, media representation, gender roles, economic contributions, interreligious relations, and the impact of global events on Australian perceptions of Islam. There is also significant interest in the contributions of Muslim Australians to the cultural, economic, and social fabric of the country. The challenges that Muslim communities face, such as domestic violence – a topic many Muslims previously avoided speaking about publicly – are also being tackled by these new generations of Muslims in a confident and self-critical fashion.

Today, research on Islam and Muslims in Australia is richer and more diverse than in the past. It has moved beyond its previous focus on securitisation towards recognising the positive contributions of Muslims and the struggles and challenges they experience living as faith communities in a secular, post-Christian society. This research is being undertaken in universities and other research institutions with funding support, and it increasingly draws upon the insights and research contributions of Muslims themselves, including academics, students, journalists, commentators, intellectuals, and religious leaders.

This book is an excellent showcase of the wide variety of research on Islam and Muslims. It captures the current state of research on Islam and Muslims in contemporary Australia, far removed from the humble beginnings before the 1990s, and brings together contributions from both established and emerging scholars. The chapters highlight the various perspectives of Australians on Islam, including historical, legal, and sociological, and draws upon the lived experiences of Muslim Australians. The content reflects the dynamic, evolving, and multidisciplinary nature of this research, underscoring how the field has progressed from viewing Islam as a marginal issue to treating it as very much a part of the mainstream research agenda. Moreover, the diversity of this field brings a sense of optimism to its progression in the future and is a sign of vitality in this area of research. This well-presented and scholarly book is a must-read for anyone interested in Islam and Muslims in Australia.

Abdullah Saeed

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Muslims in Contemporary Australia

Introduction

Adam Possamai and David Tittensor

1 Introduction

Comparatively speaking, Australia is a success story in terms of post-WWII migration of religious groups and social cohesion. This has impacted on the growth of Christian religions (e.g. migrants from Italy, the Philippines, and Lebanon) but also on non-Christian religions (e.g. migrants from Vietnam for Buddhism and Lebanon for Islam). One group which stands out in the midst of this ever-increasing diversity is Islam. Indeed, notwithstanding the ‘no religion’ category, it is the second largest religion in Australia after Christianity.

According to the 2021 census, Islam represents 3.2% of the whole Australian population – that is 813,392 people who identified as Muslim. Of this population, by far and away the largest proportion were born in Australia – a total of 39.1%. The other top countries of origin are Pakistan (10.2%), Afghanistan (6.9%), Bangladesh (5.3%), and Lebanon (4.8%). Altogether, Muslims in Australia came from 188 countries, making this religious group one of the most ethnically diverse in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021).

Between 2011 and 2021, the population of Muslims in Australia grew by 71%. While 39% of Muslims were born in Australia, this growth is explained by migration, as more than 100,000 Muslims arrived in Australia between 2017 and 2021, which represents one tenth of all immigration during that period (Hughes, 2022).

This growth has not always happened smoothly. The terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, have unleashed racially based attacks on Australians who have a Muslim background. Especially after this event, many Muslims have experienced forms of everyday racism such as discrimination at work, media stereotyping, verbal abuse and harassment, threats of violence, veil-tearing, and physical assault (Tabar et al., 2010). Some specific cases in Australia, among many, have been the media coverage from 2001 to 2002 of ‘Muslim Gang Rapes’ in Sydney (Dagistanli and Grewal, 2012), the 2007 to 2009 Islamic School Controversy in South West Sydney (Al-Natour et al., 2016), or the 2007 ‘Lindsay Leaflet Scandal’ where a politician attempted to use the public’s

fear of Muslims as a political strategy (Dunn and Kamp, 2016). Further, new anti-terror laws have been pushed through, and governments have increased surveillance (Richardson, 2013; Tittensor et al., 2020). Between 2002 and 2007 Australia introduced 44 separate pieces of counter-terrorism legislation – which was more than the US, UK, and Spain – although to date, unlike the US, UK, or Spain, Australia has never experienced a major terrorist attack on home soil. Since the advent of Islamic State (ISIS) and the issue of Australians joining them as foreign fighters, this program of laws has continued to expand: the number of law changes reached 60 by 2014, and an incredible 92 laws had been passed by 2021 (Battersby, 2018; Hardy et al., 2021). This represents a 53% growth in such laws across eight years, and there appears to be no end in sight. Indeed, despite the apparent demise of ISIS in 2019 (Hassan, 2023), the group continues to inspire further legislative additions: the ISIS flag was banned, among other religious symbols, by the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Prohibited Hate Symbols and Other Measures) Bill 2023, which passed on 6 December that year (McHugh and Tariq, 2023; Parliament of Australia, 2023).

A possible explanation for this ongoing muscular response to Islam is that recent analyses of the post-9/11 sociopolitical environment in Australia have found the media still tends to strongly and negatively associate Islam with terrorism and violence (Weng and Halafoff, 2020). This is a media workforce dominated by those from an Anglo-Celtic background; 75% of journalists identify as such (Weng and Wake, 2021), which belies the fact that Australians come from over 300 ethnic ancestries and 100 religious traditions (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). Further, an outgrowth of this white dominance is what has been described as a “hidden religiosity” and more specifically a “hidden Christianity” in news reports (Weng and Halafoff, 2020). That is, Christianity tends to permeate news stories more fully than the worldviews of other faiths. Here it is important to note that Christianity was not immune to negativity, but also that it often turns up in ways that could be described as ‘secular sacred,’ such as the use of the word ‘messiah’ for Turnbull after he ousted outspoken Catholic Tony Abbott as leader of the Liberal Party (Weng and Halafoff, 2020). In other words, Christianity functions in what Hjarvard (2012) has described as a banal way. By this he means that it forms part of the backdrop and cultural repertoire whereby viewers and readers are subliminally reminded of their religious heritage through the use of particular motifs, as opposed to explicit religion (Possamai and Tittensor, 2022). In contrast to this more understated employment of Christian concepts, when Islam is covered in the media this is often done in a sensationalised way (Weng and Halafoff, 2020; Weng and Mansouri, 2021).

Reflecting this ethnocultural and religious bias is a recent scandal that has engulfed the Australian Broadcasting Association (ABC), after it sacked casual radio presenter Antoinette Lattouf from her role on ABC Sydney Mornings. Lattouf alleged that she was sacked from her presenting because she made pro-Palestinian social media posts, wherein she reposted a story by Human Rights Watch that alleged Israel was using starvation as a weapon in Gaza. In response to her sacking, she engaged lawyer Josh Bornstein and put out the following statement of complaint:

she was sacked because of her ethnicity and that the public broadcaster systemically discriminates against people with Arab and Muslim backgrounds as well as people of colour.

GRIFFITHS, 2024

Here it is interesting to note that Lattouf herself is not a Muslim. Rather, she is a Lebanese Maronite Christian (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2011). As such, it appears that her infraction was not being Muslim, but rather that she was supporting Muslims. Since the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas, the Palestinian cause has overwhelmingly been conflated with Hamas. For example, Chris Mitchell (2024) writing for *The Australian* directly attacks Lattouf by stating, “Neither Lattouf nor Haydar¹ have criticised Hamas’s October 7 massacre”, and therefore implying that their silence is support. Similarly, Michael Gawenda (2023) chastised more than 300 journalists who signed a letter, supported by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), that urged for less biased coverage of the situation in Israel and Gaza, wherein the journalists argued that allegations of war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid on the part of Israel need to be taken more seriously by the media (Jaspan, 2023, 2024). In doing so Gawenda states that letters of this nature that seek to prioritise pro-Palestinian narratives and voices are also presumably making a space for Hamas. Such sophistry is problematic as it buys into that well-worn post-9/11 notion that all Muslims should publicly condemn every attack undertaken by a Muslim, which simply functions as a double bind as it routinely associates Islam with terrorism and violence (Green, 2023). Moreover, it is a posture that is not applied to acts

1 Nour Haydar is a former political reporter for the ABC’s Parliament House Bureau who resigned because of her concerns over how the Israel–Gaza conflict was being reported on after the events of October 7, 2023. Haydar, who is of Lebanese heritage, also raised issues around the treatment of culturally diverse staff at the ABC, stating: “Commitment to diversity in the media cannot be skin deep. Culturally diverse staff should be respected and supported even when they challenge the status quo” (Jaspan, 2024).

of white supremacist violence, such as that perpetrated by Brenton Tarrant, whom the media sought to humanise (Al Jazeera, 2019). Alongside this, not all those who support the Palestinian cause support Hamas,² in much the same way that not all who are anti-Zionist are antisemitic. Indeed, both assertions are false equivalences and indicative of this is the fact that Antoinette Lattouf won her case and was awarded \$70,000 for her trouble (Al-Khouri, 2025).

Further, this anti-Muslim bias in the media is not new and is entwined with both the secular sacred and a Judeo-Christian outlook that predominates in political circles (Possamai and Tittensor, 2022; see also chapter 13 in this volume). Like Lattouf, Yassmin Abdel-Magied found this out the hard way through the use of social media. In 2017, she made a rather innocuous Facebook post on ANZAC Day that stated: “LEST. WE. FORGET. (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine ...)” (Calligeros, 2017). This call to remember Muslims in less fortunate circumstances, alongside the ANZAC soldiers that fought in WWI, led politicians to subject Abdel-Magied to a barrage of criticism, on which the media hungrily reported. According to then-Immigration Minister Peter Dutton she was a disgrace for having besmirched “our most significant national day” (Calligeros, 2017), while former prime minister-cum-backbencher Tony Abbott labelled her a symptom of what is wrong with Australia:

An over-promoted, politically correct 26-year-old is merely the symptom of the cultural cowardice that’s penetrated to the very heart of our institutions. While officialdom wrings its hands in nervous self-doubt about anything that might be labelled anti-youth, anti-women, anti-black or, perhaps worst of all, anti-Muslim, Australians show what they think of our country’s knockers by turning out in ever-increasing numbers and ever-greater enthusiasm on Anzac Day.

LEWIS, 2017

Others were even more forthright. Fellow one-time aspiring seminarian (Robertson, 2016) and LNP Senator George Christensen called for Abdel-Magied to be sacked from her role as a part-time presenter at the ABC and intimated that she should also leave the country: “Yasmin [sic] should no longer [be]

2 Veteran journalist Tony Walker (2023), one of the signatories to the MEAA letter, fired back with a letter to the editor making precisely this point: “In Gawenda’s criticism of me and other journalists, he suggests, without evidence, that signatories would have sympathy for Hamas. Speaking for myself, I have no sympathy for Hamas. I do have a great deal of concern, though, for Palestinians under siege in Gaza, as should anyone with an ounce of empathy for those who find themselves the innocent victims of war on either side of the conflict.”

on the public broadcaster's tax-funded payroll. Self-deportation should also be considered" (ABC News, 2017). In a similar vein, then-senator Eric Abetz asked that Abdel-Magied be stood down from her position on the board of the Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR) that is run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Chessell, 2017).

In short, both the media and conservative politicians waged war on Abdel-Magied for a Facebook post, a war that would ultimately see her sacked from the ABC and cause her to leave the country and relocate to the UK. Neither deleting the post nor issuing an apology was enough, which begs the question of why. And the answer is that she is precisely the thing Tony Abbott decried, which Jane Gilmore (2017) summarised poignantly:

Yassmin is a woman, she is young, she is black and she is proudly Muslim. She dresses gloriously in the style of her cultural background and speaks passionately about her understanding of a religion we are constantly inculcated to fear and loathe. Merely existing in the world, for her, is a political act. Having a public platform and using it to talk about her experiences and knowledge is not just political, it is exhaustingly dangerous ... She hits every hot button of ideology and it is abhorrent, but sadly unsurprising, that her every action is scrutinised by the right-wing conservatives whose message of exclusion is most threatened by the identity she proudly carries into the public eye.

However, despite the toxicity of the media and political discourse about Australian Muslims – particularly on the right of the political spectrum – there are also positive developments that show such views are not shared by significant elements of the wider public. A good example of this is the #illridewithyou movement that emerged following the Sydney Lindt Café Siege in 2014, which the media incorrectly reported as a terrorist attack (see Scott and Shanahan, 2018). In the midst of the uncertainty and fear generated by the siege, Rachel Jacobs posted on Facebook that she had encountered a Muslim woman on the train in Brisbane who was taking off her hijab, and Jacobs had told her to put it back on and said that she would walk with her. This in turn led Sydney TV content editor Tessa Kum to post the message on Twitter (now X), "If you [regularly] take the #373 bus b/w Coogee/MartinPl, wear religious attire and don't feel safe alone: I'll ride with you" and then posted a second status with the hashtag #illridewithyou. By the following day the hashtag had gone viral and amassed around 120,000 tweets (Ruppert, 2014). Such a groundswell of support for diversity and inclusion is a far cry from the sustained anti-Muslim sentiment that has taken place in other Western jurisdictions, such as in France

following the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack in 2015, which saw almost immediate reprisals (France 24, 2015).

Indeed, today the majority of Australian Muslims live their lives as ordinary citizens. They are non-marginal, non-disaffected, and non-radicalised, and contribute to the culture and society of this country (Dunn et al., 2015; see also Chapter 4 in this book). A good example of this is how Ramadan is celebrated in the major cities of Sydney and Melbourne, which are home to nearly 80% of the Muslim population of Australia (Table 1.1). In Sydney the Ramadan Nights Lakemba is presented by the City of Canterbury Bankstown in Greater Western Sydney. The fair has a vibrant global food bazaar with over 70 food stalls available for each night of the month-long celebration that attracted 1.4 million people in 2023 (City of Canterbury Bankstown, 2024). Similarly in Melbourne there is the SalamFest Eid-al-Fitr celebration that runs annually and is supported by the City of Melbourne (Indrasafitri, 2025; Salamfest, 2022, 2024). Alongside this, the premiers of both New South Wales and Victoria annually hold an iftar at the beginning of Ramadan, and there are also community-led New South Wales and Victorian parliamentary iftars run by Affinity Intercultural Foundation and the Australian Intercultural Society that are well attended by politicians from across the spectrum (see Tittensor, 2018).

TABLE 1.1 Muslim population in Australia by state and territory

State and territory	Muslim population	%
New South Wales	349240	42.9
Victoria	273028	33.6
Western Australia	66764	8.2
Queensland	60381	7.4
South Australia	40302	5.0
Australian Capital Territory	14602	1.8
Tasmania	4947	0.6
Northern Territory	3351	0.4
Other territories	765	0.1
Total	813380*	100.0

* The ABS uses perturbation, the random adjustment of cell values, to reduce identifiability. This causes small variations in the data.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, CENSUS 2021

Further, research by Possamai et al. (2022) exploring news articles on Ramadan in Sydney portray this as welcomed in a country that has been dominated by Christianity for over two centuries. In this instance, we are far from the negative representations found in the research on Muslims in the media, as discussed above. However, the way this festival is represented underscores a specific type of neoliberal economic discourse as Ramadan tends to be shown as a profitable period for businesses that cater to the Muslim market, especially food outlets that run all night for the entire holy month. Moreover, some of the gains are fragile. For example, key Islamic bodies such as the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC), the Islamic Council of NSW (ICNSW), and the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) have responded to both the federal and state governments' support for Israel – in spite of the increasingly devastating attacks on Gaza – by boycotting the Premiers' iftars, causing the events to be cancelled (Kolovos and Rachwani, 2024).

Nevertheless, such fragility notwithstanding, the sociopolitical climate around Islam and Muslims is much improved. Indeed, one of the most contentious issues when it comes to Islam in the West, *Shari'a*, is very slowly starting to become ordinary. The respondents of a study in Sydney by Possamai et al. (2016) were reflective about their interaction with *Shari'a*, and the impact this interaction has on Australian society and on the ensuing perception of Muslims by non-Muslims in Australia. In stark contrast to the public's association of *Shari'a* with beheadings, stonings, and amputations, the only engagement the respondents have with these practices is their frustration at the media for perpetuating this homogenised idea that *Shari'a* is connected to atavistic forms of criminal laws. What was particularly significant in the study was that some respondents believed it was not worth pursuing a parallel system of Australian law and *Shari'a* to help them to live as Muslims in their everyday lives, and fully aligned with Australian laws. Many of the interviewees saw that any attempt to establish *Shari'a* courts in Australia would be counterproductive in the current political climate. They were not opposed to *Shari'a* but were, however, concerned that it would incite further Islamophobia in Australia. Any benefit the courts would bring to Muslims would be outweighed by the political and social backlash the issue would produce. Some respondents were also against a parallel system on the basis that it would further isolate Muslims from Australian society. In Melbourne, Johns et al. (2015) investigated the experience of citizenship and belonging among Muslims. They discovered that their informants are following liberal democratic models of civic virtue, and are committed to improve the social conditions of the locality they inhabit. To work towards this 'common good,' the informants detailed their lived practices of *Shari'a* as a positive way of living in Australia.

These changes, however, have not happened in a vacuum. They are aligned, or coincide, with a shift in multicultural politics. As Harris and Hussein (2020) argue, we have moved away from settlement, diversity, and multicultural programs that emphasised “rights and representation” towards those based on “intercultural understanding and cultural knowledge transfer as the basis of for social cohesion and inclusion” (p. 3975). As such, individuals and communities are now becoming responsible for intercultural communication and knowledge exchange, and this includes – as an example – ordinary young Muslims involved in educating and explaining their religion in everyday interactions. However, while this does facilitate social cohesion in Australia, it does add an unrecognised burden on the Muslims who have become a type of ‘explainer’ in their everyday lives.

With that in mind, this book seeks to build on the ever-growing literature on Muslims in Australia. There is already an extended literature on Muslims in the West with some focus on Australia (Ata, 2021; Ata and Ali, 2018; Harris and Hussein, 2020; Mansouri and Marotta, 2012; Yasmeen and Akbarzadeh, 2005), and some books have been published specifically on Muslims in Australia (Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 2001; Saeed, 2003; Yasmeen, 2010). Other books have taken a specific angle, such as family law (Krayem, 2014; McCue and Saeed, 2013) or news media (Rane et al., 2010).

However, as the Muslim population continues to grow, new domestic and international events have transpired since the time these books were released, and subsequently the field has changed and remains in a state of flux. Indeed, none of the books above take into account the recent 2021 census results, the 2014 and 2015 mega-raids undertaken by police to quell the ‘Muslim threat,’ and the passing of further counter-terrorism laws to combat alleged ‘foreign fighters’ going to Syria (see Chapters 13 and 14). Further, new government funding models in 2014 have also forced Muslim organisations to shift from providing culturally and religiously specific services to their target communities to servicing the wider community at large (see Chapter 8). New developments have also taken place within Muslim communities and have created new spaces, both literally and figuratively, where they contribute to the culture of Australia. This includes new forms of literature such as slam poetry and the Sweatshop Literacy Movement (see Chapters 5 and 6), and architecture (see Chapter 7). This edited book is thus timely in offering an updated, comprehensive study of Muslims in Australia. It is a multidisciplinary book which draws on disciplines including sociology, cultural studies, literary studies, and religious studies to give an account of the spirit of the times. These chapters use various methodologies: from survey to interview and textual analysis, and from secondary to primary data. These diverse methodologies and topics are meant to capture

the theme of the book: that is, the complexity of what it means to be Muslim in contemporary Australia. To this end, the next section provides a detailed overview of the contributions.

2 Content

Part 1 sets the scene for the state of research on Muslims in Australia by addressing the fundamental research of two leading and pioneering researchers on Muslims in Australia. Both Riaz Hassan (1937–2022) and Gary Bouma (1942–2021) sadly passed away recently. Their work had a considerable impact on our understanding of Islam and Muslims in Australia, and this volume contains one commemorative piece for each of them. The retrospective on Hassan is written by Bryan Turner, who met him in the 1970s at the then relatively young Flinders University. Thus, Chapter 2, titled ‘Riaz Hassan and the Empirical Sociology of Muslim Piety’, covers his career of over 40 years in the sociological study of Islam, in the world and in Australia, and his interest in understanding how Muslims think about themselves and their place in the world. Hassan’s research was driven by exposing the inequalities and misunderstandings that Muslims experience in their everyday lives in the West. With the help of his empirical work, he engaged in public debate over contested areas of public life, including terrorism and Islamophobia. He was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2006 for his intellectual and public contribution. The tribute to Gary Bouma by Greg Barton, which forms Chapter 3, is titled “‘People Like Us’: The Legacy of Gary Bouma’s Empathetic Sociology of Religion in Partnering with Australian Muslims in Countering Extremism and Dealing with Stigma’, and highlights this sociologist of religion’s foundational work. Throughout his long career, Bouma observed religious change and paid particular attention to Islam and Muslim communities in this country. Further to this, he spent decades writing against Islamophobia. However, trailblazers are often complex individuals. Indeed, as if on two sides of the same coin, Bouma fostered interreligious understanding and dialogue while he also worked at countering violent terrorism. In relation to the latter, he was instrumental in the formation and leadership of the Global Terrorism Research Centre at Monash University, which explored the dynamics of radicalisation.

To reflect the various contributions of – and reactions against – Muslims in Australia, in Part 2 the book highlights the various Muslim cultures in Australia and their different adaptation and original contribution to Australian Society. It starts with Farida Fozdar’s contribution “‘True Blue Aussie Muslim’: Young Muslim Men Talking About Australia and Their Place in It’ (Chapter 4), which

confronts the taken-for-granted perspective that Muslims are different from 'Australians'. Using the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and based on focus-group discussions with young Lebanese-background Muslim men in Australia, Fozdar unpacks the fact that her respondents use the same type of discourse as mainstream Australians when it comes to Australian values, its flag, its position in the world, and its multicultural policy. They are open to diversity and at the same time have a sense of national belonging. They also see their national identity as coterminous with their religious one.

Alongside these findings of ordinariness among Muslims in Australia, Chapter 5 by Mirela Cufurovic and Mahsheed Ansari, titled 'New Spaces and New Domains: Tracing the Cultural Contributions of Australian Muslims', explores the contribution of Muslims to the culture of Australia. If their contributions after WWII were mainly economic and social, today Australian Muslims are connecting directly with the Australian way of life through new spaces of civic and social life. Cufurovic and Ansari explore, as examples, the recent development of a poetry slam in a suburb of Sydney, the Islamic Museum of Australia, the Australian Muslim Artists' Prize to recognise the contribution of these Australians to pop culture, and the Sweatshop Literacy Movement. These are significant aspects of Muslims' contribution to the nation's ethnically and religiously diverse fabric. The authors see this cultural history in Australia as a testament to the enduring resilience of Muslims and their contribution to the country's multiculturalism. Still within the literature genre, in Chapter 6 Ibrahim Abraham's 'Millennial Muslims in Lebanese-Australian Literature: Pure and Vernacular Religion in the Bildungsromane of Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr' explores the semi-autobiographical work of two Australian Muslim authors and finds that, as with other millennials in Australia, these authors describe their coming-of-age into an unstable society. Like those of non-Muslims, their identity is also influenced by American politics, and they are in pursuit of self-emancipation. Drawing on the work of Franco Moretti and Olivier Roy, Abraham nevertheless finds in these stories their collective identities as Muslim being racialised despite Islam's fragmentary and individualistic status in Australia. While these fiction authors are new voices contributing to the Australian literature, Katharine Bartsch, Md Mizanur Rashid, Dijana Alic, Maryam Gusheh, and Majdi Faleh explore how Muslims are impacting on the architectural landscape of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Chapter 7, 'Building Faith in Walter Burley Griffin's National Capital: The Diplomatic Mosque and other Architectural Narratives', describes the developments that took place to build the faith of Islam as a material culture in multicultural Australia. With a focus on the architectural design process of three mosques in ACT, this chapter provides a look at cross-cultural

engagement in Australia that impacts on the urban fabric. The authors see in these mosques a site of cultural exchange, of spiritual reflection, and of community engagement, and an example of the social and cultural contributions of Muslim minorities to this country.

Part 3 deals with being Muslim in Australia, and being perceived as such, and the various social interactions between groups in Australia at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. Chapter 8 by Balawyn Jones, Amira Aftab, and Ghena Krayem is on 'Australia Muslim Women's Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence: The Impact of Faith' and underlines the diversity of Muslim women in Australia and the ways their faith affects their decisions in their personal lives. This also applies in the context of domestic and family violence, which is a case study for their research. Through their findings, these authors advise that social services be specifically aimed at various communities in Australia, including Muslim ones; they highlight the impact of the recent government funding shift from specialist to generalist service provisions, revealing how the latter are not necessarily fully equipped to deal with religious needs and requirements. As such, they advocate for reverting to the previous funding model, which they saw as more effective and appropriate. Similarly, in Chapter 9, Samina Yasmeen, Flavia Zimmermann, and Renae Barker's 'Pakistani-Muslim Immigrant Women in Australia: Self and Izzat (Honour)' addresses the issue of gender, focusing on a specific ethnic group working on transmitting cultural notions from Pakistan to the Perth metropolitan area. Based on the qualitative analysis of 15 interviews, the authors unpack how the notion of honour (*izzat*) remains an important concept in their participants' lives in Australia. They found that this notion encompasses different ideas and plays out differently in the lives of these individuals. These differences were due to the fact that the family plays a highly significant role in shaping participants' understanding and behaviour of honour – bearing in mind that the intergenerational transmission of *izzat* is not static. While these practices continue, with time in Australia their understandings can indeed be modified within a family, be it nuclear and/or extended.

In Chapter 10, 'Australian Muslim Youth's Access to Online and Offline Islamic Legal and Religious Knowledge', Ihsan Yilmaz moves the focus to understanding the social and religious practices of Muslim youth in Australia. Based on interviews with 64 participants from Melbourne and Geelong, he finds that even if the digital world broadens their access to Islamic knowledge, their personal connections with family, friends, and teachers remain central. Further, while their online activities tend to focus on accessing foundational texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith, a third of this sample continues to seek guidance from religious scholars. Another important finding is that gender disparities

persist in Australia when it comes to accessing offline religious authorities, and this chapter makes a call for more inclusive religious spaces.

Chapter 11, Rachel Sharples, Rhonda Itaoui and Kevin Dunn's 'Progressive Except for Islam': Profiling Islamophobia Sentiment', pushes our understanding of Islamophobia further. While there has been a recent increase in anti-Muslim attitudes and experiences of racism among Muslim communities, the authors discover that there are different manifestations of Islamophobia. Perhaps paradoxically, the practice of Islamophobia is not a homogenous reaction to a group that it itself homogenises. Rather, attitudes range from having a strong anti-Muslim disposition to being a progressive pro-Muslim. Focusing on three different progressive groups they specifically analyse in this chapter, the authors found Islamophobic sentiments hidden behind liberal and non-polemical viewpoints. That is, while these groups have progressive values along a variety of diversity criteria, these reach a limit when it comes to Islam, which is perceived as a threat to Western values. The authors thus argue for the importance of targeting education to these groups to address their misconceptions. This would help to build a deeper understanding of Muslim communities. To further redress Islamophobia, Halim Rane, Adis Duderija, and Paul Mitchell's Chapter 12, titled 'New' Religious Knowledge and the Influence of Religious Authorities on Relations Between Muslims and Non-Muslims', explores the influence religious authorities have on people's perceptions of Islam, especially with regard to presenting Islam as a religion that advocates peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims. The authors go back to the primary Islamic sources of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* to discuss the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad – that is, the pledges he made to Christians, Jews, and other groups to protect them – and how they were later received in various secondary but still historic documents, showing more restrictive and discriminatory conditions. After testing these original Covenants in a pilot survey with a small sample of religious authorities who acknowledge that Islam advocates peaceful interreligious relations, the authors recommend these Covenants should be used as 'new' religious knowledge to assist building stronger cross-religious connections, and to help counteract Islamophobia.

Chapter 13, 'Placing the Continued Hyper-securitisation of Islam and Muslims in Australia in Global Context' by David Tittensor, Farida Fozdar, Gerhard Hoffstaedter, and Adam Possamai sets the scene for the remainder of this book. Following the increased threat of terrorism in the wake of 9/11, Australia has developed a great many counter-terrorism laws. Further, while these are purportedly race-neutral, they have nevertheless disproportionately targeted Muslims. Thus, this chapter provides a historical account of these

developments since the Howard government, and in light of similar developments in the rest of the world. In particular, the chapter argues that this global phenomenon normalises the securitisation of Muslim communities and causes them a significant level of anxiety which can have long-term effects. Following very closely on the same theme is Chapter 14, titled 'Australian Muslim Men After the War on Terror: Securitisation, Generational Trauma, and Superficial Masculinities'. In this chapter Alyssa Moohin explores the crisis of identity among young Muslim men, a crisis exacerbated by the increase in securitisation of Muslim communities. Drawing on 28 interviews, she unpacks how the current sociopolitical climate has damaged the sense of self of these men who have come of age during the War on Terror. Moreover, she notes that some of her informants have adopted an alternative form of masculinity – a more 'toxic' one – that has gained ascendancy with the rise of anti-women movements.

Overall, these chapters are offering an update on the literature on Muslims in Australia and are covering recent developments in the field. They provide a sociocultural picture of the current situation, and while they observe success stories, they also highlight some of the obstacles that remain to keep Muslims at the margins of the Australian society, and that prevent both Muslims and Islam from being fully recognised and embraced as part of the Australian story.

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PART 1

In Memory



Riaz Hassan and the Empirical Sociology of Muslim Piety

Bryan S. Turner

Abstract

Riaz Hassan covered an extraordinary range of subjects in a career of over 40 years: housing, suicide, euthanasia, citizenship, and Muslim societies. Most of these topics were controversial, politically complex, and global in their reach and implications. In this contribution, I focus exclusively on his many publications to the sociology of Islam. In this area, he made many influential publications: *Faithlines* (2002), *Inside Muslim Minds* (2008), *Islam and Society: Sociological Explorations* (2014), and *Indian Muslims: Struggling for Equal Citizenship* (2016). In recent years, the study of Islam has expanded partly because of conflicts with Muslim societies, especially after 9/11. It would be wrong, however, to think that Hassan's work had a strong political agenda. He was clearly aware of Islamophobia, as his research on Australian Muslims (Hassan, 2018) illustrates. However, the general purpose of his many studies was to understand how Muslims think about themselves and their place in the world. Of course, after 9/11 there was a sudden avalanche of publications attempting to explain 'political Islam,' or 'Islamic fundamentalism.' Hassan's contribution was to conduct large international surveys to allow Muslims to speak for themselves. He brought excellent research methods and strategies into a field that was overpopulated by opinions and underpopulated by evidence. The other obvious point of his research was its comparative dimension: for example, *Faithlines* was an ambitious study of 4,000 respondents from Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan. Although his work was not politically driven, throughout his career he was concerned with the inequalities experienced by Muslims in Western societies and the misunderstanding they confronted in their daily lives. In a late publication, *Indian Muslims: Struggling for Equal Citizenship* (2016), he was also exercised by the problems Muslims face in terms of citizenship.

In the 1970s, the Department of Sociology at Flinders University, South Australia, was a young department in a young university. The new universities were regarded as socially and intellectually inferior to the major universities, especially Sydney and Melbourne; in reality, the social sciences at Flinders

were exceptionally strong. The sociology program had been founded by Bob Connell (now Raewyn Connell) and the foundation professor was Ivan Szelenyi, a Hungarian political dissident who arrived at Flinders University in 1976. As Szelenyi (2022) observed in his obituary for Riaz, the Flinders department was “left-leaning”. Under the leadership of Professor Bill Brugger (1941–1999), who had become the professor in 1980, the politics department was also ‘left leaning’ with its focus on communist China. Szelenyi became internationally famous with the English translation of *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (Konrad and Szelenyi, 1979), which was a study of the role of intellectuals in Eastern European socialism from the perspective of Max Weber’s analysis of bureaucracy. Years later a symposium on the book was published in *Theory and Society* (Verdery et al., 2005).

Szelenyi eventually departed in 1980 for a professorship at UCLA. Riaz Hassan had moved to Flinders in April 1977 from Singapore, where he had some conflict with the government over his research into housing in *Families in Flats* (Hassan, 1977). His study had a significant impact internationally where there was considerable critical interest in the social impact of high-rise flats, especially on family life. Much of Riaz’s research was focused on the issue of social control. In Singapore, high-rise flats dominate all available accommodation and therefore Singapore has been at the centre of much urban research. Singapore had made great strides forward in providing low-cost public housing to lower-income groups. By 1975, 47% of its population was residing in public housing. This government planning achievement has made its public housing a symbol of national pride. Margaret Thatcher visited Singapore on several occasions in the 1990s to examine the development of high-rise flats as a potential model for how to develop Canary Wharf in London. Riaz’s research was praised for its focus on the impact of high-rise flats on wellbeing. While living in flats created family stress, the neighbourhood context was consequently important for collective activities and personal well-being. His work inspired the title of an overview of research in the field, namely “Families in Flats, Revisited” (Appold and Yuen, 2007).

In the year before, he had edited *Singapore: A Society in Transition* (Hassan, 1976), which to some extent was a measure of the achievements of Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) and the dominance of the People’s Action Party. The soft authoritarianism of life under LKY received some attention in the book, but its focus was on culture and identity. Riaz studied the ethnically integrated and standardised English-medium education program which school children receive in Singapore. Riaz concluded that the multiculturalism strategy was generally successful. Riaz also left for the United States to take up a visiting professorship at UCLA between 1994 and 2001. He was invited to teach a course on the

sociology of Islam, but concluded that “there were very few, if any, comparative sociological studies of contemporary Muslim societies” (Hassan, 2002, p. xv). This was an early stage in his academic progress that would lead eventually to *Faithlines* (Hassan, 2002).

I arrived at Flinders in 1982 and left Flinders in 1988, eventually returning to Australia in 2013 for a professorship at ACU. As a result of our various departures in the early years of our careers, Riaz and I probably got to know each other better in our ‘mature years.’ While sociology in Australia has had a problematic history (Collyer, 2023), sociology at Flinders was remarkably successful over time, and many members of the department, such as Bob Holton, Anna Yeatman, and Ray Jureidini, have enjoyed long and successful careers. Apart from Riaz, Anna – who is currently an Emeritus Professor at the Whitlam Institute at Western Sydney University – made contributions to debates about public policy. Of course, Riaz stands out for his publications as a research sociologist, with considerable skills in survey research and analysis.

I introduce my chapter with these basic historical facts simply as a background to the sociology department where Riaz and I were colleagues. I followed Szelenyi as the next professor of sociology in 1982, coming from Aberdeen University where I had been a reader. I am not sure why I was appointed. Perhaps it was thought that I was not obviously ‘left-leaning’ and was therefore a ‘safe bet’, and that unlike Flinders, Aberdeen was an ‘ancient university.’ My main claim to fame at the time was the publication of *Weber and Islam* (Turner, 1974) and *For Weber* (Turner, 1981). The vice-chancellor who appointed me was Keith Hancock, a well-known labour economist who was at Flinders from 1980 to 1987. Weber was also not a ‘left-leaning’ sociologist, but was probably known to have leanings towards economics.

Riaz and I had different approaches to Islam. At that time my publications were historical and theoretical, whereas Riaz was already famous for his empirical surveys and somewhat later for his comparative research on contemporary Islam. From the start, however, there was one important intellectual connection between us, which also tells us a great deal about his basic orientation towards Islam. We both had a high regard for the work of the philosopher-anthropologist Ernest Gellner. As a philosopher-anthropologist, Gellner was heavily criticised mainly by anthropologists who expressed serious doubt about the authenticity of his field work in the Atlas Mountains. Gellner of course had a gift for making enemies with his acerbic wit, such as describing Isaiah Berlin as a “Savile Row philosopher”. Among Western students of Islam, Gellner was unusual in arguing that Islam was able to adjust effectively to modern society. While Weber had argued that the asceticism of the Protestant ethic was causally important in the rise of capitalist society, Gellner regarded Islam

as compatible with modernisation and furthermore argued that as a result it would resist any process of secularisation.

In Western philosophy, the issue of Islam and modernity goes back to Hegel (1827/2012), who saw the history of the West as the progressive march of freedom. Because Islam came after Christianity, it was in one sense more modern than Christianity. In *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel (1827/2012) struggled to exclude Islam from this upward progress of history towards freedom. For Hegel, the absoluteness of God in Islam was a brake on the social and personal evolution of Muslims in the historical unfolding of consciousness, with the result that Islam was “fanatical”. Hegel cast a long shadow over Western understanding of Islam as a religion and a culture.

Gellner’s original field work had been published as *Saints of the Atlas* (Gellner, 1969), in which he worked out his basic idea of the oscillation between the piety of the saints and reformist tradition of puritanical Islam. The saintly version was hierarchical, ecstatic, and hereditary, while the modern urban version was scriptural, egalitarian, and puritanical. It was this ‘puritanical’ version that allowed Islam to enter modernity without a concomitant process of secularisation. Riaz greatly admired Gellner’s *Muslim Society* (Gellner, 1981) in which the ideas he had developed from his research in the Atlas Mountains came to maturity. I remember entering Riaz’s office one day when he held up his copy of Gellner’s book and said something to the effect that Gellner was a major influence on his own intellectual development. Riaz quoted a passage from Gellner’s basic argument at the beginning of *Faithlines* (Hassan, 2002): “By various criteria universalism, spiritual egalitarianism, the extension of full participation in the sacred community not to one, or some, but to *all*, and the rational systematisation of social life – Islam is, of the three great Western monotheisms, the one closest to modernity” (Gellner, 1981, p. 7).

This interpretation of Islam ran counter to the long tradition of Orientalism which regarded Islam as backward and conservative. This view, which Edward Said (1978) famously criticised in *Orientalism*, was also shared in Marxist views of history. Marx’s theory of the ‘Asiatic Mode of Production’ argued that states which were based on the centralised management of water resources were prone to historical stagnation (Turner, 1978). Gellner had also argued that while Christianity was undergoing a process of secularisation, Islam had proved itself resistant to such secular forces. It was entering the period of modernity intact, so to speak. One might legitimately call these propositions ‘the Gellner Thesis.’ It had two components. The first was that we must regard Islam as a modern version of monotheism; and the second was that, while Christianity would decline in the face of modernisation, Islam would continue to grow. It is certainly the case that the mainline Christian churches

are in decline and will be replaced either by post-institutional religion or by various forms of evangelical Christianity, especially by Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America (Lehmann, 1996). If Gellner's understanding of Islam had been widely shared in the public domain, then Islamophobia – about which Riaz was to publish extensively (Hassan, 2018) – would probably have been less prevalent in the West. Gellner, and obviously Riaz, avoided any criticism relating to 'Orientalism' by rejecting any notion that Islam was backward or fanatical.

Gellner, who was invariably a critic of intellectual fashions, was also involved in debates against postmodernity in relation to Islam. Riaz was not to my knowledge ever caught up in what in retrospect were simply fashionable developments, such as postmodernism. Gellner was critical of the relativism that he took to be fundamental to postmodern arguments. He adopted a view of reason that I am sure Riaz would support with respect to both Islam and the West. Gellner (1985, p. 1) complained about the "profound irony" of self-doubt associated with relativism that "has become most acute and anguished" in the West. I dwell at some length on Gellner because underlying Riaz's research on suicide bombers, Islamic pietism, Islamic reformism, and his critique of Islamophobia was also a confidence in the rationality of mainstream Islam.

In retrospect, I have concluded that Riaz would have been a far more obvious choice to replace Szelenyi as the professor at Flinders. Suffice it to say that at that stage, while I had published on Islam, Riaz had already established a reputation as a sociologist with a flair for survey methods, which were successfully employed in his work on Singapore and suicide, but also clearly evident in what is probably his best-known work on Islam, *Faithlines* (Hassan, 2002). It is also worth saying, from memory at least, that nobody else at Flinders in that period had significant empirical research skills. It was probably somewhat later that our overlapping interest in Islam brought us closer together, especially when I returned to Australia in the 1990s. In our 'mature years' we were both involved in promoting the sociology of Islam: for example, when we both served in the Australian Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (AAIMES).

In this chapter, for obvious reasons, I shall concentrate on Riaz's extensive contributions to the sociology of Islam, where his work is very well known. There have been many positive reviews of his publications on contemporary Islam. However, in many respects he probably had more public exposure for his work on suicide than for his sociology of Muslim communities. Riaz's sociological approach to suicide in Australia was somewhat unusual in that the field was dominated by the medical profession and especially by psychiatrists: suicide was treated as a mental health and psychiatric issue. In classical sociology, of course, Emile Durkheim's (1952) *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* was

influential, but not in the world of Australian psychiatry. One significant argument in Durkheim's approach was that suicide could not be associated only with poverty, because suicide was equally associated with periods of economic prosperity. For Durkheim, the cause was primarily connected to "disturbances in the collective order".

In an early article, Riaz, with Joan Carr (1989), found that while the number of suicides had increased over time, along with an increase in the population, the rate was remarkably stable. The second constant factor was that the male suicide rate was almost invariably higher than the female rate. This contrast might have been related to the effects of two world wars, the Great Depression, unemployment, and changes in the labour market. However, following Durkheim, Riaz rejected the view that suicide rates were associated with economic disturbance alone, especially for men. Durkheim's basic proposition was that studies of individual acts of suicide did not provide an explanation of the comparative rates of suicide in Europe. Against the dominant medical paradigm, Riaz published major studies of suicide in *A Way of Dying* (Hassan, 1982) and *Suicide Explained* (Hassan, 1995).

More controversial were his subsequent articles relating to 'Islamic terrorism' and suicide bombers, whose actions journalists and government spokespeople uniformly saw as irrational and unethical. In 2006 the Australian Research Council awarded Riaz one of Australia's largest research grants to investigate "Suicide Terrorism: The Use of Life as Weapon", which involved compiling data on suicide attacks and exploring the ideology and motivations of terrorist organisations employing suicide missions as a strategy. The grant project aimed to advance knowledge relevant to protecting Australia from threats of terrorism, and to provide information which might contribute to the development of appropriate responses to domestic terrorism. His work in this area fell under the international spotlight during the 'war on terror' in the aftermath of 9/11, when Australian anti-terror laws were established (see Chapters 13 and 14 in this volume) which prohibited anybody, including researchers and scholars, from conducting interviews or having any contact with terrorist groups. Riaz sought to interview potential suicide bombers and as a result the federal agencies viewed him with suspicion. He managed to publish *Life as a Weapon* (Hassan, 2010a), which challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions about the irrationality of radical young Muslims. Riaz was therefore working against the trend of extremist responses to Islam. We should keep in mind, for example, that some conservative intellectuals such as Norman Podhoretz (2007), the one-time editor in chief of *Commentary*, had described Islamic politics as a form of "Islamofascism".

Riaz's argument was that suicide bombings – which are a global phenomenon – were often carried out for altruistic reasons. In adopting this approach, he challenged the taken-for-granted assumptions about Muslim fanaticism that characterised much Western journalism. The bombers were neither fanatics nor criminals who were driven to self-sacrifice on the orders of their military commanders. In fact, the strategy was a rational and effective military response by Muslim groups with limited resources against a far more powerful adversary. Furthermore, these were not lone acts by isolated individuals with psychological problems; the bombings typically received a communal blessing. However, Riaz warned against any simple generalisations, because the circumstances surrounding these incidents varied from one conflict area to another across different societies and cultures. As a result, any strategy in response to suicide bombings would need to attend carefully to the specific circumstances of each conflict area.

The debate about suicide bombings might be considered within the context of a more general fear of Islam in the West, namely under the umbrella of Islamophobia (see Chapter 11 in this volume). How extensive is Islamophobia in societies with different histories and variable relationships with Islam? The situation in France is often taken as an outlier (Bowen, 2010). France's revolutionary tradition is overtly secular, and it has a history of colonial conflict in Algeria. At another extreme are the Nordic countries with liberal traditions and well-established welfare states. There are also national variations in terms of responses to the *Shari'a* (Possamai et al., 2023). Despite these cultural and historical variations, the literature on Islamophobia adheres to a more uniform view of legal and cultural opposition to Islam. Indeed, research on Islamophobia has been described as an "industry" (Lean, 2012). While there is widespread agreement that Islamophobia exists, there is equally widespread uncertainty about its extent. Does it cover everything from discrimination in the labour market to acts of violence? The idea of widespread 'Islamophobia' is best regarded as an advocacy concept: that is, a concept whose purpose is to stir individuals and communities to political or communal activity in support of a particular cause (Roose and Turner, 2019). While advocacy concepts are politically useful, strictly speaking they are not scientific concepts, mainly because they need to simplify issues and avoid complexity. I have suggested that in many ways Riaz's starting point was what I have called 'the Gellner Thesis.' His research was based on the premise that while Christianity would decline, Islam would continue to grow – as a modern version of monotheism, so to speak. In that sense, his comparative research on Islam obviously rejected the idea that Islam was a threat because it was backward and incompatible with

modernity. However, his research was also critical of various developments in Islam to which he was opposed. In *Inside Muslim Minds* (Hassan, 2008), he was critical of Salafism and the influence of Wahhabism on the modern evolution of some branches of Islam that promoted fanaticism. His critical response to these developments was directed especially at the treatment of women in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

However, while he both defended and promoted respect for Islam, his understanding was always based on factual sociological evidence. In short, he did not sacrifice science in the cause of advocacy. This balance between advocacy and science was evident in his research reports regarding Islamophobia in Australia, which obviously avoided the limitations of advocacy. Over many years he has offered a sophisticated analysis of the extent of Islamophobia in Australia, offering a nuanced picture of the contemporary context.

Towards the end of his life, while director of the International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding at the University of South Australia, Riaz made a major contribution to our understanding of the challenge of Islamophobia through his report on *Australian Muslims: The Challenge of Islamophobia and Social Distance* (Hassan, 2018). The term 'Islamophobia' had emerged with the publication of the Runnymede Trust Commission's *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* in 1997 (Conway and Runnymede Trust, 1997). It was defined as the "dread and hatred of Islam" resulting in discrimination against Muslims in all areas of social life. Islamophobia is widespread in the Western world, and the report found that Muslims are discriminated against in both employment and at the interpersonal level. Despite high levels of education, Muslims are less likely to work in the professions and often find it difficult to get job interviews. However, Riaz's survey found that most Australians display low levels of Islamophobia and are welcoming towards members of other religions. One in 10 Australians display strong feelings of Islamophobia, but most Australians do not share these sentiments. Islamophobic attitudes are closely connected to level of education, unemployment, and age. However, in terms of the measurement of social distance, Australians feel closer to Christians, followed by Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus. In general, negative attitudes towards Muslims are related to a fear of terrorism, which the media often exploit. Insofar as age is strongly associated with Islamophobia, the hope must be that younger Australians retain their openness to Muslims as they also grow older.

I have explored the many contributions of Riaz Hassan to sociology in general and to the sociology of religion in particular. I begin to conclude this tribute to Riaz Hassan with a discussion of *Faithlines* (Hassan, 2002), which was his most influential and much-reviewed work on Islam along with *Inside*

Muslim Minds (Hassan, 2008). The scale of *Faithlines* was impressive. It involved research on four Muslim societies – Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan – representing different traditions of cultural and historical influence. It required the co-operation of social science research centres in each society. The research involved extensive field work that provided the basis of the questionnaire for a thousand respondents for each society. The sample was organised to include professionals, religious activists, and members of the general public. In terms of gender, approximately one quarter of the respondents were women. The choice of Kazakhstan provided an interesting contrast to the other three predominantly Muslim societies. Previously a Soviet republic, it became independent in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Islam had been suppressed under communist rule, and has not fully recovered from the Soviet policy of enforced secularisation. These four Muslim societies represent about one-third of the world's Muslims, or half of the population of the Muslim-majority countries.

The theoretical framework behind the survey was adopted from Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock (1968), who had developed a multidimensional approach to religious piety along five dimensions: belief, knowledge, experience, ritual, and the consequences of piety. Stark and Glock had complained that too much sociological research on religion had concentrated on belief, thereby neglecting other important features of religious life such as experience. Knowing about and believing in were also contrasted. They also studied the consequences of religious commitment. In the case of Islam, this dimension could include, for example, paying *zakat*, the tax on all Muslims which is allocated to charitable works. This multidimensional approach provided Riaz's study with a depth often missing from conventional survey research on religion.

The major conclusion of *Faithlines* was that, except for Kazakhstan, the Muslim world has experienced a religious renaissance but that, given the diversity of the Muslim world, this renaissance will result in a decentred Muslim community or *ummah*. Secondly, Riaz concluded that the increase in piety would not be an obstacle to modernity and modernisation.

Faithlines was a major publication by any measure, and was well received. Perhaps one of the most influential reviews was by Mohammed A. Bamyeh, which appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 2005. Bamyeh, a leading Muslim sociologist, welcomed *Faithlines* given the rarity of survey research on contemporary Muslim societies. One more general reason Bamyeh (2005) gave for welcoming Riaz's research was in the context of "American sociology's inexplicable persistence in ignoring Islam" (p. 1834). Bamyeh, who is a major figure in the development of the hermeneutics of Islam, raised a generic

problem with all survey research, especially with respect to religious groups. He observed that “when Muslims respond to survey questions by affirming the finality of the Qur’an and the sufficiency of the early tradition of Islam, they are doing no more than providing what they believe to be the proper response by a Muslim to questions of that kind” (Bamyeh, 2005, p. 1835). His objection reflects his own attempts to grasp the “lifeworlds” of Islam rather focusing on its belief system (Bamyeh, 2019). Riaz of course was not unaware of these difficulties, commenting in *Faithlines* about the “deep suspicion he encountered” in undertaking the research, and especially regarding Western conspiracies against Islam (Hassan, 2002, p. xvi). A more sympathetic review was offered by Richard DeAngelis (2002). He observed that “little social scientific research on Islam has been done and the inherent difficulties of undertaking such research” were obvious, but recognised that Riaz was “uniquely placed to meet these challenges” (DeAngelis, 2002, p. 566). He concluded that *Faithlines* would encourage intelligent dialogue between competing interpretations of Islam.

Riaz’s concern to study piety was also well illustrated by *Inside Muslim Minds* (Hassan, 2008). Published in 2008, *Inside Muslim Minds* was timely in the sense that it followed the popular protests in 2011–12 that became known as the ‘Arab Spring.’ Mahmoud Dhaouadi (2013) favourably reviewed the book in *Contemporary Sociology*. Riaz argued that the idea and value of civil society was gaining support across the Muslim world: Islam was not a barrier to democracy, given that humans are God’s vicereagents and the state has no share in divinity. However, he was critical of Salafism in its Wahhabi variant and the influence of Saudi Arabia across the Middle East. The book was a further development of the research results that had been analysed in *Faithlines* (Hassan, 2002). In the later volume, he turned once more to focus on Islamic consciousness, and the meaning of piety. This volume involved a study of 6,300 respondents from seven Muslim countries: Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey, and Iran. These societies have diverse political systems including military dictatorships, communism, national secularism, monarchy, and democracy. The book repeated the message of *Faithlines*: that global Islam will be constituted by a differentiated *ummah* reflecting the different cultures and historical trajectories of Muslim societies.

Despite the many problems with survey research, Riaz could legitimately complain in 2007 that there are “no good studies that explore the nature and contents of Muslim piety sociologically” (Hassan, 2007, p. 437). He suggested that there were two reasons to explain this absence. The first was that in general terms the sociology of Islam was underdeveloped; and secondly, “Islamic sectarianism makes such studies fraught with intense controversy bordering on hostility” (Hassan, 2007, p. 437).

It is not easy to summarise the findings of these large comparative surveys undertaken by Riaz. Suffice it to say that the results gave further support to what we can call ‘the Gellner Thesis’: namely that, by comparison with Christianity, Islam shows no sign of decline under the impact of modernisation and globalisation (Hassan, 2007, p. 471). Riaz concluded that “in several major Muslim countries, a major religious renaissance is taking place or has taken place” (Hassan, 2007, p. 468). Muslims in these diverse societies show no sign of declining piety. The main exception – for obvious but interesting reasons – was Kazakhstan, which until 1990 was a communist society, deeply hostile to Islam.

With these surveys in mind, one might suggest that the core of his research agenda was to explore the nature of Muslim piety in different social settings. Piety was also explored in “Why Size Matters” (Hassan, 2019) in *International Sociology*, in which he considered the religious differences between Muslim-majority countries and Muslim minorities in South and South-East Asia. He concluded that the “religious architecture” is significantly more orthodox in Muslim-majority countries. Although the surveys concentrated on Muslim beliefs about various issues, religion is not simply a collection of beliefs. We might conclude that piety is not solely about believing but rather is a way of life, and therefore there was in fact no disagreement between Bamyeh on Muslim lifeworlds and Riaz’s concern for piety.

In conclusion, Riaz Hassan (1937–2022) was a highly accomplished empirical sociologist of Islam and also of suicide, but perhaps his defining feature as both a scholar and a citizen was his engagement with public debate over the most contested areas of public life: housing, suicide, terrorism, and Islamophobia. As such he was a role model to students who might aspire to become public intellectuals. In recognition for his services to sociology, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2006.

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'People Like Us'

The Legacy of Gary Bouma's Empathetic Sociology of Religion in Partnering with Australian Muslims in Countering Extremism and Dealing with Stigma

Greg Barton

Abstract

The Muslim community in Australia has experienced steady growth in both overall size and impact on national life over 50 years of sustained migration. Muslims have been living in Australia since before European settlement, and 'Afghan' cameleers played a key role in 19th-century expansion into the interior of Australia, but more recent migration has transformed the community. The 1976 Australian Census recorded just 45,000 respondents identifying as Muslim (0.3% of the population) but the 2021 Census recorded 813,000 Muslims (3.2%). The 2022 federal election saw the new Labor government welcome two Muslim ministers, Dr. Anne Aly and Ed Husic; and the 27-year-old, hijab-wearing Senator Fatima Payman, whose family fled violence in Afghanistan, joined Australia's first Muslim senator, Dr. Mehreen Faruqi from the Greens. Prior to the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks in 2001, Muslims in Australia were broadly accepted but largely overlooked. As Dunn et al. discuss in Chapter 11, the past two decades have witnessed a sharp increase in Islamophobic bigotry and hate speech but also the emergence of a youthful, well-educated and confident Muslim community. One of the most significant non-Muslim observers of these changes in the community was the pioneering Monash University sociologist of religion Gary Bouma. Intellectually curious and empathetic, Bouma combined sharp social analysis with a deep understanding of the actual and imagined impact of religious belief in general and Islam in particular. In sharp contrast with Samuel Huntington, Bouma pushed back against the mythology of the exotic, and threatening, otherness of Islam and Muslims, and pointed to a deeper reality of a common humanity.

1 Gary Bouma: a Thoughtful Observer and Passionate Advocate

This chapter will focus on the work of the pioneering Monash University sociologist of religion Gary Bouma and the ways in which he supported vital contributions of the Muslim community in Australia to countering extremism

in the post-9/11 era while also dealing with politicised stigma and prejudice. University-based research and capacity building is a significant part of this story, and the discussion in this chapter is framed by the direct and indirect involvement of Gary Bouma and the colleagues and students he worked with at Monash University. After a brief introduction to Bouma's contribution, the discussion turns to a reflection on the pivotal events of late 2001 that established 'national security' as a central element of political discourse in Australia, to the great cost of Australian Muslims. The chapter then unpacks the little-understood story of how Muslim communities have partnered with agencies across three levels of government to counter the threat of extremism in their midst, working to prevent radicalisation and recruitment, while struggling against stigma and prejudice.

As Bouma documented, prior to the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks in 2001, Muslims in Australia were broadly accepted but largely overlooked (Bouma, 1995, 1997, 1999a, 1999b; Bouma and Brace-Govan 2000). The past two decades have witnessed a sharp increase in Islamophobic bigotry and hate speech but also the emergence of a youthful, well-educated and confident Muslim community (Ali, 2020; Bouma, 2011, 2016; Bouma et al., 2007; see also Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in this volume). Intellectually curious and empathetic, and one of the most significant non-Muslim observers of these changes in the community, Bouma combined sharp social analysis with a deep understanding of the actual and imagined impact of religious belief in general and of Islam in particular (Bouma, 2006). In sharp contrast with other scholars of his milieu, such as Samuel Huntington (1996), Bouma pushed back against the mythology of the exotic – and threatening – otherness of Islam and Muslims, and pointed to a deeper reality of a common humanity (Bouma, 2007, 2011; Bouma et al., 2007; Khatab and Bouma, 2007).

Over 50 years of sustained migration, the Muslim community in Australia has experienced steady growth in both overall size and impact on national life. The community is certainly not entirely new to Australia, as Muslims from Sulawesi had been visiting the northern coast since before European settlement, and 'Afghan' cameleers played a key role in the 19th century pioneering expansion into the interior of Australia – but, as Possamai and Tittensor discuss in Chapter 1 of this book, more recent migration has transformed the community (Ali, 2020; Bouma, 1997, 2007; Hassan et al., 2018). The 1976 Australian Census recorded just 45,000 respondents identifying as Muslim (0.3% of the population) but the 2021 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022) recorded 813,000 Muslims (3.2%). The 2022 federal election saw the new Labor government welcome two Muslim ministers, Dr. Anne Aly and Ed Husic, together with the 27-year-old, hijab-wearing Senator Fatima Payman, whose

family fled violence in Afghanistan; in the Senate she joined Dr. Mehreen Faruqi from the Greens, Australia's first Muslim senator.

For more than four decades Gary Bouma was one of Australia's leading scholars of religion and a pioneer in the field of the sociology of religion. Gary was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1942, in an area often dubbed 'the buckle of America's Bible belt.' He grew up in a family of Dutch immigrants active in the Dutch Reformed Church, and completed his graduate studies at Cullen College in 1963, followed by a Master of Divinity at Princeton theological seminary in 1966 and a PhD at Cornell University in 1970. He then taught at Dalhousie University in Canada before moving to Australia in 1979 to take up a lectureship in sociology at Monash University, where he served until his death in 2021. By 2008 Bouma had retired as professor of sociology but remained actively engaged as professor emeritus, working out of his campus office most days up until his final illness; he continued to have great influence over the careers of his colleagues and continued to be active in research and publication and in postgraduate supervision.

In contrast to Riaz Hassan, the other influential sociologist of religion discussed in this volume (Turner, in Chapter 2), Bouma was neither a specialist in Islam nor in Muslim society; but over his long career he was a keen observer of religious change through migration, a process that he dubbed 'religious settlement,' and in that process paid careful attention to Islam and Muslim communities in Australia and around the world (Bouma, 1997, 2007, 2016; Bouma and Hughes, 2014). As a progressive thinker and activist for tolerance and respect in multicultural society, Bouma spent decades writing against Islamophobia (see Chapter 11 in this volume), particularly in the difficult days after the 2001 9/11 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks and the October 2002 Jemaah Islamiyah bombings in Bali that killed 202 people, including 88 Australians (Bouma, 2007, 2011; Bouma et al., 2007). He was not naïve, however, about the problems across all traditions and communities linked to religious fundamentalism and narrow identity politics. He nevertheless refused to succumb to simplistic prejudice and was ever on the lookout for victims of bigotry and those suffering injustice (Bouma, 1999b, 2011, 2016; Bouma and Brace-Govan, 2000).

When Bouma moved to Australia from Canada in 1979 to take up his position at Monash University, Australian census data indicated that adherents of non-Christian religions made up a combined figure of around 1% of the national population. At the time, the study of religion in general was unfashionable in the university sector and the sociology of religion hardly existed. Australia was then, and is even more so today, a largely secular and a-religious society, and the study of religion remains relatively uncommon (Bouma, 2006). But today Australia has a significant cohort of scholars of Islam and Muslim society, many

of whom were former students or colleagues of Bouma, such as Sayed Khatab, Shahram Akbarzadeh, Rachel Woodlock, Pete Lentini, Susan Carland, Waleed Aly, David Tittensor, and Fethi Mansouri. Many others have benefited from and been inspired by his work in one way or another. Mansouri, for example, worked with Bouma as a fellow UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations, a position Bouma held from 2005 to 2021. Carland has become one of Australia's leading Muslim scholars and thinkers. She is particularly known for her work on Islam and feminism (Carland, 2017). As was so very often the case, Bouma encouraged and supported Carland as a colleague in a modest and low-key fashion. He invited her to assist him with co-authoring the sixth edition of his much-cited OUP handbook *The Research Process* (Bouma and Carland, 2016). He was ever ready to collaborate in research writing and publication projects, generously sharing his time and expertise, sometimes taking the lead as a first-named author but very often not (Akbarzadeh et al., 2009).

Bouma was active throughout his career in interfaith dialogue and social activism for justice. As a practising Anglican priest, as well as a professor of sociology, he was all too aware of the prejudices and failings within religious communities. His was a no-nonsense but respectful approach. His distinctive contribution was to see Islam as a global religion and source of cultural tradition that was, in many respects, similar to Christianity, and in broader terms comparable with other global faiths. This can be seen in his collaboration with Egyptian-Australian scholar Sayed Khateb in writing about *Democracy in Islam* (2007). To borrow a phrase from a book title by Waleed Aly, a colleague of Gary's at Monash, Gary saw Muslims as "people like us" (Aly, 2007). Bouma's intuitive and empathetic 'people like us' focus on a common humanity, and consequent demystifying of imagined 'exotic difference,' resonates with the central themes discussed by Abraham in Chapter 6 and in the Conclusion by Tittensor and Possamai, in drawing on contemporary storytelling about the lives of Australian Muslims. As noted above, he did not see Muslims or Islam as being an exotic 'other' belonging to some radically alternative way of viewing the world and engaging with society. For somebody who had grown up in the heartland of Protestant America this was a remarkable position, as much as he made it seem ordinary and natural.

To understand how Bouma's thought and scholarship evolved, including his approach to Islam, it is helpful to review his own faith journey and intellectual development. As noted, Bouma grew up in a Dutch Reformed household and his father was a significant scholar of religion himself. By the time he was undertaking his PhD at Cornell University, however, he had notionally become a Quaker and was actively involved in Quaker activism to assist conscientious objectors who were refusing to be drafted to the Vietnam War. He was also

very active in a social program involved in providing advice on reproductive health and, when necessary, access to safe abortion at a time when abortions were generally illegal in America. By the time he was teaching at Dalhousie University in Canada, Bouma had joined the Uniting Church in Canada, and then, after settling in Australia, he became active in the Anglican Church and was ordained an Anglican priest.

Religious belief and practice were always important in Bouma's life and for him socially progressive activism was entirely compatible with a strong religious faith. He had grown up to see religious faith and social activism very much as natural partners. His father was a participant in the American civil rights movement and advocated for racial equality. This saw him become the target of activism from racist groups including the Ku Klux Klan, which on one occasion set up a wooden cross on the family's front lawn and then set it alight. Along with providing practical support, via the Quakers, to those conscious objectors avoiding being drafted to the war in Vietnam, Bouma was an early advocate for compassion and justice for those suffering from HIV/AIDS. He was also a consistent and practical feminist. Throughout his Anglican career in Australia, for example, he was a consistent advocate for women's ordination, and his advocacy was not limited to his own church community (Bouma, 1999b). He was articulate and eloquent, and his analytical and advocacy skills saw him have significant influence on government policy (Bouma et al., 2007; Cahill et al., 2004). This saw him involved in projects such as the 2011 Human Rights Commission Enquiry into Religion and Freedom in 21st-century Australia. Two years earlier he chaired the board of directors for the Parliament of the World's Religions 2009 assembly in Melbourne. Bouma consistently spoke up in favour of religious diversity and multiculturalism, speaking frequently against Islamophobia and prejudice of all kinds as an active and effective public intellectual regularly engaged in media commentary and debates (Bouma, 2011). In 2013 Bouma was made a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia in recognition of his services to sociology, the Anglican Church of Australia, and to interreligious relations. His was a critically important contribution during the politically charged 2000s.

2 Progress Reversed: John Howard and the Politics of Fear

It was only in 1966 that the White Australia policy was formally dismantled by the government of Prime Minister Harold Holt. At the time the annual inflow of non-European settlers was under a thousand people per year – 746 in 1966.

Within five years it had tripled. Harold Holt's conservative Liberal Party government deserves credit for finally ending what was an inherently racist policy (Hage, 2023). In 1973 the government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam implemented a series of amendments overturning residual elements of racial bias in immigration policy. Only then was race explicitly disregarded as a factor in selecting migrants; all migrants, regardless of their background, became eligible for citizenship within three years of holding permanent residence. In 1975 the Racial Discrimination Act made it illegal to use racial criteria for any official purpose. And then in 1978 the government of Malcolm Fraser implemented a review of immigration law overturning considerations of country of origin in the selection of prospective migrants. These changes opened the way for significant migration flows from the Middle East, Asia, and eventually Africa, transforming the multireligious and multicultural nature of Australian society in the process (Bouma, 2016; see also Chapters 1 and 5 in this volume).

Migration saw Australia's small Muslim community begin to enjoy steady growth from the late 1960s that accelerated after 1978. Significant numbers of people migrated to Australia from Turkey, and then Lebanon (Bouma, 1997b; Possamai and Tittensor, 2022). The ghosts of the White Australia policy in the form of socially conservative and often ignorant views of cultural difference were only slowly exorcised. But by the turn of the century multiculturalism was widely celebrated, thanks to more enlightened policy from both Liberal and Labor governments (Bouma, 2016; Saeed, 2003). The question of national trajectory and where Australia would find its home in the world continued to be contested. But under the Labor government of Prime Minister Paul Keating from 1991 to 1996, there was optimistic talk of Australia finally taking its place in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the 1980s Bouma settled into teaching sociology at Monash, and by the 1990s he had pioneered the sociology of religion in Australia. In his academic work he articulated a robust optimism about religious pluralism and multiculturalism in Australia (1995, 1997, 1999a, 1999b; Bouma and Brace-Govan, 2000), and he matched this scholarly work with extensive media engagement and advice to government. This optimism is reflected in Bouma's watershed book *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st Century*. Published in 2006, it reflected the sense of progress made in Australia in the closing decades of the 20th century, a progress bound up with immigration and the opening-up of Australia. As Bouma (2006, p. 2) explains: "This book first uses an institutions perspective to describe Australian religion and how it has been reshaped through migration, separation from Britain and emancipation from the USA and forced to an emerging awareness of her Asian context."

By the close of the first year of the new century, Australian multiculturalism was facing stormy conditions that threatened to wipe away the progress made in the preceding decades. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on America in September 2001 resulted in a pivotal moment for the Muslim community in Australia, and the first two decades of the 21st century witnessed remarkable growth on all fronts, including several that represented unwelcome impositions. The al-Qaeda attacks in 2001 brought with them unprecedented attention and prejudice, as well as the need for both society and government to respond to the threat of radicalisation and recruitment (as is discussed in Chapters 11, 13 and 14 of this volume). Huntington's beguilingly simplistic thesis of a 21st-century, post-Cold War world marked by civilisational conflict, as set out in his influential 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, acquired fresh cogency in the wake of the attacks. The attacks also happened at a critical time in Australian politics when conservative prime minister John Howard was facing a challenging campaign to be re-elected.

As one of the most influential conservative leaders in modern Australia, John Howard recognised that fear and anxiety linked to xenophobia could be readily exploited to mobilise political support. By cloaking this 'fear of the other' behind the pretext of protecting national security, he cynically exploited base instincts for political advantage (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003). Howard went on to serve four terms from 1996 to 2007 – the second-longest tenure of any Australian prime minister – but as he approached the end of his second term in late 2001 his conservative coalition government was trailing the Labor opposition in the opinion polls, battling headwinds from high petrol prices and economic hardship combined with an unpopular economic reform program of fiscal conservatism. Events at the end of 2001 worked to John Howard's short-term political advantage but contributed to decades of heartache for Muslim Australians.

In 1988, as leader of the conservative opposition, John Howard had argued for restricting Asian migration as part of what he dubbed his 'Australia policy'. Talking about Asian immigration, Howard said, "If it is in the eyes of some of the community too great, it would be in our immediate-term interests and supportive of social cohesion if it were slowed down a little so that the capacity of the community to absorb was greater" (Kitney, 1988).

By the time Howard had returned to the leadership the Liberal Party in 1995 he had apologised for those remarks calling for the slowing of migration from Asia. And it is significant that the Howard government from 1996 through until 2007 oversaw not just some of the largest annual migration flows Australia had ever seen but also significant flows from Asia and from sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of the Howard government, China and India were the third and fourth

largest sources of all migration respectively after New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Bouma, 2016). In that financial year, 180,000 migrants were added to the Australian population, including 7,000 humanitarian migrants coming from countries such as Iraq and Sudan.

In this context John Howard's fearmongering in the 2001 election campaign was only partly the product of his reactionary convictions and at least as much the product of cynical political calculations. At the time, new independent senator Pauline Hanson was enjoying considerable public attention with her One Nation Party by appealing to primordial nativist sentiments and openly criticising the social changes that had accompanied the ending of the White Australia policy. Howard saw in Pauline Hanson's electoral appeal an opportunity to drive a wedge between his party and the Labor Party, and in the context of the unusual developments of late 2001, his political calculation appeared vindicated.

In late August 2001 the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* rescued 433 refugees – most of whom were ethnic Hazara Shia Muslims fleeing persecution by the Taliban in Afghanistan – from the Indonesian vessel the *Palapa 1*, a 20-metre wooden fishing boat, which was drifting 140 kilometres north of Christmas Island, an Australian territory located less than 500 kilometres south of Java (Mares, 2002; Melville and Kelsey-Sugg, 2021). The *Palapa 1* was one in a series of overcrowded fishing boats, employed by people smugglers operating off the south coast of Java, that had attempted the risky 350-kilometre voyage south to the Australian territory of Christmas Island. For decades hundreds of desperate people fleeing conflict and seeking asylum in Australia had been arriving in small boats launched from Indonesia by profiteering people smugglers. But by 1999, primarily driven by Afghans fleeing persecution at the hands of the Taliban regime, the number of arrivals by boat had reached 3721, up from 200 the previous year. In 2001 there were 5516 arrivals.

On August 26, Australia's Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) acted on concerns that the *Palapa 1* was in distress, having lost engine power two days earlier, and put out a call to merchant vessels in the vicinity. As the closest vessel, the *MV Tampa* responded and was guided by an Australian Coastwatch aircraft to the *Palapa 1*. The rescue operation was placed under the control of Basarnas, the Indonesian Search and Rescue Agency, as the *Tampa* was en route. Over a period of hours, the 433 refugees and five crew were transferred to the *Tampa*, many of them in poor health, and 10 or 12 unconscious.

Captain Arne Rinnan received instructions from Jakarta to set course for the Indonesian ferry port of Merak at the top of the Sunda Strait, on the north-west tip of Java, 12 hours away. Docking at Merak represented but a minor detour from the *Tampa's* scheduled voyage from Fremantle to Singapore. But shortly

after the Tampa began steaming north to Merak a small delegation of distraught asylum seekers entered the bridge to beg Captain Rinnan to take them to Christmas Island, while others threatened to commit suicide if they were returned to Indonesia. In order to defuse the situation Rinnan turned his ship southwards, even though Australia authorities denied his request to enter Australian waters. Over the next 48 hours, faced with hundreds of desperate passengers, including dozens in failing health, Rinnan made repeated requests to Australian authorities for assistance. At one point he attempted to execute a slow turn northwards but was met with fresh protests from agitated asylum seekers, and fearing for their safety and that of his small crew of 27, he once more turned the Tampa around.

Finally, on August 29, days after commencing his rescue mission, Rinnan declared a state of emergency and directed his vessel to cross into Australian waters and approach Christmas Island, anchoring seven kilometres offshore. This time Australian authorities did respond: after informing Rinnan that he had committed a flagrant breach of law, 45 Special Air Service soldiers boarded the Tampa. Prime Minister Howard briefed parliament. Rinnan was ordered back into international waters but refused, pointing out that his vessel was not equipped for 465 people. He was backed up by the ship's owners and by the government of Norway, which responded by reporting Australia to the United Nations, UNHCR, and the International Maritime Organization for breaching its obligations under international law.

Late on the night of August 29, on the floor of parliament Prime Minister Howard introduced Border Protection Bill 2001: an emergency bill with retroactive powers intended to provide legal cover for the actions of the government. The Howard government later excised Christmas Island and other Australian maritime territories from the Australian migration zone, so that asylum seekers could not apply for refugee status without reaching the Australian mainland. The asylum seekers rescued by the Tampa were transferred by the Australian Navy to the small Pacific Island nation of Nauru where they were detained for 'offshore processing' as part of what became known as the 'Pacific Solution.'

The 9/11 attacks had triggered horror and an urgent sense that something had to be done (as Tittensor et al. discuss in Chapter 13). There was, of course, no link whatsoever between al-Qaeda's terrorist attack and the arrival of people by boat seeking asylum – except, ironically, for the key dynamic that very often they were fleeing the same murderous fundamentalism that was behind al-Qaeda's terrorism. Hazara escaping brutal persecution at the hands of the Taliban should have been seen as victims deserving sympathy and practical support, and not as a threat in themselves. But in the largely unspoken logic of John Howard and similar political actors, all Muslims were potential sources of

threat until proven otherwise, especially those seeking asylum and arriving by desperate means, who should be regarded as miscreants.

Weeks later, on October 7, 2001, John Howard made the baseless accusation that asylum seekers arriving by boat were throwing children into the water in order to secure assistance (Mares, 2002). The previous day *MAS Adelaide* had intercepted a southbound wooden boat carrying 223 people midway between Indonesia and the Australian territory of Christmas Island. Howard's clear inference was that these were not merely desperate people but also ruthless and self-serving partners in the crime of people smuggling. These and other factors worked to Howard's advantage when he was comfortably re-elected in what writers David Marr and Marian Wilkinson famously described as a 'dark victory' in the title of their 2003 book (Marr and Wilkinson, 2003).

Howard launched the Liberal Party's election campaign in Sydney on October 28 with a stirring speech in which he declared, to rapturous applause, "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" (Wright, 2022). Two weeks later, just hours after polling closed on November 11, Howard celebrated a remarkable political turnaround. At the beginning of the year, winning a third term had seemed very much in doubt. When the votes were counted the result was a comfortable victory with a 2% swing in favour of the government, translating into its winning 82 lower-house seats against Labor's 65 seats.

It was a 'dark victory' not just because it made passing use of fear and xenophobia (contributing substantially to the rise of Islamophobia that Dunn, Sharples, and Itaoui chart in Chapter 11) but because it put in place a pattern of behaviour that shaped the policies of both major political parties for the decades that followed. It led directly to the Labor Party's responding to the Liberal Party by supporting offshore – and in effect indefinite – detention of desperate people seeking asylum. This bipartisan consensus rejected the legal right to seek asylum and framed asylum seekers as lawbreakers because in their desperation to find a means of coming to Australia they would be exploited by people smugglers. The compassion and empathy they were owed was replaced with anger at their alleged illegal behaviour. And even where the government did recognise that they were but victims of circumstance, harsh policies such as turnbacks and offshore detention were justified as being the lesser evils in the fight against the potential flood of boat arrivals. Never mind the fact that many more people arrived by air, often in much less dire circumstances and with a much less pressing need for asylum. The tens of thousands arriving on commercial air flights were conveniently ignored as political rhetoric conflated boat people with threats to national security – including, implausibly, the alleged threat of the covert arrival of Islamist terrorists (Mansouri, 2023).

3 Post-Howard: Melbourne, Monash University, and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

The impact on Muslim Australians of the pivot to ‘national security,’ framed around border security and the ‘global war on terror,’ was far-reaching and perverse (Ali, 2020; Aly, 2007; Bouma, 2007; Bouma et al., 2007; Iner, 2019; see also Mookin in Chapter 14 of this volume). A community that had previously been largely ignored was now the centre of attention and the focus of fear and anxiety. Many Australian Muslims began to experience a level of Islamophobia that they had never previously expressed. Successive terror attacks by al-Qaeda in Madrid, Istanbul, London, and closer to home of course, Bali and Jakarta, gave an urgency and legitimacy to public questioning of Muslim loyalty. By 2003 the ‘global war on terror’ had expanded from taking down some of bin Laden’s lieutenants and other al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan to launching an invasion and occupation of Iraq – not just to topple the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein and forestall his use of alleged weapons of mass destruction, but also to stop al-Qaeda taking root in Iraq. The political vacuum created in Iraq with the ending of the regime and purging of all associated with Saddam’s Ba’ath Party created unprecedented opportunity for multiple insurgencies, of which the most powerful quickly became al-Qaeda in Iraq, and eventually Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Cockburn, 2015; Gerges, 2016). Along the way, the vast majority of victims of terrorism, directly and indirectly, were the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who lost their lives, or the millions who were forced to end up as refugees outside their homeland, countless thousands of whom desperately resorted to dangerous sea voyages in overloaded and unseaworthy vessels in the hope of finding sanctuary in places like Australia.

Muslim Australians face the repeated indignity of being asked to denounce al-Qaeda and related Islamist extremists in the clearest terms if they are to be regarded as trustworthy and patriotic. In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the Bali bombings, and the moral panic about (predominantly) Muslim refugees from conflict arriving by boat, Muslim community groups and leaders were all too conscious that, in addition to having to work proactively to counter the politics of fear and address the strong currents of Islamophobia, they also had to work to address the limited but significant threat of extremists who were targeting Muslim youth to radicalise and recruit to their cause (see Chapters 13 and 14 in this volume). Even without the cynical, self-serving cultural politics of the Howard government, Muslim Australians would have had to deal with suspicion and doubt being directed towards their community across the Western world.

In the state of Victoria, and the city of Melbourne where five million of the state’s 6.7 million people live, multiculturalism enjoys broad bipartisan

support. This was reflected substantially, albeit imperfectly, in state institutions such as the powerful Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Victoria Police Force (VicPol). These two institutions played a leading role in shaping responses to the very real threat of violent extremism inspired by al-Qaeda.

The role of university academics and public intellectuals in promoting these sorts of interreligious dialogue initiatives was critically important (see Chapter 12 in this volume), and Gary Bouma was consistently to be found leading this work. Bouma worked closely with students and junior colleagues in the Muslim community and with Muslim community leaders, both in public and behind the scenes, to build understanding and prejudice. He was well known in the large and influential DPC and VicPol as well as in Canberra, as state and federal agencies scrambled to formulate responses to the security and social challenges facing Muslim communities. This can be seen in his work with Des Cahill, Hass Dellal, and the Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) undertaken for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (Cahill et al., 2004).

The Labor government in Victoria took a different approach to multiculturalism and migrant communities than the federal government in terms of tone and framing, and the result was generally more adroit and trusted engagement with communities (Victorian Government, 2005, 2006). This continued to be true even when governments changed, and the state came under Liberal leadership. The upshot of this is that CVE work with Muslim communities in Australia has been led by what is happening in Victoria and Melbourne. The vast majority of terrorist plots and cells detected, and attacks launched, have been associated with either Victoria or New South Wales, and predominantly the capitals of Melbourne and Sydney. There has been much less activity in Brisbane and the state of Queensland, and those who have radicalised in Perth and Western Australia have generally travelled to Melbourne and Sydney on the East Coast to consolidate their connections with extremist groups. What happens in Victoria and New South Wales is very consequential and it tends to be Victoria that leads in terms of more progressive policies. Also significant is the fact that in Victoria the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) has consistently represented the vast majority of Sunni Muslims whereas in New South Wales there is no single peak body representing Sunni Muslims. And related to this, levels of trust between VicPol and Muslim community groups over the past two decades has been much better than is the case between New South Wales police and Muslim community groups.

Muslim civil society groups were active in initiatives to foster dialogue and build bridges while at the same time addressing the risk of radicalisation. This saw groups such as the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS), associated with

the Turkish community, holding a series of annual Abrahamic conferences seeking to build bridges between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities, and integrating a new tradition of public iftar fast-breaking meals involving Muslims and non-Muslims coming together during the fasting month of Ramadan (as Rane, Duderija and Mitchell discuss in Chapter 12). This has now become a regular feature of Victorian and Australian public life, and the AIS has a series of community-focused activities each year with groups such as Victoria Police, the Jewish community, and the major public universities. Such cross-communal public iftar meals at each Ramadan have become a natural, commonplace feature of society and are organised by many Muslim community groups beyond AIS. But in 2002, in the wake of the al-Qaeda attacks the previous year, this was a major innovation.

Public intellectuals and leaders such as Bouma played a significant role in these sorts of initiatives. Throughout the 1990s Monash University and other universities in Victoria held a series of academic conferences focusing on Islamic thought and society. These involved significant local and international Islamist leaders, including figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid – leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim mass organisation, and later Indonesia's fourth president – together with Nurcholish Madjid, one of Indonesia's leading Islamic thinkers. Both played a significant role in facilitating Indonesia's transition to democracy following the sudden resignation of President Suharto in May 1998.

It was in this context that Bouma contributed support and leadership to the formation of the Global Terrorism Research Centre at Monash (GTReC), and worked with academics such as Pete Lentini to secure Australian Research Council (ARC) funds to undertake major research into the dynamics of radicalisation (Barton and Halafoff, 2024). In 2006, this resulted in an important industry linkage project partnering with Victoria Police through the secondment of senior VicPol officer Gaetano (Joe) Ilardi, who had recently completed a PhD at Monash looking at the leadership dynamics of al-Qaeda while at the same time playing a leading role in Victoria police counter-terrorism encountering violent extremism programs (Ilardi, 2017). After the research project commenced, another VicPol officer, Bruce McFarlane, joined the project team as a PhD candidate alongside Kate Barrelle. Today he leads the VicPol CVE team. Other ARC project team members who began their postgraduate research careers at GTReC include Debra Smith, Andrew Zammit, and Shandon Harris-Hogan.

It might seem strange to talk about academic work that focuses on understanding radicalisation and contributing to the new domain of countering violent extremism, in the same context as discussing initiatives to foster

interreligious understanding and dialogue. But for those involved such as Gary, and for the many Muslim community leaders whom he worked with and supported, these issues represented two sides of the same coin.

Increasingly, Muslim community leaders recognised not only that they needed to take the initiative in addressing the pernicious impact of ignorance and prejudice towards Muslims and Islam, but also that at the same time Muslim youth faced a real and growing risk of being radicalised and recruited by Islamist extremists.

Australia's significant commitment to these 'global war on terror' military campaigns meant that the domestic conversation about terrorism was continually recharged by news coming out of the Middle East and Afghanistan (as discussed by Yilmaz in Chapter 10 and Moohin in Chapter 14). This contributed to the persistent framing that the Muslim community constituted a security threat that might manifest at any time in domestic terror attacks. In December 2002 the federal government commenced a three-month counter-terrorism awareness campaign. Fortunately, the earlier dramatic images of balaclava-clad SAS troops storming houses and manning lookouts on the Sydney Harbour Bridge were replaced by more friendly, less confrontational scenes. Nevertheless, the consequences of these arguably well-intentioned efforts were far-reaching. The \$15 million ad campaign ran with the central theme of being "alert but not alarmed" (SMH 2002). The key intent of the "Lookout for Australia" campaign was for people to be attentive and to report anything suspicious. A national hotline was set up and the public was encouraged to "say something if you see something". The national hotline was soon flooded with calls from concerned citizens but very few of these were helpful or based on observations of genuinely concerning behaviour.

To be fair, the campaign commenced in the weeks following a serious terror attack that was directly linked to Australians. As shocking as the 9/11 attacks were on the other side of the world, and as consequential as Australia's involvement in military campaigns was to become, it was the bombings in Bali on October 12, 2002 that most directly brought home the immediate threat of terror attacks (Barton, 2004). Of the 202 people killed in the attack, 88 were Australians holidaying in a place that they regarded as part of Australia's neighbourhood.

This context helps explain why the work undertaken at Monash University at GTRC, supported by Bouma, was to prove so nationally influential. Today, significant research and co-operative initiatives with practitioners are taking place in multiple universities and institutions across Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. But in the 2000s, it was the group at Monash that led the way (Halafoff and Wright-Neville, 2009).

In September 2005, the Victorian government launched a significant initiative in CVE, setting out the preliminary groundwork for what was to become a sustained process of broader engagement with Muslim and other community groups. The government published a paper entitled “Protecting Our Community: Attacking the Causes of Terrorism”. It was this paper that first established in Victoria the conceptual framework that came to be known as CVE. In 2006, a second paper, “A Safer Victoria: Protecting Our Community – New Initiatives to Combat Terrorism”, fleshed out some specific ideas, including interfaith dialogue, community engagement, and the sponsorship of research into radicalisation. This led directly to the establishment of GTReC at Monash and laid the foundation for a major Australian Research Council Industry Linkage Project with VicPol and Ilardi on understanding the drivers of radicalisation. Bouma helped establish GTReC and served as its acting director in 2007 and as director from 2013 to 2015.

In December 2007 when the Rudd Labor government was sworn in after eleven and a half years of conservative government under John Howard, the shock of the 7/7 attacks months earlier in London, and of CVE transformations that were occurring across Europe, saw the new federal government quickly pivot to action in promoting CVE. The NCTC was tasked with a series of community roundtable consultations. This led to the formation of a permanent Subcommittee for Countering Violent Extremism, known as CVESC. The NCTC and CVESC quickly developed a national framework on CVE with four clear concrete aims: 1. Identify and divert violent extremists and provide them with disengagement options; 2. Identify and support at-risk individuals; 3. Support community resilience and build cohesion; and 4. Achieve effective communications to challenge extremist messages and to support alternatives (Australian Government, 2010).

4 Responding to the Threat of ISIS Radicalisation

This concrete and clear formulation of thinking about CVE was very much shaped by the experience of having to deal with the threat posed by ISIS that manifested most clearly in late 2014 through to March 2019, when the physical caliphate was finally destroyed. Much of the focus was on detecting early signs of radicalisation and recruitment, primarily of young people in Muslim households, through working with community groups to help them recognise early warning signs (Harris-Hogan and Barrelle, 2020).

In the early days of awareness-raising under the Howard government it was easy to dismiss phrases such as be ‘alert but not alarmed’ and ‘if you see

something, say something' because the unfortunate reality was that there was not a lot of substance behind the slogans in terms of thought-out responses and strategies, particularly when it came to helping Muslim families deal with threats to loved ones.

By 2015, when the sharp rise in ISIS recruitment presented a more immediate and concrete threat, mature, practical measures were finally in place to work with those who had concerns about young people who appeared to be in trouble. One of the most valuable tools in the space was a risk-and-needs tool that was developed based on observable behavioural changes occurring simultaneously across the domains of ideology, social networks, and transgressive behaviour. Kate Barrelle had worked for a decade as a forensic psychologist in the Counter Terrorism Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT); she developed a risks-and-needs assessment tool that became known as Radar while undertaking her PhD research at GTRC Monash between 2007 and 2014, as part of the ARC Linkage project that Bouma had helped Lentini and Ilardi develop. Barrelle's doctoral thesis was entitled *Pro-integration: Disengagement and Life after Extremism* (Barrelle, 2017). She drew upon her professional experience and insight into structured professional judgement to develop a behavioural change tool that could be effective in alerting practitioners and others to the early signs of external influence in the life of somebody who was starting to become radicalised into violent extremism.

The Radar tool addressed a pressing need to identify at-risk individuals and came to be extensively used by VicPol and other state police forces across Australia. Barrelle worked with Dellal from AMF to develop a community awareness training program employing an attenuated version of Radar (AMF, 2013).

The need to respond to the threat of ISIS radicalisation and recruitment saw the rapid consolidation of a decade of CVE thought and practice. By 2017 the National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism set out a relatively mature and complete formulation of policy on CVE that defined the purpose of CVE as being: 1. To prevent individuals from becoming or remaining violent extremists, by supporting diversion, rehabilitation and reintegration programs; 2. To address the social impacts of violent extremism, by supporting programs to build community resilience (Attorney-General's Department, 2022). In other words, CVE policy was focused on reducing the likelihood of violent extremism through effective early intervention, and on reducing the consequences of violent extremism through preparedness and effective responses (Barton and Halafoff, 2024; Harris-Hogan, 2020).

It was clear that effective programs to prevent and counter violent extremism depended on trusting partnerships between community groups and police. Police have unique access to certain kinds of intelligence that no

other groups have, but by themselves they are not in a position to properly implement the sorts of interventions required. On the other hand, community groups can contribute unique insights as well as the specialist expertise to conduct sustainable intervention programs (which very much parallels the community-based work on domestic and family violence that Krayem, Aftab, and Jones discuss in Chapter 8 of this book). With respect to the threat posed by ISIS, this meant particularly working to stop young people from travelling to Syria by being observant of the early warning signs of their intentions. A final line of defence involved Australian Federal Police (AFP) teams working with state police based at airports in Melbourne and Sydney. A more important element of the successful preventative work undertaken in 2015, 2016, and 2017, however, was the contribution of family and friends who spoke up and solicited police support with early interventions. Given the fact that radicalisation generally involved recruitment through social networks, police work done on identifying key networks in Melbourne and Sydney enabled effective preventative responses in hundreds of cases.

The result of this work has been that, to a considerable extent, the stigma and distrust associated with CVE have been overcome. And while the CVE aspect of the work is not front and centre, it is nevertheless respected as constituting an important element in broader work done to deliver practical assistance to those in need, and to provide a respected place for community engagement and leadership. Both state and federal police continue to play a key role in the broader framework, as needs be, because of their unique capacity and access to information; but their role is generally backgrounded, and the role of Muslim community groups foregrounded, in a way that leads to a more holistic and healthy mode of engagement.

5 Conclusion

Throughout his career Gary Bouma remained focused as a sociologist of religion. Although he collaborated on several works on Islam, such as *Democracy in Islam* (Khatab and Bouma, 2007), and an ARC Linkage project with Akbarzadeh on “The Hopes and Aspirations of Australian Muslims” (2005–2006), and he also wrote about Islam and migration (Bouma, 1997) and Islamophobia (Bouma, 2011), he made no claims to be a scholar of Islam or an expert on countering violent extremism.

In his late seventies he was an active contributor on two ARC projects, as chief investigator: one with Andrew Singleton and Anna Halafoff on “Young Australians’ Perspectives on Religions and Nonreligious Worldviews”

(2016–2020), and another with Ezzy, Halafoff, and Barton on “Religious Diversity in Australia: Strategies to Maintain Social Cohesion” (2018–2021). These projects resulted in a series of joint publications (Bouma and Halafoff, 2017; Bouma, Halafoff, and Barton, 2022; Bouma et al., 2022; Halafoff et al., 2021; Halafoff et al., 2024; Singleton et al., 2021; Weng et al., 2021).

As this work makes clear, Bouma’s broad and lasting influence is felt, like that of Riaz Hassan discussed in Chapter 2, especially in the domain of the sociology of religion, which has a focus on migration, settlement, multiculturalism, and religious diversity in Australia. In this body of work over a lifetime, Bouma’s approach to Islam, Muslim society, and Muslims was very much to focus on common humanity rather than perceived difference. He is consistently curious and respectful but had no interest in framing Islam and Muslims as an exotic ‘other.’

Bouma’s publications and academic collaborations certainly represent a substantial part of his legacy. But they reveal by no means the full extent of his lasting influence. To more fully understand his contribution to Australian society as a public intellectual it is essential to understand what he achieved through the work of GTRc and the ways in which this work shaped Australian responses to countering violent extremism. Given his lifelong commitment to progressive causes it might strike some as strange to frame his legacy in these terms. But it was precisely because of his open-minded, respectful approach to Islam and Muslim society, and because of his commitment to social justice, that the community of scholars that was GTRc developed in the way that it did and had the constructive influence that it continues to have. In recent years most of the individual scholars who formed GTRc have moved on from Monash and the centre no longer functions, but its lasting influence is felt across the domain of CVE, whether in VicPol, state and federal government departments, or across community groups – as is seen in the ongoing work of the AMF.

Bouma was instrument in the establishment of GTRc and his collegial presence was a vital part of its operations, shaping in ways both subtle and profound the research undertaken there, as well as its public engagement with community groups and government agencies. In ways difficult to delineate but impossible to deny, the ideas, insights, and input to policy and practice associated with one-time members of GTRc in the domain of CVE are imbued with Bouma’s progressive values, commitment to social justice, and respect for others, together with his insights about the importance of paying attention to society, community, and social relations rather than narrowly focusing on the individual.

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PART 2

Muslim Culture in Australia



‘True Blue Aussie Muslim’

Young Muslim Men Talking about Australia and Their Place in It

Farida Fozdar

Abstract

Muslims are frequently characterised as being fundamentally different from ‘Australians’ in terms of values, practices, and national commitment. This chapter maps the ways in which a group of young Lebanese-background Muslim men in Sydney respond to focus-group prompts using the same discourses as mainstream Australians, suggesting an almost complete overlap in their perspectives on civic responsibility and patriotism. It does identify a few areas of difference, suggesting a more cosmopolitan outlook among these men than the wider community. The ways in which these attitudes are attributed to Muslim ethics is also discussed. The chapter looks at the discursive aspect of the nationalist cosmopolitanism expressed, using Bourdieusian concepts to understand it.

1 Background

While Australia has remained remarkably stable and peaceful since federation (Castles et al., 1992; Jupp, 2007b), concerns emerged in the context of terrorist attacks in the West, particularly in the early 2000s, that Australia might be vulnerable to religiously motivated violence. Even without this direct threat, multiculturalism and the cultural diversity it advocates have been held to account for emerging evidence of divisiveness, cultural violence, and segregation (Dandy and PePua 2010). As in many countries, Muslims are the target of such concerns. Muslims have been constructed as the ‘dangerous Other’ in Australia: outsiders wanting to impose their way of life and change ‘our’ culture and laws (Dandy and Pe-Pua, 2010; Fozdar, 2014; Fozdar and Low, 2015; Humphrey, 2009; Mansouri and Lobo, 2012; Noble, 2005; Northcote and Casimiro, 2010; Poynting and Mason, 2007; Tittensor et al., 2020; Yasmeen, 2010, 2014).

Considerable work exists mapping this discourse among mainstream Australians, and the consequent experiences of discrimination among Muslims. A single exemplar illustrates this body of literature: a quote from a

young Muslim Australian in Yasmeeen's (2008) study of Muslim belonging, who says he perceives an assumption among Australians that Australianness does not encompass Muslimness:

I think that the society in general sees ... a clear distinction between being Australian and being Muslim, I think if you ... survey people what it means to be Australian? I don't think that being Muslim would be an answer.

p. 52

Much of this discourse around Muslims has focused on 'Australian values' and the extent to which Muslims are seen to adopt these. Yet, Kabir (2007, 2008) has noted that some Muslims feel Australian values are the same as Islamic values, endorsing compassion, mutual support, and tolerance; and quantitative work by Dunn and colleagues (2016) finds similarly that a huge majority of Muslims see these values as compatible. Their survey found little alienation, and very high levels of support for cultural diversity among Muslims, together with a rejection of assimilationist impulses, all exceeding the average for the general population (Dunn et al., 2016). These findings challenge the assumption in much of the literature that social exclusion is preventing Muslims in Australia from belonging, with the attendant risk of a loss of faith among these communities in the potential for social harmony and the social compact around religious diversity. Interestingly, significant perceptions of racism were not found in Dunn et al's study to be correlated with rejection of diversity or alienation. While these results could partly be explained by a social desirability effect, given the use of face to face and telephone surveying, the findings are rather more optimistic than might be expected.

However, Muslims have been the target of a range of government interventions, with the response to the perceived threat being increased securitisation measures and discourses. Significant legislation was introduced during the early 2000s, under conservative Prime Minister John Howard, that increased powers of surveillance (Roach, 2011), and an attendant Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) discourse developed to position Muslims as a potential enemy of the state and its peoples (Abdel-Fattah, 2019; Grossman, 2014; Poynting et al., 2004; Tittensor et al., 2020). This generated an ongoing climate of fear and rejection (Poynting et al., 2004; Tabar et al., 2010; Yasmeeen and Akbarzadeh, 2005), with research finding Muslim Australians are retreating into ethno-religious communities/identities (Tittensor et al., 2020). Other government interventions implemented include the introduction of a citizenship test focusing on knowledge of Australian history and 'values' that appeared to target Muslims

(Fozdar and Spittles, 2009), the introduction of laws stripping dual citizens of Australian citizenship if they have engaged in terrorism, and the 'National Action Plan to Build Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security,' which targeted Muslims and was designed to respond to "the increased threat of global religious and political terrorism" by raising awareness of religious and cultural diversity, addressing intolerance and radicalisation, and increasing loyalty and commitment to Australia through community education (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2008). The assumption evident in the government's reaction was that Muslims are not integrating, do not understand the Australian way of life and values, and require targeted interventions and surveillance.

Such interventions, and the concerns that prompted them, are part of a worldwide sociopolitical phenomenon constructing Muslims as 'the enemy,' both transnationally and within the nation-state (Cantle, 2001; Kapferer et al., 2002; see also Abdel-Fattah, 2019; Humphrey, 2009; Noble, 2005; Northcote and Cassimiro, 2010; Yasmeen, 2014). Muslims are seen as a fundamental threat to social cohesion (Ata, 2020), with the infamous Cantle (2001) report blaming the development of segregated communities living parallel lives for acts of terror perpetrated in the UK and the West. But social cohesion is a term that requires critical reflection, as it often is used to signal critique (Ho, 2013). For many, but particularly from the perspective of those targeted by such narratives, I would argue, social cohesion implies a sense of belonging, inclusion, legitimacy, and equality, and opportunities for participation and recognition, together with attachment to place (Markus and Kirpitchenko, 2007); and the fact that such definitions often emphasise the sharing of common values and a common vision carries the attendant implication that those who do not share these characteristics do not belong. Some definitions prefer to focus on commitment to public institutions, a more civic form of cohesion, but even this perspective targets those seen as suspect in terms of such commitment. These characteristics translate into common civic values, order, solidarity, bonding/bridging social capital, security of identity and belonging. Affective dimensions are also important (Fourtier, 2008, 2010), particularly the building of a sense of affection and fellow feeling between co-nationals.

This paper asks: to what extent do Muslims articulate being part of the social cohesion project in Australia? While Dunn and colleagues' (2016) work demonstrates perhaps surprising levels of inclusion, I will focus here on the narrative details of the ways in which a group of young Muslim men construct themselves and their relationship to Australia when discussing topics of interest to Australians, indicating how similar their discourses are to those of other Australians – and, significantly, how 'Muslim values' are seamlessly integrated

with so-called Australian values. This offers an insight into how inclusion and cohesion are understood and enacted by an often-demonised group, who can be seen creatively adapting and sometimes reconfiguring the Bourdieusian field of multicultural Australia.

2 Methodology

Data is drawn from a study of 27 focus groups (with 223 participants in total) undertaken across Australia exploring conceptions of Australian, transnational and postnational identities.¹ Focus groups elicit information about a range of social issues, including identities (Gamson, 1992; Munday, 2006; Phillips and Smith, 2000), through encouraging free-flowing discussion which generates data suitable for a range of qualitative analytical approaches, including content, thematic, and discourse analysis (Kreuger and Casey, 2000; Puchta and Potter, 2004). Interactive and collective discourses and metanarratives are thereby revealed, particularly in relation to the binary nature of such discourses, often evident in their 'thesis/antithesis' format (Munday, 2006; Skrbis and Woodward, 2007). Focus groups resemble 'natural' social situations, allowing participants to raise and respond to topics of conversation in a normal 'turn-taking' procedure, enabling the researcher to explore the links and divergences between themes. Because the discussion occurs in a group, there is the possibility of a social desirability effect – that people will monitor what they say for its social acceptability. Attempting to avoid this effect, I used groups of people who had existing relationships with each other.

Rather than using direct questions that might have prompted scripted responses, in the current research a series of still images was used, applying a technique (and indeed two of the same images) used by Skrbis and Woodward (2007). These were selected to trigger discussion about ethnic, religious, national, and supranational identities and relationships, orientations to the globe, and visions for the future. They included images of the Australian flag, a world map, an Aboriginal painting, pollution, an aeroplane, cross-cultural caring, the 'buy Australian' logo, a young woman with two passports, the Australian Multiculturalism policy document cover, and the Australian Values Statement. The images specifically did not include anything deliberately

¹ This work was supported by the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship scheme, under Grant FT100100432. I would also like to acknowledge the research assistants who facilitated the focus groups, and Brian Spittles who assisted with data management.

focused on Muslims, such as an image of a woman in hijab or the Cronulla riots, in order to allow issues to be spontaneously raised.

As noted, the focus group discussions were conducted among pre-existing groups, half of which were ethno-specific, migrant, or multicultural groups, and the rest were collectives based on some shared interest, e.g. a group of Christian youth, a group of librarians, and a group of veterans. The goal was to generate dialogue that reflected the sorts of discussions going on in everyday contexts in Australia, around family dinner tables, office lunch rooms, and in pubs and restaurants.

In this chapter, I take the rather unorthodox approach of adopting as a case study a single focus group with nine Arabic (Lebanese) young men. They were all between 18 and 29 years of age; three had finished high school, one TAFE, and five had completed or were undertaking Bachelors' degrees. Eight identified as Lebanese when asked their ethnicity, and one as Lebanese Australian. All were born in Australia. None responded to the question about voting preference, although three said they didn't vote, suggesting little interest in Australian politics or possibly a lack of voting rights.

A single focus group may seem inadequate in terms of canvassing a range of participants to generate generalisable information. However, I use this group as a case study, using the constant comparative method to compare their responses to those of the other focus groups. Here I rely on ethnomethodologist Harvey Sacks's (1995) observation, as outlined below, that the social world demonstrates "order at all points", to argue that this focus group reflects the ordered nature of discursive and interactional features likely to be found more widely:

Taking up the relevance of sampling, Sacks points out that it depends on the sort of order one takes it that that social world exhibits. An alternative to the possibility that order manifests itself at an aggregate level and is statistical in character is what he terms the 'order at all points' view ... This view, rather like the 'holographic' model of information distribution, understands order not to be present only at aggregate levels and therefore subject to an overall differential distribution, but to be present in detail on a case by case, environment by environment basis. A culture is not then to be found only by aggregating all of its venues; it is substantially present in each of its venues.

SCHEGLOFF, as cited in Sacks, 1995, p. xlvi

Thus, the ways in which these young men speak about their identity and values are likely to be reflective of other Muslims, and (perhaps) of Australia

more generally. This assumption is supported by, and fleshes out, the results reported by Dunn et al. (2016).

I also draw on discourse analysis to identify the ways in which the nation, and belonging to it, is communicated. Benedict Anderson's famous edict that the nation is an 'imagined community' was based on the argument that it is imagined through media and communication. My question here is how the nation is imagined and articulated by a group of young Muslim men, a group found to be marginalised in much Australian research (Grewal, 2007; Noble, 2007; Roose, 2016). To do this I use tools from the Bourdieusian toolkit in the discussion section.

3 Results

This section offers examples of the responses of the young men to a selection of the images. Space does not permit detailed demonstration of how these reflect the discourses found among the mainstream Australians in the focus groups, but reference is made to relevant publications from the same study, and the reader may be able to draw on their knowledge of everyday discourses to recognise features of the responses.

The young men's responses to the image of the Australian flag were immediately positive and enthusiastic, although, as in other focus groups, they note the negative ways in which the flag is sometimes used (see Fozdar et al., 2015; Johns, 2015), and there is a slightly defensive tone in their statement that "It's our flag as well"; (see Hage, 2011, for a similar statement by a Lebanese Australian at the Cronulla riots). Their enthusiastic, masculine yelling of "Straylia" (Australia) is a patriotic demonstration of the belonging and acceptance they go on to identify. Stereotypical practices such as "footy" and "barbecues" and sport are identified as part of the "Australian way of life" that they "love". The flag signals "home", and makes them feel "accepted" and "proud". They go on to argue that anyone who uses the flag in a racist way, such as the ways it was used to persecute men of Middle Eastern appearance during the Cronulla riots, is an "extremist" – a targeted and ironic reversal of a label often applied to them. They are quick to minimise these uses, to say they are a minority. The way the participants hedge (see Markkanen and Schröder, 1997), with pauses and incomplete statements, when they start to acknowledge these negative uses is interesting, suggesting a sensitivity and hesitance to recognise these elements of the Australian character and culture. The request to other Australians – "don't give it a bad image" – is a poignant plea to those using the flag to foment division.

YOUNG MEN: Australia. Australia. Straylia. [many voices, with emphasis, hamming it up] [...]

YOUNG MEN: Yes, it's home ... It's home ... I was born here ... I still call Australia home. Austaylia!

INTERVIEWER: Okay, great. So how does it make you feel?

Boris:² It gives me a sense of belonging. I feel accepted.

INTERVIEWER: So when you see the flag, it makes you ...

Pe Pe: Australia, it reminds me of ...

YOUNG MEN: It reminds me of convicts ... convicts ... yeah ...

Neymar: Multiculture. [...]

INTERVIEWER: Well we're talking about, you ... this is when you see other people use the flag. So let's finish that conversation, we started talking about how Australians use the flag on Australia Day, we've talked about them being a bit drunk when they use it. What about flags on cars?

YOUNG MAN: Stickers ...

Pac: Well that's just ... that's pride, there's nothing wrong with that ...

Boris: There's nothing wrong with showing it ...

YOUNG MEN: ... not using it the wrong way ... not abusing it ...

Grimnar: ... sporting people or whatever, they'll usually have it on their antennas ...

Neymar: [Indecipherable]

YOUNG MAN: ... yeah, they're allowed ... they're showing patriotism,

Abdul: ... it's a good thing. As long as it doesn't get mixed up with ...

YOUNG MAN: ... But don't give it a bad image ...

Abdul: Cos we're all Australian ...

Neymar: ... We all enjoy it ... Australia Day but sometimes people get a bit restless and ... racism and things happen.

Boris: I'm proud of being Australian. I like my cricket, I like my footy ...

Neymar: I love my footy.

Boris: ... and yeah, we all love footy, and I like going down to the beach wearing thongs, having a barbecue, spending time with family ... certain things they perceive as Australian way of life so there you go, we love the Australian way of life. [...]

YOUNG MAN: ... The Australian flag in the Cronulla riots ...

Roger: I think with the Cronulla riots it was just a minority of Australians

...

Pac: Extremists.

² Participants were invited to select their own pseudonyms.

When shown an image of a map of the world – the common response across focus groups of both migrants and mainstream was “we’re so far away” (cf, Fozdar, 2015). Interestingly, this was not the key feature of these young men’s responses. Instead, they express a sense of pride in Australia’s size, and a desire that it be a “leader”, to “dominate”, “stand out”, have others “look at us”, and be the “best in the world”. The conversation then turned to detailed engagement with topics of world politics, current wars, humanitarian aid, and so on, which is not included here. This was unusual among focus groups, most of which did not engage in discussions demonstrating any understanding of global political issues. But most significant here is the sense of geographical pride expressed.

Neymar: The world!

INTERVIEWER: ... What does that image make you feel about you and your place in the world?

Neymar: Down under.

Neymar: Land down under.

YOUNG MEN: [Indecipherable ... talking all at once] ... We stand out.

Roger: We dominate. Look how big Australia is.

James: Like, we stand out: look at us.

Neymar: We’re a continent and a country, we’re the big country there.

INTERVIEWER: Right. That’s interesting.

Boris: Look, if you look at that country, look for any other country you want; but you find Australia’s right there.

MAN: It’s by itself.

[...]

INTERVIEWER: So guys, what do you think Australia’s place in the world should be?

Neymar: What do you mean ...

Abdul: It should be a leader, it should be the best in the world ...

Boris: It should be a republic.

As with other focus groups, participants responded positively to the image of the cover of Australia’s Multiculturalism Policy, which is a map of Australia with a collection of diverse faces smiling happily. However, unlike the majority of the others, who also responded positively, this group did not go on to criticise multiculturalism. Instead, as can be seen below, they respond to this critique, resisting the idea that some people have more right to be in Australia than others. In this sense their discussion becomes a dialogue with an invisible partner (what Billig has called the interplay of ideological dilemmas, see Fozdar 2008). Their argument is that Australia is multicultural to its roots. Again, this reflects Dunn et al.’s (2016) findings:

Roger: It's a mix.

Neymar: It's a mix. With multiculturalism.

Grimnar: That, that makes me feel accepted.

Pac: Yep ... That makes me feel accepted.

[...]

Abdul: The fact that they can ... the fact that they put a photo and say, look, we want to accept who you are part of us, it makes us feel welcome. I think that's what everyone says – welcome.

[...]

INTERVIEWER: So how, how important is multiculturalism to how you think about Australia and being Australian?

Abdul: It's very important.

Grimnar: It's the most important.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that.

Roger: Well, it makes us feel more comfortable. ...

Neymar: ... where everything's more tolerant ...

Abdul: If Australia's not a multicultural society, then what else is it? Or what else could it be?

YOUNG MEN: I don't see anything else it could be ... again ...

Abdul: ... it goes back to the history of the country ...

James: Like we were saying, no-one is purely Australian. There's no such thing. Cos you all, you all go back to a root. But, like they were saying, the boys, Australia's not old. To classify yourself to ... as an Australian, and to stay, and to stay ...

Boris: ... a hundred per cent ...

James: ... a hundred per cent Australian, and, and to not accept multiculturalism doesn't make sense. Like, logically, it does not make sense. So yeah.

Their commentary around the image making them feel “accepted” and “welcome” does suggest they recognise the image (and policy) is targeted at those who may be seen as marginal. These are not words that a son of white British migrants would be likely to use. Yet the sentiment demonstrates an appreciation of the policy, and a recognition of the issue of diversity in a predominantly white country. James appears to push back on this slightly, noting that most Australians are migrants and thus not “purely Australian”, and therefore they should recognise accepting multiculturalism as an imperative.

In relation to the image of the ‘Buy Australian’ symbol, the young men responded, as did most of those in focus groups, and particularly those in the migrant focus groups (see Fozdar, 2021a), with significant support for buying Australian products, arguing it is the patriotic thing to do. An interesting

feature of the ways these Muslim young men articulate this patriotism is that Islam is recruited as a rationale. Confidence is evident, in the opening point and second last point in the extract, that Australia's egalitarian economic policies will mean the benefits of economic nationalism will filter across the population. This is linked to an Islamic teaching similar to the aphorism that charity begins at home: that "our obligation [is] to Australia", being "our home", a term they repeated several times. Rather than having a global economic perspective, they focus on the benefits to Australia and Australians, couched as a moral imperative that has economic benefits.

Abdul: Supporting our economy, Australia does support a lot of its, its wealth back into ... it's not like other countries ... it pours it back into the population. It's starting to become also more back to general people rather than just to the rich people. And by supporting Australia if you can get the Australian [inaudible] ... it's always gonna ... in Australia at least, 15, 20 years I think it'll ... I think it'll always benefit you. It'll benefit the general Australian.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the 'Buy Australian' campaign?

Pe Pe: What's that?

INTERVIEWER: Well, it sort of encourages you to buy products that are Australian-made, yeah.

Pe Pe: It's good ... it's good. It helps the economy.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah? Do you, do you think that our obligation to Australians is more important than our obligation to workers overseas? In terms of buying products?

Abdul: It's a two-way ... again, there's two sides of the thing. Everyone's human; it's a humanitarian thing, but our obligation to Australia, being, being your home – and it's something, something that I think, we are all Muslims here, something that we learn in Islam as well, you support your home first. So Australia's our home country; if I was to donate money to a charity it would be to Australia, or to a needy person it would be to someone that's in Australia, before someone ...

James: Plus, it's gonna come back to us; it's not like it's, you know ... you're keeping your wealth inside your country.

Abdul: We do identify with Australia as our home and we'd support it regardless.

In another extract we see a perhaps surprising coalescence of perspectives with those of the majority. This focus group's response to the image of the Australian Values Statement (DIAC, 2007), which lists characteristics identified

by government as 'Australian values' and asks migrants to support them, was one of wholehearted support – if anything, even more supportive and uncritical than other focus groups (Fozdar and Low, 2015).³ The statement was seen as an entirely positive thing: "beautiful", "absolutely fantastic", "absolutely brilliant", "love it", summarising who we as Australians are or aspire to be. They ask why it is not more widely known or distributed. Neymar even makes the point that it should be a condition of entry, like accepting the terms and conditions of any contract, with migrants having a more formal obligation to abide by it. This was strikingly similar to other responses, and to a related national survey (n = 1636) that found 89% felt the statement reflects Australian values, 79% agreed that migrants should be required to sign the statement, and almost half (49%) agreed that migrants should be deported if they breached the values (Fozdar, 2021b, p. 158). So these young men share the views of most Australians.

Abdul: I agree with that a hundred per cent, it's beautiful.

James: Yep, it's beautiful; absolutely fantastic.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

Boris: Love it.

INTERVIEWER: This is a statement that migrants to Australia must sign.

James: That's absolutely, absolutely brilliant. [...]

Abdul: How come that's ... like, as an Australian, how come you hardly see that, unless you look for it? How come it's not a common thing for you to know and to understand? [...]

Neymar: Has to be shown; they have to read it at least. Accept the terms and conditions, for example. Accepting the terms and conditions, you click to continue.

Their responses to the other images were also very similar to those of other focus groups. To the image of Aboriginal artwork they not only described their love for it, as did the other focus groups, but also articulated a degree of affiliation with Aboriginal people, in terms of the intrusion of Westerners

3 The Howard government produced the 'Australian Values Statement' which migrants must sign, and this requirement remains in place. It identifies 'Australian values' as follows (DIAC, 2007): 1) Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, Parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good; 2) Australian society values equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their race, religion or ethnic background; 3) the English language, as the national language, is an important unifying element of Australian society.

into their countries. They used an analogy I have heard independently among Muslim scholars: the notion that the West's intervention in the Middle East is like someone coming into your house, deciding to stay, and rearranging your furniture, without so much as asking permission. Thus, they identified in some ways with the Aboriginal people.

An image of the former leaders of China and Australia shaking hands initially generated discussion of local politics in all focus groups, including this one (see Fozdar, 2015). However, unlike other groups, these young men then proceeded to discuss Australia's relationship with China, but rather than focusing on Asia, they emphasised Australia's need to be autonomous from the US, to stop being "America's little puppy", again suggesting pride and confidence in their country.

When asked for their views on the idea of a borderless world, they reacted similarly to other focus groups – with general incomprehension at the very idea, and then a range of arguments for why it couldn't work. In other focus groups people identified a range of barriers including human nature (greed, corruption), governance issues, collective interests, cultural differences, resourcing, the need for nations to 'get it right' first, and issues around identity (Fozdar, 2017). These young men, for whom one might have expected the concept of an *ummah* or caliphate might have generated an orientation towards political formations beyond the nation-state, instead saw the nation as necessary to prevent "chaos" and as a foundation for building a "good" society. Boundaries were seen as necessary to distinguish difference, "to compare against", in an explicitly competitive manner, to see who is "doing good" and "doing bad".

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Do you think citizenship is relevant? Or do you think ... you know, how would you feel about a borderless world?

Pe Pe [?]: A what?

INTERVIEWER: A borderless world.

Roger: A borderless world is just a chaos.

Neymar: People taking drugs from place to place.

Roger: It'd honestly be chaos. There needs to be boundaries.

Abdul: There has to be some sort ... something to compare against, always. So, if it was all just one nation ... that's why you kind of say, if it was just, you know one nation, it doesn't matter, it's all the same thing, then there's nothing to compare against ... it can go down. There's no-one to say, you're doing good, you're doing bad. You can't have good if there's no bad, you can't have bad if there's no good.

Participants were also probed about their orientation to being Australians versus potential global citizenship, which generated a mixed response, as with other focus groups (see Fozdar, 2017). As was common, the initial response is to identify with Australia first, but then one or two people in the group comment that a global responsibility and identity is an alternative legitimate option. Here ‘Roger’ makes this argument, and ‘Boris’ supports it (contradicting his earlier statement that he is ‘a hundred percent’ Australian) using a saying from Islam that identifies a connection across difference, based on common humanity.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay. Can I ... is it possible to centre you all? Just, just one thing. Do you think people should think of themselves as Australians or citizens of a globe?

YOUNG MEN: Australians.

Boris: Australian, a hundred per cent.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

Roger: No, I think citizens of the globe. Citizens of the globe makes more sense because like ...

Pac: ... we’re all out here doing the same thing.

Roger: ... if you’re just going to say ‘citizen of Australia’ in a way that’s exclusive ...

YOUNG MEN: [mixed voices] ... everybody has a responsibility ...

Boris: Can I say something? The cousin of the Prophet Muhammad once said that ... he had a saying, “Your brothers are of two types: your brothers of faith [...] And equals of humanity”. [...] Like, we should be called citizens of the globe, we’re all ... like, no matter what race, religion, we’re all equals in humanity.

This saying was used several times in different contexts by participants. For example, it was raised in a discussion about helping people with disabilities, to argue for compassion for those less fortunate, with ‘James’ saying: “There’s an old lady that needs help with her shopping ... There’s a quote for [Arabic] ... That if you’re not equals, if you’re not brothers in faith, you’re equal in humanity. [...] So even if you’re ... even if they’re not the same faith as you, you’re still equal in humanity, and they deserve help. And if somebody’s unfortunate physically, all right, you help ‘em out, ‘cos one day, it’s gonna come back to you. It could be you, and that somebody could help you either physically, mentally, verbally, any way, you know. It’s gonna come back to you ‘cos once someone does good, it returns back to me and if you do bad it’s also going to backfire.”

This principle was again raised when discussing social cohesion:

James: Sorry, can I just add one thing? [...] when I'm saying you work within yourself and then build, build the connection, you have to ... obviously, if you want to unite you have to unite on something. You can't unite out of ... you can't falsely unite, you have to. So firstly, back to what he said, how we're equals in humanity, try and unite on your –
Abdul: Equality.

James: Exactly, on your common similarities. Cos you're equal in humanity, [...] there's many things that we could, we could unite on.

There were limits for some, however, in terms of the notion of “equals in humanity”. When asked about asylum seekers, and Australians' responsibility to them, the response was mixed. While James maintained the ‘equal in humanity’ line, Abdul is uncertain, evident in his rhetorical questions suggesting limits are necessary.

INTERVIEWER: So what about asylum seekers? Do you think we have a responsibility to be looking after asylum seekers?

James: Of course. Like we're saying, if you're not brothers in faith, you're equal in humanity. They're still your ...

Abdul: It's a very hard topic, cos to what extent? Like, if you gave everyone ... I'm not saying, I don't disagree, but I'm saying, if you gave everyone the opportunity to come in, can Australia accommodate 6.3 billion people?

Again, this perspective paralleled that of most other focus groups.

When asked about their vision for social cohesion, participants used another saying, emphasising the need to begin change from within and allow it to move out in a ripple effect.

Boris: [...] we should start building bridges with the[?] communities.

[...] **INTERVIEWER:** And how do we do that?

[...] **Pe Pe:** You start from the inside. You got to fix yourself –

Boris: Exactly. Fix yourself up before you start fixing other things.

James: Like they say, [Arabic] also says, has a nice saying, “When you want to start fixing a community, it's like throwing a pebble in a river.” When you throw a pebble in a river you find it's like, rings, and they start opening up a bit. You start with yourself, then you start with your

family, then your brother, your sister, then you start going in ... and [Arabic] [laughter]

[...]

Pe Pe: Like he was saying, add onto him, like how you have to fix yourself before you fix others; so individually you got to fix yourself. You start with your family, as he said; community, and then out of community, and then it goes on. Like ripples.

Others noted the best way to ensure social cohesion included encouraging multiculturalism, communicating across cultures, controlling the media to limit stereotypical generalisations, celebrating an annual 'Multicultural Day', and this notion of fixing oneself first to "ripple" out to others.

Participants were asked what their strongest identity is, and rather than use further direct quotes, I have produced two Wordle images to demonstrate how this group of young men talked about their strongest identity, and where they feel they belong. Wordle generates 'word clouds' from text, giving greater prominence in size and orientation to those words that appear more frequently in the source text – in this case, the transcript of collective responses. While these young men's strongest identity is very clearly Muslim, they feel they belong in Australia. Almost all responded "Australia", immediately, to the second question, while one said "everywhere".

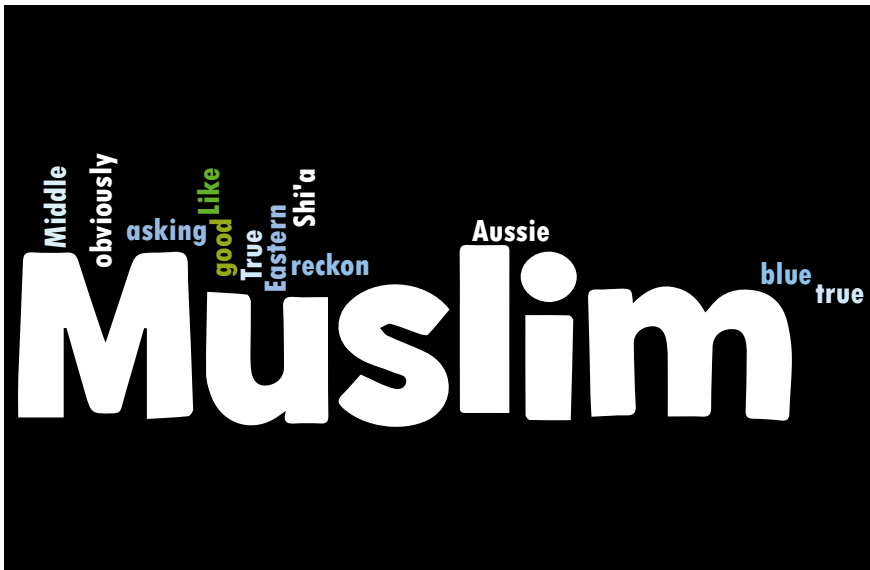


FIGURE 4.1 Wordle – "Can I ask what is your strongest identity?"



FIGURE 4.2 Wordle – “So where do you feel you belong?”

4 Discussion

The point to derive from the many extracts quoted, as well as the word clouds, is that these young men of Lebanese background, who identify as Muslims who belong in Australia, are very ‘Aussie’, very patriotic, very proud of Australia (as Abdul says, “Australia is the best country”); and their belonging is demonstrated in the fact that their responses to the focus group images were so similar to those of other more mainstream focus groups. These young men constantly use the term “we” when talking of Australia and Australians, demonstrating this identification. While they shared stories of discrimination, they challenged the right of some Australians to exclude and to represent themselves as speaking for all, and criticised the media’s negative representations of Muslims – that is, they pushed back against attempts to impose social exclusion. If looking for evidence of “Australian values” – their transcript is clear, they share these values; if looking for challenges to values, or evidence that Muslims are trying to undermine or change Australia, as was the stated concern among many other focus groups (Fozdar and Low, 2015) – there are none.

Interactionally the focus group was a nightmare to transcribe. The young men were horsing around constantly, teasing each other, snickering about cockpit jokes when the image of the airplane was shown, showing each other

pictures on their mobile phones, stuffing down the food provided, talking over each other, and generally behaving like young Australian men who are mates (a point Hage (2011) also notes in relation to the adoption of Australian working-class masculinities by second-generation Lebanese Muslim men). So it is unlikely that a strong 'social desirability effect' is behind their enthusiastic support for and identification with Australia – this did not appear to be a performance.

Where this group differed from many of the other focus groups was in their awareness of world events, particularly concerns about American imperialism, the situation in the Middle East, and war ruining families. But like others, their discussion of each image often begins positively, and then negative elements are noted. The thesis/antithesis format is clear – although, as with some other focus groups, some of the arguments are made collectively, with different participants finishing each other's sentences or simply agreeing with each other, demonstrating significant shared perspectives. Participants occasionally got into arguments about politics, and jokingly put these down to being "Arabs". There was also considerable pushback against discrimination and the presumptions and stereotypes of mainstream discourse, which were again collectively constructed by participants. Participants were particularly critical of the media; and they were more thoughtful, and more aware of world issues than many other groups. They could be described as proud nationalist multiculturalists, rooted cosmopolitans, or cosmopolitan nationalists (Dunn et al., 2016; Moran and Brett, 2011; Werbner, 2006), where the strength of their Australian identity was fundamentally bound up with pride in diversity and wide-scale acceptance (see Moran, 2011; Moran and Brett, 2011). They also were not 'seriously religious' in the stereotypical way Hage (2011:158) identifies as being constructed as threatening; rather, they reflect more closely the findings of Dunn and colleagues (2016) that there is little alienation among Muslims generally, and an orientation to integration rather than assimilation.

To conclude, I wish to apply Bourdieu's social field theory, particularly his concepts of habitus, field, doxa and cultural capital, to these results, which have thus far been presented rather prosaically. In particular, I draw on the work of Greg Noble and colleagues to understand and theorise how these young men recruit elements of the doxa from two fields, supported by the habitus and cultural capital they share from each, to generate ways of being in the world that demonstrate cosmopolitan nationalism in action.

Bourdieu's social field theory provides an analytic framework that understands social phenomena in terms of a number of interconnected concepts: field, habitus, and capital, and the less-discussed doxa. Bourdieu conceptualises social activity as practice that occurs between actors in social spaces that

he calls fields. Fields are autonomous spaces with rules and roles that inform social behaviour and distinguish them from other fields: in Bourdieu's (1992) words, they have their own "logic". A field is "a relatively autonomous network of objective relations between positions, a social space of institutions and forces with its own forms of cultural and social capital" (Noble, 2013, p. 351). In order to succeed within a field, one needs to understand the rules that govern social behaviour within it.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) extend the analogy of a field to that of a game, in that "it follows rules or regularities that are not explicit or codified" (p. 98). Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* – that which is taken for granted in any particular society – is perhaps related to this notion of rules of the game. *Doxa* limits what is thinkable and sayable (Bourdieu, 1972) and generates a sense of belonging: if we know what to think and what to say in a given field, we fit in – we belong. *Doxa* gives rise to common action (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992). Whether it is possible to argue against *doxa* is contested, but given Bourdieu's framework was designed to allow for social change and individual agency, it seems logical that a field's *doxa* can change through contestation from differing opinion.

The field is not experienced equally by all agents within it. Rather, a field assumes inequality between agents, due to the different positions they hold which are determined by their access to resources (capital) and their own dispositions (*habitus*). Fields overlap and are contested. Within social fields "groups of social actors, positioned within the field, struggle over particular kinds of stakes, drawing on particular kinds of resources" (Noble, 2013, p. 352). Fields are relations; their boundaries are fluid; and there is a subjective element to their construction and representation.

In his study of what he calls "ethnic *habitus*", Noble (2013) notes: "Fields are not simply adjacent or juxtaposed planes, they are imbricated and turn into each other in a kind of four-dimensional social space ... This field is not a one-dimensional plane of positions and relations, nor a struggle over a singular set of resources, but a multi-dimensional interface between the field of ethnic communities and the larger political field on which it is dependent" (p. 354). I would argue this is evident in the content and manner of expression of these young men's discussions.

While field is the structure and environment in which social activity occurs, *habitus* refers to the internalised dispositions held by agents within the field that influence their decisions and actions. It is essentially "the mental structures through which [individuals] apprehend the social world" (Bourdieu, 1989, 18). *Habitus* provides a framework that embraces subjective and objective realities:

by influencing how one perceives surrounding structures, the habitus influences how one chooses to engage with a particular social situation. Habitus combines “embodied dispositions”, a sort of internalised history which structures future practices through the process of socialisation (Tabar et al., 2010) – or as Noble (2013) describes it, habitus is “the system of durable and largely unconscious bodily dispositions which orients human actions” (p. 343).

One’s position within the field is determined by one’s capital, which refers to the tools, skills, knowledge and resources available to the individual to help them engage in the interaction. The ‘game’ of the field is played with capital: “kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230). Capital comes in many forms, social, cultural, economic and symbolic, and its value or worth is determined by the field. If an agent has access to capital that is valued in a field, they will typically succeed in the field.

In summary, Bourdieu’s theory recognises that social phenomena occur in, and are shaped by, their context (field), which is structured by doxa. The participation of agents is shaped by their habitus, access to capital, and the value the field affords to each. These are all dynamic, shaping and being shaped by each other.

Greg Noble and colleagues have mapped the ways in which Australian men of Lebanese descent bring a different habitus to the Australian context, enacting strategic hybridity, which includes a strong emphasis on respect (which can produce a “tough guys” macho persona, a “protest masculinity ... to compensate for hidden injuries of class and race” (Tabar et al., 2010)). They note that these men construct hyphenated identities, fashioning complex identities through “strategic repertoires of symbolic resources” (Noble and Tabar, 2002, p. 128). Lebanese-ness is found to offer these young men ontological security, unity/solidarity, and moral certainty, and is seen as a response to structural conditions (Noble and Tabar, 2002, p. 137). But they also demonstrate “strategic Australianness” (Noble and Tabar, 2002, p. 138), which may be assimilationist or transgressive depending on context, mobilised against marginalisation or the influence of restrictive cultures of origin. The result is a “double consciousness” of Lebanese young people to negotiate the “competing imperatives of national and ethnic identity” (Tabar et al., 2010, p. 169). The key point is that their identity is heterogeneous and hybrid, contradicting the simple multicultural assumption that members of ethnic communities retain a single ethnic identity. These hybrid identities and double consciousness are developed, Tabar and colleagues (2010) argue, in a process of dialogue with those who have the ability to recognise and validate their identity claims.

The data I have presented above demonstrates one side of this process. The focus group participants are using the existing doxa of mainstream Australian society (a doxa that privileges localism, nationalism, diversity with limits, and a limited cosmopolitanism (Moran, 2011; Skrbis and Woodward, 2007)). But significantly, an interesting feature is the ways in which, in some instances, these young men justify their positions using their specific cultural capital (such as Muslim and Arabic sayings about how to treat others). In doing this they are foregrounding the overlaps between what might bluntly be called the 'Australian' field and the 'Muslim' field, demonstrating how the doxa of each is far from incompatible, and enacting a habitus which clearly benefits from cultural capital that is relevant to both fields.

In the public sphere, discourse has emphasised a single Australian field and a single doxa (found in the Australian values statement for example) that implicitly does not include (or explicitly excludes) Muslims. These young men are challenging this notion, pointing to the overlaps between the fields of which they are a part. They are not simply adopting the relevant cultural capital of the mainstream field, converted into symbolic White capital (Hage, 1998). Instead, they are bringing over the field and doxa of Islam into the 'Aussie' field, using the cultural capital that is part of their habitus. Here we see an overlapping of the conventional Australian field with what has been identified as an "ethnic field". They do this using "strategies of differentiation and similarisation" (Tabar et al., 2010), differentiating themselves from elements of the Australian habitus that they see as exclusionary, and embracing others that they see as positive and reflective of Muslim values. But they are also just being Aussies – they are performing and communicating nationalism in the same way members of the other focus groups performed and communicated it. Thus, they are demonstrating what Audre Lorde (2013) argued was impossible: they are "using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house", if that house is seen as exclusivist versions of the Australian identity (see also Fozdar, 2008), while converting cultural capital from one field to another. And they do not demonstrate the awkwardness, the disjunction, that Noble's (2013) subject 'Michael' does when code switching. Their discourse, in which the linking of fields and doxa occurs, is apparently seamless. It may be because their habitus is that of second-generation Lebanese, whereas Michael was first-generation. However, Tittensor and colleagues (2020) also found second-generation participants sitting squarely on the margins, self-censoring and seeking solidarity outside mainstream Australia and online. This question thus requires further research.

What can be concluded then? First, these young men demonstrate the same rooted or limited cosmopolitan outlook other scholars identify as being

characteristic of Australian identity (Moran, 2011; Skrbis and Woodward, 2007) – the same orientation identified quantitatively in Dunn and colleagues' (2016) work showing migrants demonstrate openness to diversity and simultaneous national belonging. Second, their national identity is not seen by them as competing with their religious identity – the two are experienced as not only complementary but as coterminous. These young Muslim men simultaneously perform membership of the nation-state and of their religion, and see no disjunction between these. This contrasts with the young man from Yasmeeen's (2008) research who was quoted in the introduction to this chapter, and Hage's observations about the mis-interpellation, and ultimate "shattering" (Hage, 2011:162), experienced by second-generation Muslims when they are not "recognised" (Hage, 2011:160) as legitimate members of society, resulting in "assimilation fatigue" (Hage, 2011:159) that reinforces their marginalisation and sees them turning to other forms of solidarity (Hage, 2011; see also Tittensor et al, 2020).

If we return to the definition of social cohesion noted earlier, we see that the dimensions of sense of belonging, inclusion, legitimacy, attachment to place, commitment, affect and fellow feeling, shared values, and a common vision (Fourtier, 2008, 2010; Markus and Kirpitchenko, 2007) – are all evident in the excerpts analysed. These are the 'internal' dimensions, the ones these young men have some control over. The dimensions of equality, and opportunities for participation and recognition, are perhaps less obvious, suggesting the 'social cohesion' problem lies less with Muslims than the wider population. The literature surveyed earlier indicates that much of the fear of the Muslim Other in Australia is rooted in (mis)representations by the media, and by political leaders. This makes it difficult to break through the stereotypes and distrust. Greater education of media players, and less dog-whistling by both the media and key public figures, would go some way to addressing this issue. The rest can be done through greater interpersonal engagement across apparent cultural divides (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006) with what are clearly a pretty 'Aussie', fun, and thoughtful bunch of young people. These three elements would help with recognition of shared habitus and doxa, and would shift the two social fields even closer together, or at the least, engage in a more positive inter-field dialogue.

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New Spaces and New Domains

Tracing the Cultural Contributions of Australian Muslims

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Abstract

In 1921, a little over a hundred years ago, Australia's Muslim population of three thousand barely made a dent in Australian society. Fast forward to 2021: 813,392 Muslims call Australia home. While Muslims settled in Australia in the early 18th century, albeit in small numbers, it was the post-World War II period that truly spurred on the growth of the Muslim community. When once their contributions to Australian society were largely economic and socially based, Muslims in contemporary Australia – or perhaps the better term would be Australian Muslims – are now contributing in new ways, forming new spaces and domains of civic and social life. Australian Muslims are connecting directly with the Australian way of life, participating in the arts, and forming their own multicultural organisations. From poetry slams to writer's festivals to art museums, the Muslim community's rapid development and commitment to the Australian way of life is not only reflective of their resilience (Dunn et. al., 2015) but is also a testament of their ongoing contribution to Australian society. This chapter traces the historical presence and contribution of Muslims in Australia from the post-war period to the contemporary era and assesses the Muslim community's growth and contribution to Australia and the Australian way of life. The chapter contends that Muslims in Australia are embracing their unique Australian Muslim identities by engaging in, and developing, new creative and innovative spaces.

1 Introduction

In 1921, a little over a hundred years ago, Australia's Muslim population of three thousand barely made a dent in Australian society. Fast forward to 2021: 813,392 Muslims call Australia home (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022). While Muslims settled in Australia in the early 18th century, albeit in small numbers, it was the post-World War II period that truly spurred on the growth of the Muslim community. Where once their contributions to Australian society were largely economic and socially based (Haveric, 2019; Kabir, 2004;

Khatun, 2018; Stevens, 1989), Muslims gradually began to participate in the arts, engage in active citizenship, and form their own multicultural organisations (Ansari, 2019; Busbridge, 2013; Ozalp and Cufurovic, 2021; Peucker and Ceylan, 2017). But Muslims in contemporary Australia – or perhaps the better term would be Australian Muslims – are now contributing in new ways, forming new spaces and domains of civic and social life. From poetry slams to writers' workshops to art museums, the Muslim community's rapid development and commitment to the Australian way of life is not only reflective of their resilience but is also a testament of their ongoing contribution to Australian society (Dunn et. al., 2015). From a cultural history perspective, this chapter evaluates the evolution of Muslim cultural contributions in two distinct sections. Firstly, it contextualises both the history of Muslims' cultural development in Australia and their contemporary cultural expression within cultural theory, especially theories on popular culture. Secondly, it examines the shift from cultural development to individual creative expression to argue that Muslims in Australia are embracing their unique Australian Muslim identities by actively participating in and shaping new, creative, and innovative spaces and domains. This assessment positions the cultural endeavours of Australian Muslims within the realms of popular culture and individual artistic expression.

2 Muslim Cultural Development and Popular Culture as Creative Expression

Before we can explore how Australian Muslims seek new spaces and new domains to express themselves and their unique identity as Australians and as Muslims, we need to first understand 'culture'. According to Raymond Williams (1985), culture can be understood through three broad definitions. The first refers to aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual developments: the great poets, great philosophers, great artists of a time. The second definition refers to "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group or humanity in general" (Williams, 1985, p. 83), and this may include the celebration of particular holidays, religious and other festivals, sport and other tournaments, and literacy and other movements. The third definition aligns itself with intellectual and artistic activity – not developments, as the first definition suggests – where meaning emerges through textual and other means of creative expression, including art, writing, literature, and poetry (Williams, 1985, p. 83). These three stages of cultural expression have been present in the cultural development of

the Muslim community as a minority group in Australia. However, to understand how new spaces and new domains have emerged as avenues of cultural expression for contemporary Australian Muslims, we combine the second and third definitions to define culture as the lived practices of a group of people expressed through creative texts to convey a sense of identity.

Indeed, the cultural expression of a group of people suggests human agency, through the textual forms and practices used to convey a sense of identity; and so, by analysing how people express themselves outwardly through creative – or perhaps ‘popular’ – means, we can trace how culture is actively produced rather than passively consumed (Storey, 2015). Popular culture allows minority groups to reconstruct their identities through rearticulating their thoughts, feelings, and movements. For people who belong to a minority community, like Australian Muslims, their consumption of and participation in popular culture offers new insight into how their identities are reconstructed in a post-September 11 world. For example, a television series called *Here Come the Habibs!* that aired on Channel Nine in 2016 raised concerns about true representation: in the promotion of the show, the Habibs were caricatured to fit within White understandings of the Arab ‘other’ (Stratton, 2020, p. 216). More pointedly, unease emerged over the identity of the Habibs: were they Muslim or were they Christian? Sarah Ayoub (2016) captured these anxieties when she wrote that people were

concerned that this very rare occurrence of diversity on Australian screens is part of a ploy to condition the population into thinking that Australian Muslims have a right to be a part of our national story ... In some respects, I get it. These are troubling times. Those who don't know otherwise feel that humouring Middle Eastern stereotypes could fan the flames of tensions with Muslims.

Although she confirms that the Habibs are in fact Lebanese Christians and thus “nullifying concerns about Islamophobia”, these anxieties reveal the extent to which Australian Muslims feel the need to engage in new domains and new spaces to challenge not only the caricature of their identities, but also anxieties over their ‘Whiteness’, by reconstructing what it means to be Australian Muslim.

Indeed, popular culture is a site where “collective social understandings are created” (Hall, 2009b, pp. 122–123) – where meaning-making occurs to present to the world a particular version of oneself that conflicts with existing perspectives about who one is yet is true to one’s collective identity. What this means is

that relations of power shape cultural identity and self-expression, and so popular culture becomes more than a source of entertainment. It is the source for the construction of identity: the site where it takes place to be examined and understood by a collective and those outside of its immediate circle (Turner, 2003, p. 6). As Hall (2018, p. 360) argues, popular culture allows a collective to engage in meaning-making in opposition to “the power bloc” – that is, the economically, politically, and culturally powerful groups in society – in order to unite under a common connection (see also Bennett, 1986, p. 20). Australian Muslims create meaning through popular culture to redefine what it means to be Muslim living in Australia and claim agency over their identities. Some new spaces and new domains that allow for Australian Muslims to assert their agency include but are not limited to the Bankstown Poetry Slam, the Muslim Writers’ Festival hosted and organised by the Right Pen Collective, the Islamic Museum of Australia, and the Sweatshop Movement in Western Sydney, which will be discussed shortly.

This contemporary stage of cultural expression as individual creative expression for contemporary Australian Muslims has come about gradually. The initial stage of cultural development eventuated in the postwar period of community development; Muslims in Australia participated in what we call ‘cultural development’ projects – or ‘physical culture’. These cultural development projects, such as the building of institutions, community centres, and mosques, cemented their presence in Australian society. For postwar Australian Muslims, their objective was simple: to establish a presence and build a community in a new country where minorities were discriminated against yet, paradoxically, their cultural diversity welcomed by the wider community – or at least, tolerated. Indeed, the influx and settlement of Muslims hailing from Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Bosnia in metropolitan areas like Sydney and Melbourne necessitated the construction of Islamic societies and mosque building projects. Temporary community halls often served as venues for Friday prayers and Eid celebrations until large-scale mosques in places like Preston, Victoria, and Erskineville and Lakemba, New South Wales, were built to hold these crucial religious prayers and celebrations as well as fundraisers to unify the diverse and small Muslim community. These mosques became enduring cultural landmarks, affirming Islam’s presence in a country that rapidly transformed from a predominantly European-centric nation into one of multiculturalism (Ansari, 2022; Kabir, 2004). The efforts of postwar Muslims to engage with ‘cultural development’ projects sought to show the wider Australian community that they, too, could be Australian without sacrificing their religious and cultural identities. This cultural development differed significantly from earlier Muslim settlements,

like the Macassan fishers of the 18th century and the Afghan cameleers of the 19th century. The former engaged in trade with local Indigenous tribes along the northern coasts of Australia and did not desire any permanent settlement within the country. Still, such trade and commerce between Indigenous Australians and the Macassan fishers facilitated cross-cultural exchanges, leaving a lasting impact on Indigenous language, ceremonies, and traditions (Stephenson, 2007). The Afghan cameleers contributed more significantly to the economic development of Australia's regional areas and established small settlement spaces called 'Ghan towns'. These early Muslims were brought in as camel drivers to navigate the challenging terrain of the Australian outback, marking the beginning of a strong historical presence of Muslims, specifically the South Asian men from the North Western Frontier of India bordering on Afghanistan (Ansari, 2021; Stevens, 1989), however they were rarely welcome to mingle within the White population (Ali, 2020). Instead, many Afghan cameleers established relationships with Indigenous Australians and some married into their tribes to permanently settle into Australian society; some engaged in cultural development projects, albeit on a smaller scale – the mosque in Broken Hill is a key example – to mark their presence in Australian society, even if on the outskirts. Scholars such as Christine Stevens (2003) and Peta Stephenson (2010), among others, have demonstrated that these indentured South Asian men left an indelible mark on the Australian outback.

Although the postwar period saw the rapid growth of minority communities, including Muslims, Australian authorities intended this growth to help the Australian economy – Arthur Calwell's popular slogan 'populate or perish' comes to mind – and many Australians did not anticipate a permanent growth of minority communities within the nation's borders. And so during this period, the normal, natural, and universal equalled the White, heterosexual, and middle class, whereby other ways of being were seen as inferior to meaning making. Over the next few decades, these attitudes would shift with changing immigration policies and racial biases that prevented Muslims from truly feeling "Australian" (Ansari, 2019, 2020). For contemporary Muslims in Australia, cultural expression through popular outlets, such as those mentioned earlier, is a direct challenge to these assumptions. No longer are labels like the 'Muslim writer', the 'Muslim poet', or the 'Muslim artist' acceptable means of identification where the first term is used to qualify the second as a deviation from what is accepted as the normal category. Contemporary Muslims in Australia are claiming agency through cultural expression that allows them to *be* rather than to *not be*, and this process is forged through meaning-making. When once popular culture was "approached from a distance and gingerly, held at arm's length by outsiders who clearly lacked any sense of fondness for or participation

in the forms [that make up popular expression]" (Bennett as cited in Storey, 2015, p. 59), now it has become the means by which those outside the confines of society demand inclusion and the right to self-expression. For postwar Muslims living in Australia, engaging with popular culture was to engage with "cultural decline and cultural difference" rather than "cultural deference, regulation and control" through physical spaces (Bennett as cited in Storey, 2015, p. 59). That is, the tangibility of physical space suggested control and progress and was more important than the space for expression and creative participation that did not contribute directly to the urgent need for space and place that allowed Muslims to call Australia 'home'.

But much of this attitude was shaped by ideas around multiculturalism. In the period of the Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser governments, when immigration was at its height, an 'official' multiculturalism emerged that focused on group identity and establishment, based heavily on the preservation of cultural identity rather than cultural and creative expression through everyday interactions. Official multiculturalism was more about group identity – group membership – than people as individuals engaging in identity expression. As Jon Stratton (2020) argues, "the concern is not with people as individuals but with the group of which they are members. Official multiculturalism was focused on groups" (p. 214). Everyday multiculturalism, on the other hand, challenges this narrative and "explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations" (Wise and Velyautham, 2009, p. 2). While individuals are the focus in this narrative, they are seen attempting to make sense of their interactions with those within their same space to create culture and engage in cultural expressions through popular means. In light of this, Muslims felt confident in their collective identities in an environment that negotiated their right to exist. But contemporary Australian Muslims have since claimed their identity as Muslims and as Australians by occupying and participating in spaces that allow them to focus on 'being', as we will soon discuss in the subsection on Literature; it's the individual expression that takes precedence over collective identity while simultaneously reclaiming representations of their collective selves.

That is not to say that modes of creative expression did not have a place in the postwar Muslim community development; they certainly did, but in different ways. Postwar Muslims focused on education to strengthen communal bonds; they focused on print media to disseminate information on religion and encourage cross-cultural and cross-spatial communication; and they participated in halal markets and festivals to assert their presence as Muslims in Australia, enriching the Australian palate in the process. These efforts were

largely communally based and, much like mosques, centred on preserving religious identity and ties to a scattered yet still connected religious community of Muslims.

2.1 *Education and Media: Strengthening Communal Bonds*

The strengthening of the collective communal identity of the Australian *ummah* in the postwar period changed significantly with access to tertiary education and print media, which played pivotal roles in accelerating communal and cultural bonding among Muslims in Australia.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the Muslim organisations were keen to further the unification and consolidation of Muslim communities across Australia. Efforts towards the federation of the Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) were also first made in 1966 during the Australian Federation of Islamic Societies (AFIS). AFIS was an external federal body that was amalgamated in 1964. After a series of other developments, AFIS became the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) in 1976. Since then, Muslim students on campus established many Islamic societies across the various tertiary institutions in Australia, which further strengthened the Australian Federation of Muslim Student Associations (AFMSA). By 1981, the federation comprised 13 university-based MSAs across Australia. Fadlullah Wilmot, a convert student from Tasmania, along with Salman Harrahap, an international student from Malaysia, were instrumental pioneers who worked towards establishing the federation in 1967, and Salman was its first president in 1968. He was also the first editor of its first publication, *The Light Journal*, being active in 1968–69 (Ansari, 2019).

MSAs emerged as vital players in fostering a sense of community among Muslim students on Australian campuses. They organised conventions, conferences, and forums that provided platforms for Muslim youth to cultivate their identities and address the challenges of being a minority (Ansari, 2019). MSAs also contributed to cultural development through publications including newsletters, magazines, and journals. These publications raised awareness of issues relevant to Muslims in Australia and promoted Islamic teachings, becoming essential contributors to the unique Australian expression of Islam.

In a post-White Australia, the diverse Muslim community's use of print media for knowledge dissemination was an important step towards forging a collective, communal identity which assisted with the establishment of the Australian *ummah*. Printed materials encompassing newsletters, magazines, and newspapers were disseminated across Australian states and territories, and were seen as essential tools for disseminating knowledge about Islam and Muslims in Australia, including religious knowledge and practices.

Publications such as *The Australian Minaret* (founded in 1961), *The Light Journal* (1968), *Salam Magazine* (1975), *Insight Magazine* (1987), *Australian Muslim Times* (1992), and *Crescent Times* (2008) served as influential communication platforms, bridging communities with their home countries through bilingual papers in Arabic, Albanian, Turkish, Persian, Urdu, and Bosnian. Muslim migrants were urged in these periodicals to maintain their ethno-religious values but at the same time to learn the English language and the laws and customs of Australia, and to interact with Australians (Haveric, 2019, p. 58). The publications empowered Muslims in Australia to address their spiritual and religious needs and encouraged them to foster a collective Islamic identity (Ansari, 2019).

2.2 *Halal Market and Festivals: Enriching Australian Culture*

Apart from educational events and print media, the cultural formation of the Australian *ummah* was facilitated by the growth of the halal industry and market as well as Muslim holidays, further enriching collective cultural bonds. Muslims introduced the lucrative halal market to Australia, contributing to a diverse culinary landscape with items including Turkish kebabs and Lebanese bread. Food became a vehicle for adding flavour to the Australian palate. Efforts were also made to celebrate Muslim festivals collectively. The Multicultural Eid Festival (MEFF) originated in the early 1980s, evolving into a grand celebration of Australia's various ethnic cultures. In 1985 Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad OAM, a Muslim community leader, noticed along with his family that the communal Eid spirit was missing; he started the first small fair in the playground of a primary school (Australian MEFF Consortium, 2023).

Today, MEFF continues as Australia's first, largest and longest-running Multicultural Eid festival, welcoming thousands of people from over 35 communities with various exhibitions and food stalls, traditional cultural performances, free entertainment, and rides (Australian MEFF Consortium, 2023). These festivals have united the Australian *ummah* and become a focal event in their cultural calendar. MEFF has been visited by and continues to attract federal and local politicians, Muslim artists, and families.

In the postwar era, Muslim cultural formation was centred upon the various activities that forged the essential collective cultural identity; today, however, Australian Muslims are emerging to engage with a cultural movement that champions intellectual and artistic activity, where they are eager to express a cultural identity that did not exist, in a formal sense, during the postwar period of community development. They seek an identity that is about themselves as Australian Muslims; however, they define what it means to be Australian *and*

Muslim equally and at the same time, rather than an identity solely wrapped around being Muslim living in Australia.

3 New Spaces and New Domains

Raymond Williams (1977) aptly captured how dimensions of human experience take form through cultural expression to generate “structures of feeling” (pp. 131–132). Indeed, popular culture is generated through everyday multiculturalism because both rely on meaning-making and connection. Australian Muslims are thus seeking new domains and new spaces to engage in this process through cultural expression that once took a different turn, or meaning, for the postwar Muslim community. Williams (1977, pp. 131–132) draws the distinction as follows:

For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period. The relations between this quality and the other specifying historical marks of changing institutions, formations, and beliefs, and beyond these the changing social and economic relations between and within classes, are again an open question: that is to say, a set of specific historical questions ... We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity.

Although Williams’s central argument here is that “feelings” are crucial elements that belong to the historical record because they shape and are also shaped by human societies, he also stresses the importance of being present: of attuning oneself to one’s identity through thought that is felt within the depths of the individual. Feeling as thought allows individuals within a community to forge a sense of identity that speaks to their reality, and popular culture does just this. From poetry to art to literature, Australian Muslims have found new spaces and new domains to express themselves, assert their agency, and subvert representations about their identities; these contemporary spaces and domains allow Australian Muslims not only to express their deepest feelings and use their voices unapologetically, but also to *be* without constraint. Three key new spaces and new domains are discussed in this section: the

Bankstown Poetry Slam, the Islamic Museum of Australia, and the Sweatshop Literacy Movement.

3.1 *Poetry*

In the inner-Sydney suburb of Bankstown, poetry has captivated more than 500 people a month at the largest poetry slam in the Southern Hemisphere: the Bankstown Poetry Slam (BPS). Those who come attentively listen to poets and artists speak their truth and break stereotypes that surround Sydney's West. Founded in 2013 by two Australian Muslims, Sara Mansour and Ahmad Al Rady, BPS is a not-for-profit charity that hosts poetry slam events on the last Tuesday of every month at the Bankstown Arts Centre. Ten years since its inception, BPS has gained national recognition as the largest regular poetry slam in Australia, having featured renowned spoken-word poets including Rudy Francisco, Nate Marshall, Rupi Kaur, Omar Musa, Safia El Hillo, Luka Lesson, and Anthony Anaxagorou.

The city of Canterbury-Bankstown is a culturally diverse melting pot: its ethnic demographics range from Lebanese to Australian to Chinese to Vietnamese to Bangladeshi, and its affiliation with Islam accounts for more than seven times the national average (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021). And while BPS is of Bankstown, and its founders are from the suburb, too, its focus has always been on creating a new and open space for creative and cultural expression. On the Slam's significance, Mansour stated: "Often the Bankstown area is reported on in a negative light and when something good happens, no attention is paid to it. I guess part of the slam is to allow these young people to speak rather than be spoken about. My co-founder, Ahmad Al Rady, and myself decided to do a local poetry slam ..." (as cited in Fares, 2015). Mansour further stated that many who attend the monthly poetry slams do so because they feel "a lot of disconnection" from everyday society, which often places them on the "fringe" (as cited in Fares, 2015). It is still no surprise, then, that BPS has become a space where those from minority communities can express themselves in ways that redefine social narratives about who they are and who they should be. One attendee stated: "More than anything it's the freedom of expression for individuals who break the typecast ... [we] have our own stories ... [the slam] has opened people to an artistic expression they never knew they had" (as cited in Fares, 2015).

One initiative by BPS that highlights the importance of cultural expression is *Real Talk*, a high school program that uses spoken word poetry to "facilitate meaningful dialogue and empower young people to find their voice" (Bankstown Poetry Slam, n.d.). The program runs over six weeks and gives students an opportunity to engage with mentors through writing workshop

classes that prepare them for an interschool poetry slam. “I want to try and change what’s being taught in schools,” stated Mansour; “I feel like the poetry that’s taught is so irrelevant to youth today” (as cited in Fares, 2015). Topics such as racism, bullying, identity, and gender are explored – topics that generally allow for reflection and confrontation with reality. Indeed, literacy often operates “vis-à-vis difference, oppression, and marginalisation” (Alim, 2011, p. 133), and because spoken word poetry spaces exist in tandem with audience and community to cultivate a culture of listening and engagement, they allow poets to “engage in reflection, to make connections and to resist oppression” as a means of “visible activism through exploring their own identity, power, and agency, and seeing themselves as change agents” (Curwood and Jones, 2022, pp. 50–51; see also Muhammad and Gonzalez, 2016). Such is the power of engagement with popular culture cultivated from grassroots multiculturalism that one participant, Bilal Hafda, enthused: “It’s a space that is owned by the community, even though they might not be the ones who run the event. It’s the audience that makes me feel welcome every time I step into the Arts Centre ... The reason it’s such a respectful and safe space is that no one is trying to make everyone pick the same answer. It comes down to your personal experiences with it, whatever your journey with it is” (as cited in Rachwani, 2022).

It is not only vocal self-expression that allows minority groups like Australian Muslims to develop new ways of understanding who they are as they engage in spaces and domains that celebrate popular culture. Preparation plays a part, too:

The preparation that goes into each performance involves deep thought, planning and thorough practice, with a large proportion of participants reciting (almost performing) their poems without the use of notes to aid them ... Artists also often describe the process from planning to performing as cathartic and a release. The progression to performing was even described by one artist as “about how honest you can be to yourself”. Bankstown Poetry Slam has unintentionally caused its own participants to be taken on a detailed journey of self-reflection, all before they actually reach the point of self-expression on Slam night.

CUNNINGHAM, 2017

It is here in Bankstown, a suburb that writer Ian Lloyd Neubauer (2013) described as the “Middle Eastern ghetto terrorised by members of its community”, that BPS and its initiatives such as *Real Talk* invite a rainbow of cultures to celebrate their right to self-expression in ways that disrupt “stories of domination and resist oppression” to “retell the story about the person or

the group to which the person belongs in such a way as to make visible the morally relevant details that the master narrative suppressed” (Nelson, 2001, p. 7). As a medium of popular culture, spoken-word poetry allows Australian Muslims to express themselves and assert their individual and collective identity through meaning-making work, like self-reflection through preparation, and self-expression through the spoken word. In this way, BPS has opened up a space where the construction of identity can take place, to be examined and understood by a collective (Australian Muslims) and those outside of its immediate circle (the BPS audience). BPS is an example of how popular forms of creative expression invite an exploration of lifeworlds and experiences not seen through traditional narratives that often do not welcome interaction and understanding. As co-founder of BPS Ahmad Al Rady expressed: “I believe we all have stories, opinions, and experiences to share, that’s what makes us unique, and that’s why I believe poetry slams and spoken word is very important” (as cited in Searle, 2013).

3.2 *Art*

Against the leafy, semi-industrial backstreets of Thornbury, in Melbourne’s inner north, stands the Islamic Museum of Australia (IMA) – the first of its kind. The IMA presents the creative contributions of Australia’s Muslim community through art, history, and heritage. Founded in 2010 by Australian Muslim Moustafa Fahour, the IMA’s mission is to bridge the gap between past and present and to highlight the historical and contemporary relevance of Australian Muslim cultural contributions to Australian society and their own identities. The IMA’s mission statement reads: “The Islamic Museum of Australia provides educational and cross-cultural experiences and showcases the artistic and cultural heritage of Muslims in Australia and in Islamic societies abroad. It aims to foster community harmony and facilitate an understanding of the values and contributions of Muslims to Australian society” (Islamic Museum of Australia, n.d.). In the years since its founding, the IMA has created and hosted a number of exhibitions and initiatives and has become a central domain of Australian Muslim creative expression.

Right from the outset, the IMA reflects Australian Muslim identity: the veil of weathered steel, an iconic Australian material, welcomes visitors into the building – and hints at early Muslim Australia and the Ghantowns which had tin mosques and houses built by the cameleers. Enveloped by the veil of Corten steel, the building sits like a white glass box adorned with Islamic calligraphy and geometry juxtaposed against its raw wrapping. There is a prayer room that overlooks a billabong, and visitors can eat Arab-inspired sweets at a café near gum trees as they learn the origin of camels in the Australian outback.

On the importance of IMA's design, Moustafa Fahour reflected: "There was September 11 [bombings in New York]. Then there was the build-up of the Bali bombings and there were all these claims of people doing things in the name of Islam which were totally factually incorrect ... That build-up led me to say we need to do something about it, as Muslims, as Australian Muslims ..." (as cited in Percy, 2016). Moustafa's sister Wafa Fahour concurred, stating that the IMA and its design "means diversity, it means education, it means learning – it means seeing people walk [in] with one perception and walk out with a whole new one" (as cited in Percy, 2016). Unsurprisingly, the IMA has become a space where Australian Muslims can not only feel comfortable to express their identity but also engage in creative expression and meaning-making; here they can tell their own stories without apology and, in the process, challenge misconceptions about who they are and who they should be.

One initiative is the Australian Muslim Artists' (AMA) Art Prize, held every year to celebrate the creative hearts and minds of Australia's Muslims. The AMA Art Prize showcases "the diversity of the contemporary Muslim experience in Australia" (Abdulrahim, 2018). Indeed, as Williams (1977, pp. 131–132) argued, meaning-making work happens when one attunes themselves to their identity through their "feelings". Spaces like the AMA annual exhibition and prize, and mediums that emerge as artefacts of popular culture like art, allow Australian Muslims to engage in cultural self-expression in ways that were not prioritised in the postwar settlement period. One former finalist of the prize, Mysha Islam, expressed: "As Muslims, I don't think we have many platforms where we can portray ourselves as artists. But this exhibition [the AMA] has given me the courage to come out and show the world what I have created" (as cited in Fain-Binda, 2021).

Since the 1950s, art as an expression of popular culture (also known as 'pop art') has been a reaction against traditional fine art: one where artists challenged dominant discourses through their use of irony, humour, contemporary references, commentary on political events, and nostalgia, and invited the viewer to directly engage with and reflect on the meaning behind the art. Pop art emerged as an expression of everyday culture and of identity 'from below' that was rarely captured in traditional spaces and domains. For Australian Muslims, the AMA has emerged as a space where they can express themselves in very much the same way, using visual languages and techniques to express their identities as Australian Muslims – and some draw connections to the deep roots of the Muslim experience prior to European settlement. For example, Racquel Austin-Abdullah's *You Left Something Behind (Wangkumara Woman)*, featured in the 2018 AMA exhibition, explores the fusion of Indigenous Muslim identity. In her work, Austin-Abdullah has reconfigured textile into glass to

narrate an intimate story of her great-great-grandmother's experience as an Aboriginal Muslim woman and mother. This act of connecting the past with the present through the agency of material and making allows Austin-Abdullah to redefine narratives about what it means to be an Australian Muslim, to show that individual voices can make up a multitude of different Australian Muslim experiences not usually seen or discussed outside of engagement with cultural expression and mediums of popular culture (Abdulrahim, 2018).

Much in line with the objectives of pop art, artist and winner of the AMA 2021 prize Fatima Killeen explores irony through themes of human rights, conflict, and migration. Her artwork *The Crooked Narrative* is a collagraph print that shows a fused pomegranate and hand grenade against the backdrop of a traditional Islamic tile pattern. The pomegranate is believed to have sacred life-giving qualities (Fain-Binda, 2021) and when the French invented the grenade, they modelled its shape on the pomegranate; Killeen thus offers an artwork that "fuses a symbol of fecundity with an instrument of death" (Evans, 2023). Placing this symbol in red against the backdrop of a traditional Islamic tile pattern in blue, Killeen directly expresses her discomfort with the discourse of Australian politics on Muslims while also commenting on the everyday experiences of Muslims in Australia and around the world. "It's the continuous harassment towards the Middle East and African countries. There is an unfairness," she stated. "You feel a derogatory attitude towards the Middle East and Arab countries and nations" (as cited in Evans, 2023).

The act of creating and making and engaging with popular culture allows Australian Muslims to assert their own agency and redefine narratives around their identity as Muslims, and the IMA is a valuable space for such means of cultural expression. In 2014, when the IMA officially opened to the public, Moustafa Favour made its intentions clear: "What better way can we showcase what Islam is, and the positive contributions Muslims have made to civilisation, and more importantly to Australia?" (as cited in Webb, 2014). Seven years later, he maintained the same principle and mission of the IMA when he stated: "There's a place to document people's culture and promote social cohesion, through art ... [and] you can be from different countries, you can have different backgrounds, but you're also Australian, and you can have the Australian Muslim identity as well" (as cited in Fain-Binda, 2021).

Away from the AMA Art Prize, the IMA also encourages Muslim youth to visit and reflect on its permanent and occasional exhibitions. For example, students from Ilim College in Melbourne's north feel the pressure of being young in Australia amidst growing prejudices against Muslims, and stereotypes about them. On the permanent exhibits in the IMA that showcase general Muslim history, one student commented, "I didn't know about the university – that

Muslims were the first to create the university in the world”, while another added, “I learned that the first man who flew was a Muslim, I never knew that before” (as cited in Percy, 2016). For Moustafa Fahour, the permanent exhibitions are a way to break down stereotypes and help youth understand their place and space in Australian society, and within the broader civilisational narratives: “We’re fighting a force which is online which is where the community need to get together to connect with the youth to show them what Islam truly is versus what’s been falsified” (as cited in Percy, 2016).

Above all, the IMA is a space that showcases the talent of Australian Muslims – to show “what kind of art is Down Under” (Puvanenthiran, 2014) – and to celebrate not just artistic expression that transcends boundaries and challenges perceptions (Cheong, 2023), but also the meaning-making work of cultural expression: new ways that Australian Muslims are asserting their sense of self and agency, and the ways they are seeking new spaces and domains, like the IMA, to speak their truth. It is the IMA’s focus on cultural diversity and social cohesion expressed through art and education that makes it a central space of engagement with popular and cultural expression (Chua, 2014).

3.3 *Literature*

American author, Black feminist, and cultural theorist bell hooks once argued in 1997: “I think that we cannot begin to talk about freedom and justice in any culture if we are not talking about mass-based literacy movements. Because I think that ... the degrees of literacy determine so often how we see what we see, how we interpret it, what it means for our lives ...” (p. 8). It would be this quote by bell hooks that would inspire Michael Mohammed Ahmad to establish the Sweatshop Literacy Movement in 2012.

With a focus on, and a home in, Western Sydney – one of Sydney’s culturally and linguistically diverse regions, “the right place to tell the most exciting and complex and original stories about who we are as a nation” (Ammenhauser and Ahmad, 2022) – Sweatshop is devoted to empowering First Nations people and people of colour through reading, writing, and critical thinking. It is a domain that has provided a safe space for people, including Australian Muslims, to enhance their literacy while also developing their voice as a “revolutionary gesture”: the former is about understanding representation of the ‘other’ while the latter is about creating alternative representations that challenge dominant narratives of minority groups and communities (Ammenhauser and Ahmad, 2022). As Ahmad (2016) writes: “Degrees of literacy define our ability to be critical of social systems (which may be racist, sexist, homophobic and or classist) and to create alternatives to these systems, specifically through critical consciousness, critical discussion and artistic self-representation”.

Indeed, literature – much like poetry and art – offers alternative perspectives to experiences; it provides freedom for cultural expression that aligns with one's sense of self and that lies outside dominant discourses about one's identity. Literature allows meaning-making to take place where minority groups, like Australian Muslims, can create complex and empowering representations of themselves – to allow themselves to *be*. Scholars including Natalie Kon-Yu (2016) and Claire Squires (2017) have observed that the Australian literary space and its publishing institutions are overwhelmingly White spaces, devoid of true representation and inclusivity of both gender and race, which begs the question: who has the right to tell the stories of minority groups and whose voices do we hear? In exploring this double standard like this one that shapes the Australian publishing industry, albeit from a gendered perspective, Joanna Russ (1983) wrote: “The trick in the double standard of content is to label one set of experiences as more valuable and important than the other” (p. 40).

On February 11, 2023, children's author Hazel Edwards took ownership of her entitlement to say: “It seems to be the prevailing literary attitude is that I must not write of other cultures in which I was not raised ... Loud voices from ‘minority’ or ‘unrepresented’ cultures are claiming that the only people entitled to tell or review their stories must come from that culture ... I've always used diverse characters from varied backgrounds and ages in all my stories. As a 70-ish, white grandmother, I find this diversity is increasingly being challenged” (Edwards, 2023). A few days later, Australian Muslim librarian and freelance writer Özge Sevindik Alkan (2023) tackled this double standard of privilege and representation when she responded: “A newspaper published her column defending her right to write from any perspective she wants. Be it from an Indigenous, a Muslim, a transgender, a refugee, or a hippo. Yes, she put us together in the same category as the zoo animal ... so she can show off how diverse, how culturally appropriate, how respectful her writing is ... She didn't care about content; she wanted the cover with the smiling hijabi child on it for her PR”.

The use of one's privilege to represent minority communities, and the Australian literary industry's complicity in it, is one reason why spaces and domains like the Sweatshop Literacy Movement are crucial for representation, for agency, for giving a voice. Although the 2021 Census ranked Islam as the second largest religion in Australia (ABS, 2021), Australian Muslim writers and artists are still heavily underrepresented in Australian art and literature. Sweatshop provides a space where authors from minority backgrounds can assert their own agency to rewrite the narrative and take ownership over their identities. Sweatshop not only champions minority voices from ethnic backgrounds but also places a focus on the problem of gendered representation in

the Australian literary space. Susan Sheridan's (2011) study of postwar women writers found that women were invisible in the Australian literary space, and when they did occupy the space, they attracted little critical attention; their works were often relegated to the category of popular fiction at a time when 'serious' literary fiction was prized. In the contemporary literary space, the same occurs. In 2009 and 2011 respectively, the shortlisted authors for the Miles Franklin Literary Award – one of Australia's most notable literary prizes – were then all male, suggesting "unconscious or even subconscious ideas and dispositions that underpin the production and reception of literary texts in Australia" (Dane, 2020, p. 5).

In 2018, Sweatshop released a new program called the Collective for Diverse Women, also known as Sweatshop Women Collective, to give women from minority communities and women of colour a space to express themselves unapologetically. The program runs a series of workshops in Parramatta, facilitated by Australian women authors of colour including, but not limited to, Michelle de Kretser, Randa Abdel-Fattah, Shakira Hussein, Maryam Azam, Sarah Ayoub, Roanna Gonsalves, and Sweatshop editor and general manager Winnie Dunn, who then put together a publication celebrating their voices. Two volumes have been published since the program's inception. In the foreword of *Volume Two*, Ruby Hamad (2020, p. xii) writes:

Sweatshop Women is a book for readers, for writes and for anyone who has craved a different kind of narrative. Amidst the howls of 'political correctness gone mad' and 'go back to where you came from', and despite the petty accusations that marginalised people have nothing of literary value to offer, these women just go ahead and do it. Like Volume One, this book is a testament to the importance of stories – of seeing what is possible, what is being done, and what has yet to be done. The women whose work features in this volume are first, second and third generation immigrants, they are Indigenous, they are religious, they are secular, they defy singular or easy categorisation.

One Australian Muslim author, Ferdous Bahar, owes much of her writing success to the Sweatshop Women Collective program. On her experience with the program, Bahar said:

I realised it was a space that would not only drastically improve my writing skills and publishing know-how but a space that would clarify my overall purpose and direction in creative writing ... [and] truly, in the current political climate I think it is more important than ever before that

we project the voices of people from Indigenous, migrant and refugee backgrounds. I am grateful for the opportunity to be one of those voices and bring attention to the subtle forms of racism that I have experienced. I hope that my work emboldens other women, especially Muslim women from immigrant backgrounds, to call out offensive behaviour when they encounter it and to unapologetically express their faith.

University of Sydney, 2019

Projects like the Sweatshop Women's Collective, like many of the other initiatives and aims of Sweatshop, are about empowerment. It is a space that allows Australian Muslim women, and women of colour in general, to subvert narratives and offer positive and more nuanced representations of their identities – especially in an industry that often groups minority women into a homogeneous literary category, obscuring their voices and their chance to participate in meaning-making through cultural expression. It is no surprise, then, that the Sweatshop Women Collective, funded by Create NSW, drew in the biggest number of workshop participants upon its launch in 2018. Winnie Dunn writes that the reason why “there’s a huge hunger for projects like this [is] because a lot of Australia’s media and arts culture don’t provide the space for marginalised people to tell their own story” (as cited in Chung, 2019).

However, while Sweatshop is one of the largest organisations that provides a safe space for minority communities – including Australian Muslims – to express themselves, other organisations and festivals have provided such a platform, too. In February 2022, the Sydney Muslim Writers' Festival was launched in Bankstown, featuring prominent Australian Muslim writers including: Amani Haydar, who was awarded the Victorian Premier's Award for Non-Fiction for her memoir, *The Mother Wound*; Michael Mohammed Ahmad, who was nominated for the Miles Franklin Award for *The Lebs* and *The Other Half of You*; Greens Senator Dr. Mehreen Faruqi, who is the author of a memoir *Too Migrant, Too Muslim, Too Loud*; Sara Saleh, who was the first poet to win both the *Australian Book Review's* Peter Porter Poetry Prize (in 2021) and the *Overland* Judith Wright Poetry Prize (in 2020), and has released her debut novel *Songs for the Dead and the Living* in 2023; and self-published children's author Farah Yaghmour Elsaket. This festival came a year after the launch of the very first Australian Muslim Writers' Festival in 2021. Where Australian Muslim writers in earlier periods of Australia's history wrote travelogues, spiritual newsletters, journal articles, and letters to the editors, Australian Muslim writers in the contemporary period have broken into the Australian literary and publishing industry in unprecedented – albeit still limited – ways. Their pursuit of literature often centres on constructing an identity that defines who

they are on their own terms, and attempts to engage in cultural expression through popular mediums to produce more meaningful work.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the cultural history of Muslims in Australia is a testament to their enduring resilience and profound contributions to the nation's multicultural fabric. Australian Muslims have played a pivotal role in shaping the country's cultural landscape. They began as traders and cameleers, and over time, they have established mosques, educational institutions, and print media. In doing so, they have not only enriched their own community but also fostered a sense of unity and understanding within Australian society. The post-World War II era marked a significant turning point as changes in immigration policies welcomed a diverse range of Muslim migrants to Australia. This period, marked by both discrimination and cultural exchange, reflected the evolving dynamics of Australian society and its transformation from a European-centric nation into a multicultural one. The multifaceted contributions of Australian Muslims, spanning education, media, the halal market, and festivals, have left an indelible mark on the nation's cultural landscape. This unique journey has not only celebrated diversity but also created a bridge between diverse backgrounds while cherishing their shared faith. This paper has highlighted the evolution of their activities, particularly from the postwar period to the present day. Contemporary Muslim sentiments find expression in new realms such as poetry, art, and literature, representing a significant transformation in the community's cultural output and contributions. These new creative domains convey the unique sensibilities of the Muslim community. In the face of prevailing negative narratives, contemporary expressions by Muslim Australians serve as acts of resilience and protest against global and national prejudices seeking to dehumanise them.

The cultural landscape of Muslim Australians extends beyond well-known landmarks such as 'tin mosques,' city mosque construction projects, and the thriving halal market. In the modern era, these communities actively refine the expression of their faith, spirituality, and unique Australian identities. Embracing a rich diversity of backgrounds, including Afghans, Bosnians, Turks, Arabs, Chinese, and others, they find common ground in their shared faith and sense of Australian identity, enriching the broader Australian cultural tapestry. Contemporary Muslim Australians are making substantial progress in various creative domains, such as in poetry, art, and literature as this chapter has explored. But they have also made progress in other domains within the arts,

such as film, performance art, photography and music. Since these were not all within the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that there's much more to Australian Muslim cultural expressions than this one chapter can describe. These creative expressions, which may have faced limitations in previous decades, now flourish as powerful means through which Australian Muslims assert their identities, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to Australia's diverse cultural fabric.

The evolving landscape of Muslim cultural expression in Australia is a profound response to the challenges of ongoing Islamophobia. These expressions demonstrate the resilience of Muslim Australians and their commitment to shaping a more inclusive, diverse, and harmonious society. As they continue to enrich Australian culture with their creativity, their voices, literature, and artistic expressions become integral contributions to the ongoing narrative of unity in diversity within the nation.

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Millennial Muslims in Lebanese-Australian Literature

Pure and Vernacular Religion in the Bildungsromane of Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr

Ibrahim Abraham

Abstract

Contemporary Lebanese-Australian *Bildungsromane* shed light on the complexity and diversity of Muslim identity, belief, and practice in contemporary Australia. Focusing primarily on the ambiguously autobiographical work of Omar Sakr and Michael Mohammed Ahmad, and drawing on the literary theory of Franco Moretti and the sociology of Olivier Roy, this chapter argues that millennial Muslims are coming of age into unstable societies and identities. As contemporary Lebanese-Australian literature bears witness to the entropy of vernacular religious practices, Islam becomes fragmentary, individualistic, and illusive; and as contemporary Australian culture comes under the influence of American politics of recognition, millennial Muslims oscillate between racialised collective identities and the hegemonic politics of self-emancipation in which the individual is sovereign overall.

1 Introduction

A strong body of contemporary Lebanese-Australian literature sheds light on the complexity and diversity of Muslim identity, belief, and practice in Australia. Focusing on the ambiguously autobiographical work of Omar Sakr and Michael Mohammed Ahmad, and drawing on the literary theory of Franco Moretti and the sociology of Olivier Roy, this chapter argues that Australia's millennial Muslims are coming of age into unstable societies and identities. This contemporary Lebanese-Australian literature bears witness to the entropy of vernacular religious practices as families and ethno-religious communities fragment, through both the dysfunction of poverty and the mobility of the multicultural welfare state. Here lies the "pure religion" theorised by Roy (2010): rational and universal in its rhetoric, picking at the insecurities and

inadequacies of young men raised in provincial and patriarchal cultures whose patriarchs may have gone missing through migration.

The key texts in this chapter can be categorised as *Bildungsromane*: coming-of-age novels, or novels of formation and development. Dealing with the fundamental modern tension between individual agency and social structure, the *Bildungsroman* is the most sociological of literary genres. In taking a sociological approach to these ambiguously autobiographical novels (autofictions), I follow Eagleton's (1988) "pragmatic" approach to the sociology of literature, by recognising that it is possible to locate various readings and rankings of values and contents in any text, and his "realist" approach to the sociology of literature, by recognising literary texts as socially situated. The texts in question here are created in specific literary fields, or cultural worlds, subject to sponsorship and many of the other institutional influences Bourdieu (1996) recognises in his influential work on creative practice. I also take inspiration from Sneja Gunew (2018) on the relationship between interviews, ethnographic data and other cultural texts, for these autofictions resemble (auto)ethnography. Arguing against the privileging of interviews in research on multicultural societies, Gunew argues that literature expands the social picture. Since social scientists have long recognised that interviews are forms of performance anyway, I concur.

There is, moreover, something significant about reading *Bildungsromane* as autofiction in this context, because an important cultural shift witnessed in these texts is toward expressive individualism and sincerity, away from the interchangeability of individuals in communities. It is here that writers make themselves most useful. For even if we argue, after Charles Taylor (1989), that expressive individualism is hegemonic in the West, making us all expressive individualists of one kind or another, or that cultural values are rising from lumpen depths rather than descending from Romantic heights, there is still something notable, even avant-garde, in writers undertaking this reflective work. The *Bildungsroman* genre allows an individual subject to represent a generational transition such that the authors of *Bildungsroman* autofiction may be both the subject and object of this process.

This chapter begins by introducing and contextualising the work of Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr, noting their many similarities but crucial differences. The focus then shifts to the *Bildungsroman* genre, drawing on Franco Moretti to explain why Sakr's and Ahmad's autofictions embody the sociological strengths of the genre. Finally, the chapter applies Olivier Roy's heuristic of pure religion and vernacular religion – the latter concept adapted from Leonard Norman Primiano and Jenny White – showing the unstable world of religious belief and identity in Australia's multicultural suburbs.

2 Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr

This chapter engages with the creatively ambiguous autobiographical fiction of Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr, two millennial male authors born to low-income Muslim migrants in Western Sydney, home to the majority of Australians of Lebanese birth and descent. The primary focus will be four autofictions: Ahmad's 'Bani Adam' trilogy – *The Tribe* (2014a), *The Lebs* (2018), and *The Other Half of You* (2021) – and Sakr's *Son of Sin* (2022), furnished by some discussion of Sakr's poetry and the authors' shorter publications. Some of these shorter publications engage a wider field of millennial Muslim Lebanese and broader Arab-Australian writers, wielding critical knowledge of representational practices and the politics of diaspora. This diaspora began to form in Australia in the 1880s, when primarily Christian immigrants from what is now Lebanon first arrived, and immigration increased with the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s, including a far higher proportion of Muslims (Batrouney and Batrouney, 2019).

This Lebanese Muslim diaspora has been central to three significant 21st-century challenges to the notion of Australia as a successful multicultural society in which retaining one's minority ethnic and religious culture has been treated as no impediment – indeed, as a pathway – to social inclusion. All three crises appear in the autofictions analysed in this chapter. The first was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which heightened suspicion of Australian Arab and Muslim individuals, and their communities as potentially harbouring radicals (Poynting, et al., 2004). This undermined the sense of national security which multiculturalism likely requires (Kymlicka, 2007). Secondly, in 2001 and 2002 multiple sexual assaults of non-Lebanese women and girls were committed in Sydney by groups of young men of Lebanese Muslim background. Some media coverage of these crimes cast blame on the nominally shared ethnic and religious culture of the offenders, speculating that victims were targeted due to ethnic or religious animosity, or a specifically Muslim misogyny (Poynting, et al., 2004). Thirdly, the Cronulla riots of 2005 were a crisis in which violence erupted between young men of Lebanese background and young male surfers of largely Anglo-Celtic background, over several nights in and around the beaches of southern Sydney. An example of the youthful subcultural beachside conflicts made famous by Cohen (1972/2002), the violence was also conceivably a "landmark" crisis in social cohesion (Collins, 2007), relatable to relatively contemporaneous riots involving Muslim minorities in northern England and peripheral Paris (Colombo, 2015).

Sakr and Ahmad are part of this Lebanese diaspora, but in a complex and open way, for however uncomfortable they may find Australia – not least

because of the challenges to Lebanese-Australian belonging occasioned by the three cases cited above – there is no sense that Lebanon is their one true home (Bayeh, 2015, pp. 5–6). As Sakr (2023a, p. 91) expresses it in a dreamlike poem inspired by an article by Lebanese-Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2020), they belong to the diaspora of “a country that cannot keep its children”. One of the many commonalities between Ahmad and Sakr is the inspiration they draw from Hage, both as a Lebanese-Australian role model and as a radical critical theorist of Australian society. Hage has spoken of the “love” he has received from authors affiliated with Sweatshop, the Western Sydney literacy movement Ahmad established (Saleh, 2023), which republished Hage’s influential early books (Hage, 2023).

Sakr and Ahmad certainly have their differences, however. Sakr is of Lebanese and Turkish ancestry – although he identifies very strongly as an Arab. He is also Sunni, primarily a poet, and identifies as bisexual and queer, a major theme in his work. Ahmad is known for his leadership of the Sweatshop movement; his work is much more concerned with heterosexual masculinity; and he is Alawite, a Muslim minority predominantly present in Syria and Lebanon, and their diasporas – the titular “tribe” in the first volume of his trilogy (Ahmad, 2014a). Alawism may be described as “a mystical version of Shi’ism”, syncretised with the neighbouring beliefs of its region (Friedman, 2010, pp. 70–71). A relatively recent report (El Matrah et al., 2014) implies a contemporary population of at least 30,000 Alawites – or Alawi – in Sydney, who began arriving with other Lebanese Muslims in the 1960s; but the report observes that even today, “so little is actually known about the Alawites to outsiders” (p. 13) given the persecution of the Alawites and the esotericism. Although another Alawite Australian writer, Ruby Hamad (2019), met some non-Muslims fascinated by her supposedly secretive sect, differences in Islamic theology often appear “blurred or pedantic” (Bahfen, 2010, p. 220) to non-Muslim Australians, and no doubt to many Muslims themselves.

Regardless of their nominal religious differences, Ahmad and Sakr emerge from a very similar social environment, share socioeconomic origins and political positions, and write with similar candour about the poverty and dysfunctionality of their families and communities. Despite writing against the backdrop of the social crises cited above, they eschew any idea of counteracting media (mis)representations with purely positive portraits. Both writers also emphasise the creativity of their autofiction. While insisting upon the authenticity of lived experience, neither wishes to be considered a mere memoirist. In interview with George Mouratidis (2021), Ahmad argues that dominant-culture readers are wont to read the autofiction of cultural minorities as “a diary entry, and then they just interpret our work as personal. I’d like to be seen as an artist first: I have a doctorate in creative arts.”

This creativity contains multitudes, because each author's autofictional alter ego – Ahmad's Bani Adam and Sakr's Jamal Smith – is himself a young creative. Inspired by Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese-American poet, Bani is a beret-wearing Romantic – until a classmate throws the beret out a window (Ahmad, 2018, p. 23). Sakr's alter ego is creative in a different way, a voracious reader and scribbler; his creativity is darker, twisting towards the neurotic and horrific. Jamal sees *djinns* (genies) and a university campus transformed into Guantanamo Bay. Reviewing *Son of Sin*, Thompson (2022) criticises Sakr for such flights of magical realist fancy in a work of “gritty” or dirty realism, complaining “it's unclear whether it is real or imagined”. Yet *djinns* dwell within the “horizon of intelligibility” (Roy, 2010, p. 114) of Jamal's community. “Dirty realism, supposedly, really is real”, Paul Dawson (1997, p. 120) argues in his analysis of the grungy genre in Australia, but representing some aspect of youth subculture grants it “substantial sociological importance” (p. 123). If the dominant-culture reader doesn't know whether Jamal's *djinns* are perceived as real or imagined – in other words, if *they* really believe this stuff – consider the complexity of Australia's Muslim subcultures represented.

A final point of commonality between Sakr and Ahmad is their shared sense of embattled marginality within Australia's multicultural creative industries and cultural institutions. This is despite objectively appearing to be successful products of Australia's multicultural welfare state that, since the 1970s, has facilitated cultural retention and expression as vehicles of social integration and upward mobility. Arab-Australian literature, *qua* Arab-Australian literature, is defined by its place within this multicultural field (Nikro, 2013), and Ahmad and Sakr's publications carry multiple imprimaturs of the multicultural state's funding bodies. For example, Ahmad's (2020) edited collection, *After Australia*, which imagines beyond the multicultural Commonwealth, credits funding from local, provincial, and federal levels of government. While one could argue, following Bourdieu (1996), that such sponsorship saves the country's creatives from a far crueller master than the multicultural culture industry – the market – such a view is not entirely congruous with Sakr's conviction that Australia is antagonistic to his existence as an Arab and a Muslim, nor the suspicion of multicultural institutions in Ahmad's autofiction. In *The Lebs*, a school principal named Whitechurch and a manipulative community arts executive named Guy Law stand in for the system – race, religion, gender, and the state are stacked against Bani and his community (Ahmad, 2018).

This anxiety is given form through the influence of Hage, whose work allows minority writers to theorise their own marginality, as an ironic form of empowerment. His key concept is whiteness as a measure of centrality in Australian society, an expression of the cultural dominance over those he terms “Third World-looking people” (Hage, 2023, p. 38). Hage draws heavily on

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of fungible forms of capital – cultural, social, symbolic – that allow one to navigate certain social spaces. One can accumulate various forms of capital to be whiter than one is, such as Jamal's family in *Son of Sin* attempting to cultivate national capital by changing their surname to Smith (Sakr, 2022). Hence whiteness overlaps with broader notions of power, such that multiculturalism does not challenge what Hage (2023) would see as Australia's "White Nation" ideology. This theorising of one's own marginality is integral to the creativity in these autofictions which resemble autoethnography. The authors' lives are their data but they are obliged to theorise that data, like ethnographers using data from the lives of others. The critically theorised nature of these autofictions complements the narrative arc of the *Bildungsroman*, to which we now turn.

3 *Bildungsromane*

Often termed the coming-of-age novel, a more accurate translation of *Bildungsroman* is novel of formation, with the implication of education and development of the self. The autofictions in focus in this chapter emphasise two elements of the *Bildungsroman* genre, drawn out in Franco Moretti's (1987) classic study of the genre, both of which are essentially sociological. The first is the notion of a young person coming of age into a different kind of society and a different kind of subjectivity than the previous generation. Non-modern societies do not produce such narratives, because coming of age is then a process of reproduction. Even if this does not go smoothly, there is no ambiguity in how the narrative should end. In perpetually changing modernity such socialisation-as-reproduction would be socialisation into a disappearing social system and lead to quixotic comedy. Imagine Bani, wearing his beret, wooing the women of Western Sydney with the poetry of Kahlil Gibran – a strategic anachronism in his own time – but never maturing beyond this (Ahmad, 2018). Moretti (1987) offers a useful pointer, referencing migration: when the old social system fractures, "the countryside is abandoned for the city, and the world of work changes" (p. 4), then youth become a problem.

Borrowing a phrase from W.E.B. Du Bois, Moustafa Bayoumi (2008) posed the question to Arab-American youth, after the September 11 attacks: "how does it feel to be a problem?" Ethnic minorities – or "Third World-looking people" – are similarly positioned as a social problem in Hage's (2023) theorisation of Australia. Within the *Bildungsroman* genre, however, youth is the perpetual problem. Modern youth is that liminal period on the cusp of something else; it involves "uncertain exploration of social space" (Moretti, 1987, p. 4).

Sakr depicts the culture shock of university life for low-income, first-in-the-family students, the trauma – in the words of another brilliant but perpetually embattled Australian poet, Les Murray – when he “stepped over a social line and first encountered the middle class and fell flat on my face” (Kinsella, 2001, p. 192). In a moment of shameful realisation of his family’s dysfunction, “even the flimsy illusion of middle-class living provided by share houses in the city had ruined him” (Sakr, 2022, p. 134).

The *Bildungsroman* genre suggests that experiences of uncertain spaces are not the reserve of class migrants, however. Youth in modernity expands imaginative capacities in ways that rub against any older generation, leading to ambitions and expectations that set up much of the genre’s drama – the tension between interior and exterior, individual and society. We should nevertheless remember the different habitus or forms of capital that youth seek to mobilise. Illustratively, Bayeh (2023) observes Bani’s mobility around Sydney as the trilogy develops, as he hardly stays put in Western Sydney. However, she underemphasises his discomfort in many new spaces and his retreat to places of comfort, like fast food restaurants.

In these experiences we see the second essential element of the *Bildungsroman*: youth as the most important stage of one’s life. This, Moretti (1987, p. 3) argues, is profoundly modern, for in classical literature heroes were adults; in the *Bildungsroman*, heroes are youths. Often unpromising youths. This is most apparent in the English *Bildungsroman*, which, Moretti (1987, pp. 191–192) jokes, reflects English democracy in its absence of heroics, replacing them with a desire to dull the edges of extremes and come to tolerable consensus. We see the same thing in fairy tales, beginning with the mistreatment of the unpromising protagonist (Moretti, 1987, p. 182), and the same unprepossessing everyperson is a feature of contemporary fantasy, whether as Harry Potter or Peter Parker.

The everyperson abides in Ahmad and Sakr’s autofictional alter egos. Ahmad’s Bani Adam, ‘children of Adam’, references a medieval Persian poem by Saadi and signals a patriarchal challenge – will the children of Adam honour their ancestor, the first man in a new world? Bayeh (2023, p. 643) suggests Ahmad may also be alluding to *adab*, literature and culture, with Bani as an *adib*, someone cultured and well read. On this reading, Bani is built for *Bildung*, which the character grows into by the end of his trilogy, but this undermines the narrative arc, I will argue below. Another probable intertext is Kahlil Gibran, referenced throughout the trilogy. Indeed, the final volume, *The Other Half of You*, is narrated by Bani to his son, Kahlil, also the name of Ahmad’s son, and features an epigraph from Gibran on permissive parenting (Ahmad, 2021). Known in the Anglophone world for *The Prophet* (Gibran, 1923), his *Jesus the*

Son of Man (Gibran, 1928) invokes a biblical title that can also be translated as 'Son of Adam'. The term can signify humanity in its banality, but also function as a messianic title. Gibran and Ahmad play with this ambiguity. Is his alter ego's name an (ironic) claim to the messianic self-importance of the Romantic poet, or a measure of Bani's ordinariness and a lesson in egalitarianism? "I'm related to the Prophet Adam," Ahmad (2014b, p. 24) quips to anyone boasting of their descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

There is something similar going on in Sakr's *Son of Sin* and his alter ego, named Jamal Smith. This is a name we might expect to come straight out of Compton, not straight out of Casula, in Western Sydney. However, we learn that 'Smith' was a name Jamal's family adopted, part of their desire to acquire national capital and cultivate whiteness. The effort is futile, and when Jamal's family is misinterpellated as a working-class Anglo-Celtic Australian family, the kind that might appreciate a getaway to a holiday park by the beach, it backfires. "Did he think she was a real Smith or something?" his bored mother muses about her Anglo-Celtic partner who takes pleasure in tormenting the young Jamal (Sakr, 2021, p. 55).

In emphasising youth as the most important stage of one's life, the *Bildungsroman* focuses on the formation of the young protagonist's personality and place in the world. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Bildung* requires finding a vocation that takes one beyond self-interest and into the world (as cited in Wallulis, 1990, pp. 33–35). The irony is that moving beyond self-interest can require a period of adolescent self-absorption, and we cannot predict where in the world we will be called to. Illustratively, *The Lebs* follows Bani's sometimes comical calling as a writer. After working through the sense of adolescent superiority this can entail – "Punchbowl Boys [High School] is not ready for poetry", he declares after the beret incident (Ahmad, 2018, p. 23) – Bani realises his calling is not against or beyond his community, as the world of middle-class whiteness has no place for him. His calling is therefore within his Western Sydney community, now he has absorbed the middle-class notion of the spiritual value of work. As Jurgen Habermas argues, *Bildung* is not about wish-fulfilment or even about achieving specific ambitions (as cited in Wallulis, 1990, p. 32). As Bani shows, *Bildung* is what happens when you are busy making other plans.

Moretti approaches this idea of vocation or calling more existentially. Drawing on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, *Bildung* is about finding meaning and one's place in the world, a sense of self within community (Moretti, 1987, pp. 18–19). The alternative is to mature into a life of meaninglessness. We can glimpse this anxiety around meaninglessness in the writing of Ahmad and the praxis of his Sweatshop movement, which cultivates both social awareness via critical reading, and creative self-expression. The latter

is an essential adjunct to the former, to avoid the misery that can come from theorising oneself as superfluous in a society as thoroughly raced and classed as Ahmad and Sakr conceive of it.

The anxiety to live a life of value is also clear in Ahmad's trilogy, and shorter writings about his community and certain vernacular religious practices. There is palpable anxiety in Ahmad's narratives about socially and spiritually directionless lives. This is particularly apparent in an autobiographical apology, "On Being Michael and Mohammed" (Ahmad, 2014b), which glosses part of the plot of *The Lebs* (2018), minus the humour and vulgarity. Not only is there little apparent progress in the lives of Ahmad's peers, but the vernacular Islam they have been socialised into has no place for spiritual or moral *Bildung*, as it consists of outward observance of community practices such as fasting during Ramadan, and magicking away sins through the *Hajj*. Here, Ahmad, the essayist, and Bani the autofictional avatar, reflect the anxiety around authenticity that is evident in the broader *Bildungsroman* genre; the tension "between professed and actual values" (Moretti, 1987, p. 90) becomes acute as morality becomes individualised and interiorised. One must learn how to live a life of value; in other words, one cannot fall back on reproducing community practices.

However difficult this process of becoming may be, wrestling with one's vocational and moral ambitions and competing social values and practices, the significance of the *Bildungsroman* genre is that the unfolding struggle itself can be seen. Bakhtin's (1986) analysis of the *Bildungsroman* identifies the novelty of experiencing a character in the process of *becoming*, rather than the "ready-made hero" (p. 20) whose character remains unchanged, despite changing fortunes. The genre therefore shows us that self-understanding is limited. Sakr's and Ahmad's critically theorised autofictions are effective in this regard, verging on the autoethnographic. Bani's knowledge of his family and community expands across the trilogy; forgiveness of his family is made possible through a critical political knowledge of something akin to Hage's system of hegemonic whiteness, as well as deeper religious history. Bani can forgive his family, and Ahmad can explain the dysfunctions present in his community, through understanding the social systems that have produced it.

A challenge, then, especially in *Bildungsroman* autofiction, is the extent to which characters are allowed to slowly transform in the narrative, without narrating from a position of later, fuller knowledge. Hence the problem with presenting Bani as an *adib* from pre-adolescence, predicting the gaining of *Bildung*. *Son of Sin* walks a similar line here, for sometimes Sakr cannot resist political commentary – which Thompson (2022) suggests might better belong on social media – nor resist reflecting on Jamal's experiences to move the

writing beyond what Ahmad had earlier called “diary entry” to “creative arts” (Mouratidis, 2021). On the other hand, Sakr’s writing demonstrates an extraordinary amount of vulnerability and self-discipline not to attempt to rescue Jamal from humiliation and other traumas; he is faithful to the emotions the young man experiences in those moments. It is no wonder then, that the first person Sakr (2022) thanks in the Acknowledgements section is Jamal himself, “my distant avatar, for carrying the weight of my unreal life” (p. 277).

Despite its focus on change and development, the *Bildungsroman* can be a conservative genre, since it is about the individual finding their place within society while at the same time being inescapably socialised, albeit into different values than preceding generations. Narratives can end with a stable subject who knows and accepts their place in society. Moretti (1987) broadly classifies *Bildungsromane* into two tendencies: novels of classification and novels of transformation (pp. 7–8). Ahmad’s trilogy fits within the classification tradition, as the story ends with a particular stable situation: a (second) marriage and the birth of his son, which gives Bani’s miseries meaning. Marriage is central in such narratives of classification and, indeed, *The Other Half of You* contrasts Bani’s first disastrous marriage within the Alawite ‘tribe’ with a later marriage to Oli, a ‘white’ woman – sometimes “the white woman” (Ahmad, 2021). Youth comes to an end here, which is also a feature of the novel of classification, as Bani narrates *The Other Half of You* to his son, Kahlil.

Bildungsromane can also end in instability, however, in novels of transformation. This is the case with Sakr’s *Son of Sin*. Whereas the novel of classification often centres on marriage, the novel of transformation can be based on adultery – “the natural habitat of an existence devoted to instability” (Moretti, 1987, p. 8) – and the unravelling or disregarding of the symbolic stability of marriage. In the final pages of *Son of Sin*, Jamal observes the passage of legislation on same-sex marriage in Australia, with a religious exemption clause, which occurred in late 2017, “but it made no difference to his life, nor to anyone in his family” (Sakr, 2022, p. 268). The idea of a stable marriage – same-sex or otherwise – is out of reach at that point. Nor does the novel of transformation seek or celebrate the end of youth and the entry into the stability of maturity. Jamal recognises “[t]he last awkward structures of adolescence were falling away” as friends move out of home, setting aside perpetual family quarrels. Jamal is resolved to “learn how to hold a reckoning without retribution” (p. 273), but there is no definitive end here.

What matters in the *Bildungsroman* of transformation is the story itself – it has no resolution of the kind we see in Ahmad’s trilogy that puts the past in order. *Son of Sin* thus ends with two new acts of storytelling. Jamal composes an email to his deceased father, claiming a personal religious revelation

we have not witnessed unfold or resolve. When, precisely, did Jamal look into his heart, “and find Allah there, where Allah has always been” (p. 275)? Where has all this *Bildung* come from? Jamal is writing a fiction of a stable identity, the kind of narrative closure that Bani genuinely achieves. Finally, the novel concludes as Jamal asks his deeply dysfunctional mother the story of her life, and she begins with the tale of her failed relationships – another repudiation of stability.

4 Pure and Vernacular Religion

I have shown, in the previous section, that *Bildungsromane* depict protagonists coming of age into new social situations, different from one’s parents’ social norms. This process is evident, in different forms, in Sakr’s *Son of Sin* and Ahmad’s Bani Adam trilogy. I have alluded to certain religious aspects of this process, notably Bani and Ahmad’s emphasis on moral and spiritual *Bildung*, against mere outward conformity with one’s community. This section expands this discussion. For these autofictions reveal tensions between working-class migrant communities’ ‘vernacular’ religion – quotidian, public cultural practices handed down over generations within families – and the intercession of ‘pure’ religious expression, as theorised by Olivier Roy (2010): modern religious expressions that repudiate these quotidian cultural practices in the name of abstract and universal religious principles.

As Barton (2011) argues, “traditional rural Islam” (p. 103) with its local vernacular iterations of widespread practices remains the predominant form of Islam around the world, in contrast to “middle class modernist” (p. 118) expressions, of which the forms of pure religion discussed in this chapter are examples. The autofictions in question in this chapter reveal the same global tensions playing out in the multicultural suburbs of Sydney, within its diverse diasporic communities. The key protagonists here are youth, as in the *Bildungsroman* genre. In the lives of Bani and Jamal – and their alter egos Sakr and Ahmad – we see the fragmentation of vernacular religion overlapped by purer forms, with their universal pretensions and narrative ambitions.

I take the notion of ‘vernacular religion’ from Leonard Norman Primiano (1995), who offers it as a more sensitive ethnographic notion than ‘folk religion’ with its metropolitan implications of provincial ignorance and illegitimacy. To refer to religious expressions as ‘folk religion’ implies that other religious expressions are more legitimate because of their ‘official’ trappings, and that some natural (indeed, *pure*) religion has been corrupted by human touch (Primiano, p. 39). All religion is vernacular religion for Primiano, as the term

refers to the specific personal and social practices among a network of people. This includes 'official' religion taught in institutions of power and authority, as official institutions are also networks of people engaged in interpretive processes (Primiano, pp. 45–46).

The problem is: if all religion is vernacular religion, then vernacular religion is a universal descriptor; and terms that describe everything often explain nothing. To put the notion of vernacular religion on its feet, we can look to Jenny White's (2002) proximate concept of "vernacular politics" developed in her ethnography of contemporary Turkey – a country where Jamal spends some time in *Son of Sin*, journeying for patrimony in search of his absent father (Sakr, 2022). Like Primiano, White (2002) moves away from conventional categories and assessments that cannot capture quotidian life. Her notion of vernacular politics transgresses "conventional scholarly differentiations" (p. 6) and "makes no assumptions about motivation or form" (p. 27). What is significant about the Islam in Islamic vernacular politics is that it is not identified "as a philosophically thought-out and coherent ideology" but as a "local cultural idiom played out through social and political structures", differentiating the "lived variety of Islamic practice" from "behavior modified by an ideological prefix", such as Islamic finance (White, 2002, p. 28).

Reading Primiano through White allows a distinction between vernacular religion and pure religion – for it is precisely this behaviour-modifying, Islamic-prefixing form of religion that Roy locates in contemporary Muslim life, including Muslim minorities in the West. In my modified understanding, vernacular religion is practiced where "[t]he cultural marker and the religious marker coincide" (Roy, 2010, p. 67). Since religious identity is a marker of community identity, this carries on even if society or the individual becomes secularised, because "individual belief" – or individual sincerity, as I would prefer – "does not come into it" (Roy, 2010, p. 67.). Religion is simply a matter of the family one is born into – unless one repudiates one's family. Roy gives various examples, including the Ottoman millet system that divided the empire's subjects into religious groups, which continues in Lebanese sectarianism (pp. 78–79).

The society of the vernacularly religious is held together by public conformity – "and the other side of the coin, hypocrisy" (Roy, 2010, p. 112) – where true social scandal requires the public repudiation of this functional system. Roy gives the example of the centrality of Islamic law in Muslim discourse, with (almost) no desire to ever fully implement it (p. 114). *Son of Sin* offers the illustrative dramatic irony of casually violent homophobic asides from Jamal's family, but without the sense his family wishes their own sex lives so judged (Sakr, 2022, pp. 103–105). Roy (2010) argues private spaces of

hypocrisy and taboo are shrinking with the increasing sincerity around sexual expression, and the ubiquity, or even banality, of sex in the West (pp. 125–126). Hence the arrival of Australia's same-sex marriage survey in 2017 infuriates Jamal (Sakr, 2022). The symbolic – though expensive – postal survey brought the question of homosexuality into the open, into his home, presenting a “frontier” of values his community could not publicly abide (Roy 2010, p. 112). Indeed, respondents in Sakr and Ahmad's Western Sydney region were among the least supportive of same-sex marriage: religion and university education were significant variables in predicting attitudes (Wilson et al., 2020).

The rupture with vernacular religion begins to occur, for Roy (2010), “when believers and non-believers no longer find themselves with a shared ‘orthopraxy’ [...] when believers no longer identify with the surrounding culture, and when the culture no longer accepts religion” (p. 113). In other societies, there would be a “a shared horizon of intelligibility” between the personally more and less devout, and a common appreciation of local vernacular religious practices, symbols, and values (p. 114). This shared horizon would compel a certain public conformism – there would be things one knows not to publicly flout, but many other things that do not particularly matter so long as they are kept private. This was shaken in Jamal's family through the same-sex marriage survey, but that is certainly not the only threat to vernacular religion in diasporic communities.

Ahmad's Bani Adam trilogy also witnesses the fracture of vernacular religion – in his case, Alawite vernacular religion predicated on public conformity with patriarchal authority. Friedman (2010) emphasises “spiritual fatherhood” in Alawism: the loyalty to one's spiritual father and sense of “brotherhood” among the Alawites that is considered integral to the survival of the group over the centuries (pp. 221–222). Yet this is precisely what we see fracturing across the trilogy. In the first of his autofictions, *The Tribe* – a reference to the insularity of the minority-within-a-minority – Bani is aged between seven and 11 and is rather in awe of his father, accepting his religious pieties even as he begins to bristle against the principal instruction never to marry outside the religion (Ahmad, 2014a). His toleration of vernacular patriarchal values fades in later volumes, especially the expectation of unyielding obedience to his godfather (Ahmad, 2018, 2021). Indeed, given the esoteric nature of Alawism, the Bani Adam trilogy demonstrates the difficulty of Alawite's continuity outside of a traditional patriarchy; the spiritual hierarchy requires loyalty to community structures to reproduce itself.

Coupled with his aforementioned anxiety over whether his sect's emphasis on public conformity and ritual is retarding his spiritual and moral *Bildung*, and his emerging political sense of the disempowerment and dysfunctionality

of his community – especially its patriarchal authorities – Bani questions the ‘self-evident’ nature of the religion of his birth, as many other Muslim diasporic youths do (Roy, 2004, pp. 36–37). As he seeks to embody his values and differentiate himself from his peers, he demonstrates the sense of spiritual “brotherhood” that Friedman (2010, p. 222) describes as incompatible with a culture of expressive individualism. For what emerges through the trilogy is an expressive, individual sincerity, drawing us back to the significance of writers as the subjects and objects of these autofictional *Bildungsromane*: they are creative artists but also autoethnographers.

Bani never abandons his Alawite identity. As he becomes aware of his father’s anxiety over Alawi survival in the face of Sunni persecution, Bani explains away the portrait of Syria’s Alawite dictator Bashar al-Assad on the wall of his family home (Ahmad, 2021), as collective blame for the actions of the Syrian government obliges Alawites to further rally around the regime (Friedman, 2023). However, as in Roy’s (2010) thesis on the slippage of vernacular religious identities, and Bahfen’s (2010) argument that Muslim differences blur in Australian public life, Alawite identity becomes less significant later in the trilogy once Bani’s family have moved from the Inner West suburb of Alexandria, in *The Tribe* (Ahmad, 2014a), to the South Western suburb of Lakemba, in *The Lebs* (Ahmad, 2018), which is home to large Lebanese and Muslim populations.

Muslims become ethnicised in Ahmad’s novels in ways that include an enormous amount of internal diversity. Nevertheless, as Hamad (2019) argues, Ahmad never loses sight of being an ethnic minority among Australia’s white majority, nor of living “in the shadow” of the Sunni majority (p. 77). The position of Alawites within the *umma* has certainly been ambiguous. While scholars have debated Alawism’s origins and theology, contemporary Alawites insist upon their Muslim identity, and Lebanese Alawites position themselves as a branch of Shi’ite Sufism (Friedman, 2010, pp. 235–236). Anyone interested in Alawism’s allegedly arcane theology will be disappointed by Ahmad’s work, however, for Alawite difference does not appear in his trilogy as a question of orthodoxy, but orthopraxy *vis-à-vis* Sunnis, particularly the Alawite rejection of hijab and toleration of alcohol. As Lakemba’s main shopping area, Haldon Street, has been described as the only street in Australia “where a Muslim woman feels conspicuous for not ‘covering’”, since here hijab signifies a woman as a “practicing Muslim” (Deen, 2003, p. 121), such differences are noticed even by Bani’s young friends. Salafis aside, however, few Muslim scholars, or Muslim laity, have “explicitly” excluded Alawites from Islam (Friedman, 2010, pp. 234–238). Indeed, the prevailing attitude of Sydney Sunnis in the Bani Adam trilogy is that Alawites are misbehaving Muslims who too closely resemble Arab

Christians, again suggesting Bahfen (2010) is correct about the blurring of Muslim differences.

Under the clear influence of Hage, *The Lebs* is primarily concerned with ethnicity, further folding Alawite Bani into the blurred category without entirely losing his sense of difference – primarily with Christians. The category of ‘Leb’ expands even beyond the Lebanese to include young working-class males of adjacent minority groups residing in Western Sydney. Bayeh (2023) depicts ‘Lebs’ as a youth subculture reminiscent of those in Cohen’s (1972/2002) classic study of working-class British male delinquency – as the introduction of this chapter has discussed in reference to the Cronulla riots: “Lebs talk in a particular way with speech that is replete with foul language; share the same posture and gestures; and maintain a dress code” (p. 641). Patriarchy is transformed into misogyny in this subculture: a kind of parody patriarchy of men without women; another vernacular culture for Bani to differentiate himself from.

If Bani loses faith in the patriarchal vernacular religion of his community and subculture, in Jamal’s situation, patriarchy never had a chance. His father is largely absent from his life, although he visits him in Turkey once he drops out of university. Middle Eastern families may project images of togetherness and tradition, but Orfaea (2006) is struck by the commonality of the absent or abusive father in Arab American literature, going back to Gibran, whose father was left behind on Mount Lebanon. The key contemporary example is Mona Simpson’s (1991) *The Lost Father*, in which the titular character – also the lost father of her brother, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs – is discovered living a life of utter banality, confounding her mythologising of him. The fracturing of vernacular religion is inseparable from the fracturing of these patriarchal systems, whether fathers are absent, as in Jamal’s case, or shown to be merely flawed and socially disempowered, as in Bani’s case. “A territorial people follows the religion of its king”, as Van Herck and Drigo (2019, p. 151) gloss Roy’s thesis; and without patriarchs, how can one reproduce the vernacular religion of a patriarchal culture?

An intersecting example of this fracturing of vernacular religion and patriarchal culture is what Sakr (2019b) refers to as his “language problem” (p. 93). For while Sakr’s Arab identity is essential to his sense of identity and his public image – his breakthrough collection is titled *The Lost Arabs* (Sakr, 2019a) – he lacks proficiency in Arabic. So does his alter ego, Jamal, whose personal *djinn* chastises him for this: “Forbidden one, sacred son, inviolate and set aside, you know neither your own tongue nor our Lord, the Most High” (Sakr, 2022, p. 260). Arabic is, of course, the sacred and ritual language of Islam; and as young Muslims shift towards a sincere, individualised Islam – away from

treating religion as a matter of public, ritual conformity – knowledge of Arabic gains greater significance. An early scene in *Son of Sin* presents Jamal praying, “knowing the Arabic sounds by rote, a music without meaning” (Sakr, 2022, p. 5) – a different example of being “religiously unmusical”, as Max Weber famously described himself (as cited in Jackson, 2023, p. 70).

Sakr (2019b) is open enough about his “problem” to publish an autobiographical essay about it in *Meanjin*, the country’s leading literary magazine, but defensive if he feels his identity as an Arab or a Muslim is being questioned. There is likely less irony than tragedy in the sentence, “I finally started to learn my mother tongue” (Sakr, 2019b, p. 95), for his openness includes reflections on his impoverished and dysfunctional youth, raised by people who, “unskilled and uneducated, didn’t know how to be parents let alone how to raise bilingual children” (Sakr, 2019b, p. 92). Sakr (2023b) thus responded with anger to a needling essay on *Son of Sin* by Lur Alghurabi (2023), which analysed his ultra-vernacular use of Arabic. While Alghurabi acknowledges Sakr’s idiosyncratic diasporic accuracy, she argues it is an accuracy that comes from “tourist” ignorance of Arabic, rather than the mastery of Arabic that Alghurabi claims – the Arabic of a poet (Alghurabi, 2023, p. 86).

Sakr’s (2019b) ignorance of Arabic places him alongside the white people in his Arabic class he considers himself apart from, and separates him from family he feels connected to, especially his grandmother, as each knows little of the other’s language (pp. 90–92). Similar sentiments pass between Jamal and his grandmother, in *Son of Sin*:

Wein ummok? Teyta said to Jamal. *Where’s your mother?* [...] His eyes drifted over to Aunty Rania and back again as he tried to find the Arabic to reply. Between them, an untravelled sky. His grandmother never stopped trying to reach him, though they shared only a handful of words.

SAKR, 2022, p. 31

His language here reminds me of David Malouf’s (1992) poem “Early Discoveries”, originally published in 1974, about his Lebanese-born grandfather who “pantomimes a dervish-dance” (p. 69) while gardening in a Brisbane backyard. There is, however, no trauma for Malouf in the “continents / I have not happened on” (p. 69) and the distance between himself and his grandfather – Sakr will never have such a splinter of ice in his heart – let alone in the “words of a tongue I cannot read” (p. 71) in the Arabic newspaper his grandfather wraps his cabbages in. This verges on the “grandmothers, grape leaves, and Kahlil Gibran” style of diasporic writing Hartman (2008) regards as cliché, as does Hourani (2022) in another needling critique of Sakr; but what is one to do if

such language accurately captures the lives of many rural Lebanese migrants?
How can the quotidian be cliché?

Ignorance has its occasional bliss:

Recently this strategic incomprehension came to my rescue yet again when one of my aunties accosted me by the door (I was trying to escape before she could begin), to lecture me on my failures as a Muslim, and all I could do was nod my head at whatever she was saying, catching only one in every five words. My uncle laughed at her, saying, 'Leave him alone, ya. He doesn't know.'

SAKR, 2019b, pp. 92–93

Yet in *Son of Sin*, what Jamal does not know about language and religion leaves him reliant on the vernacular beliefs circulating within his community or online, such as *djinn*s crawling into his mouth when he sleeps (Sakr, 2022, pp. 10, 16).

When Islam breaks from vernacular expressions such as these, it gives rise, *inter alia*, to forms of Salafism, which is Roy's key concern in his treatise *Holy Ignorance* (2010). Despite having obvious origins on the Arabian Peninsula, Salafism can present as decontextualised and universal. Salafism is thus a prototypical example of Roy's notion of "pure religion" – a religion that presents itself as coming from no-one and nowhere but purports to offer rational and thorough instruction for everyone, everywhere. To return to Jenny White's (2002) ethnography of Turkish political Islam, there is a top-down condescension to pure religion, as whatever one is doing – and has been doing for generations – is inevitably wrong.

As noted above, there is also a constant call to sincerity because in this model of pure religion there is no premium on public conformity; you cannot have agnostic Salafis (Van Herck and Drigo, 2019, p. 152). There are no obvious boundaries around the conceivable community of practice of this pure religion, and no interest in the local vernaculars that, for Primiano (1995), constitute lived religion – language, art, and so on. Nor is pure religion concerned with the vernacular practices that provide social stability: the hypocrisies, in other words, that allow for the "management" of human vices, "from the brothel to carnival" (Roy, 2010, pp. 110–111). A society built on pure religion will be perpetually unstable, Roy argues, as in Primiano's terms it will wage constant war against the inevitable emergence of vernacular practices – always reforming, always purifying.

Salafism is rarely sighted in these autofictions, however. A cousin who has adopted neo-traditional dress appears in passing in *Son of Sin* (Sakr, 2022); but

Sakr, an openly queer man, and Ahmad, an Alawite, are not going to be predisposed to this form of pure religion. Indeed, Ahmad shows Bani's developing awareness of Alawite anxieties over Sunni persecution. More intriguingly, pure religion appears in Sakr's *Son of Sin* in the form of a figure of both ridicule and envy: Jack, an evangelical youth pastor. In Ahmad's Bani Adam trilogy, moreover, pure religion appears in the Romanticism of Kahlil Gibran.

The evangelical pastor in *Son of Sin* is a typically disruptive carrier of pure religion in various ways. His very presence undermines the "self-evident" nature of Jamal's religion of birth (Roy, 2004, pp. 36–37). Moreover, the pastor knows more about Islamic theology than Jamal does – although that is not saying much – but when he invites a discussion about Islam, Jamal realises his profound ignorance (Sakr, 2022, p. 79). Like overly confident and critical book reviews, pure religion has a way of lecturing, hectoring, and correcting, and thereby revealing the inadequacies of vernacular religion and the vulnerabilities of those raised with its limitations. This moment of humiliation also reveals the dysfunction of Jamal's family life. Whereas Bani learned various pieties from his father and godfather which he later came to question, the absence of any such person in Jamal's life left him with a humiliating ignorance. While I respect the creativity of these autofictions, and only their authors know which parts of their lives are put to which purposes in the narratives, when I read Sakr's (2023b) long response to reviews of *Son of Sin*, I imagine Jamal screaming, "Jesus was not the son of God!" at a youth pastor who believes he is making a connection (Sakr, 2022, p. 79).

Jack's evangelicalism also superficially binds him to the world of privilege, for in *Son of Sin* – as in Ahmad's trilogy – Christianity is folded into a category of whiteness, which serves at times as a catch-all of absolute negativity, as the "superabundant utilization of the adjective 'bourgeois'" did in Marxism (Althusser, 2006, p. 202). Jamal's encounters with any part of this world are traumatic, and Christianity appears as an oppressive, alien presence in Western Sydney in these novels, despite being more at ease in the diverse, largely working-class region than in affluent parts of the city. Sakr's poetry is more nuanced, however. The influence of African-American poetics brings Christian language into the horizon of intelligibility of any racially conscious poet, even when nominally addressing Islam: "Don't preach to me, mama, don't tell me no stories" (Sakr, 2017, p. 6). One could ask, of course, the extent to which African-American culture has itself been purified of its historical referents. African-American culture, specifically hip-hop, also saturates the worldview of characters in Ahmad's trilogy, which may be the pure culture of the universal teenager.

The final example of pure religion in these autofictions comes through the Romanticism of Kahlil Gibran, an idol of Bani's in his trilogy. Gibran could be

considered a symbol of East/West intermediation, an illustration of what Hage (2021) calls, after Levi-Strauss, successful “anisogamic” Lebanese immigration (pp. 52–54). An anisogamic marriage is one between socially unequal spouses, requiring reciprocal valorisation. The lower-status spouse demonstrates sufficient gratitude, short of abjectifying their origins, while the higher-status spouse praises the qualities of their low-status spouse without disavowing their origins. A Lebanese minority must not, accordingly, praise their host country and condemn Lebanon (or its diaspora) such that they demean themselves – especially not in progressive postcolonial intellectual circles, in which liking the West one lives in is so gauche. Nor must they indulge in the kind of nationalist Occidentalism that sees the West as entirely without virtues. Gibran’s careful cultivation of an image of a Levantine sage who relished the freedom of the West seems to fit this description.

However, in embracing Gibran, Bani betrays this idea of anisogamic immigration in two ways: firstly, in his free admission of his jealousy of the white middle class; secondly, in his embrace of Gibran’s generic Euro-American Romanticism. Bani is wont to quote a line from *The Prophet*, that love “grinds you to whiteness” (Gibran, 1923, p. 16), symbolising perfection and total self-realisation; this is akin to Hage’s (2023) notion of pure whiteness as an unobtainable state of absolute cultural hegemony. Gibran thus symbolises the free soul in flight, repudiating all traditions. But following Allen Ginsberg’s (1978) criticism of Gibran’s poetry as “bad, in the sense of so unreferential that you really don’t know what he’s talking about”, Gibran surpassed his Lebanese origins and all other referents.

Romanticism is perhaps the purest of pure religions, promising self-development and freedom of experience: the individual soul utterly unencumbered by social systems. But precisely because of this purity of the individual soul, its right to take flight from any social encumbrance or cultural irritation, Romanticism is incapable of providing the kind of calling into the world, beyond the self, that *Bildung* ultimately requires. That it comes with the nominal imprimatur of Lebanese authenticity makes it more alluring. Bani ultimately repudiates this form of pure religion in his trilogy. He maintains a critical attitude towards his flawed family and flawed community, but finds a place for individual expression within his community, not from the pure heights above it.

5 Conclusion

Focusing on the autofictional *Bildungsromane* of Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Omar Sakr, this chapter has revealed the ways vernacular religion is

breaking down among young Lebanese-Australian Muslim men, members of an identity group ensnared in various social crises. When patriarchs are absent or embattled, fighting against a tide of individualism or recognised as victims of a broader, far more powerful system of hegemonic whiteness, the vernacular religion of patriarchal cultures will struggle to reproduce itself. Further, these autofictions reveal the powerful nature of pure religion. Since pure religion is nominally from nowhere – even if it is Salafism from the Arabian Peninsula, evangelicalism from California, or Romanticism from Europe – its claim to universality offers a moment of crisis and shame, prompting a realisation that one's current provincial knowledge is partial and inadequate, that one is not living as one should. That such a moment can be productive, compelling the kinds of progressive sincerity found in Ahmad's Bani Adam trilogy, Ahmad's broader literary praxis, and Sakr's brave, poetic introspection, does not make it less traumatic.

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Building Faith in Walter Burley Griffin's National Capital

The Diplomatic Mosque and Other Architectural Narratives

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Abstract

Canberra's first mosque is located in Yarralumla, the leafy garden suburb designed by Walter Burley Griffin. It was the initiative of Australia's Indonesian Ambassador in the late 1950s; further financial support was provided by the governments of Malaysia and Pakistan, which also maintained diplomatic seats in the national capital. Designed by Melbourne-based architects Gerd and Renate Block, the mosque was completed in 1960. Despite the ongoing lure of employment in Canberra's public service sector for many Muslim migrants, the Yarralumla mosque was the only mosque constructed for another half a century. Today, Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). There are currently four congregational mosques, numerous designated prayer spaces (*musalla*), and two Islamic schools operating in the region. Three further mosques are on the drawing board. This chapter delves into the historical, cultural, and architectural significance of three purpose-built mosques in the ACT. Each project has been designed by architects. Privileging an architectural lens, this paper explores the client – architect collaborations, architectural drawings, contemporary media, interviews, and demographic data considered in the context of national immigration policies. Emphasis on the architectural design process offers innovative insights into creative collaboration and cross-cultural engagement. Forwarding the notion of a diplomatic architectural language, comprising rhetoric (*mutahawilat*) and morphology (*thawābit*), this chapter contributes to new knowledge about the place of Islam in Australia and collective efforts to build faith, literally and metaphorically, in multicultural Australia.

1 A Diplomatic Foundation

The foundation stone for Canberra's first purpose-built mosque was laid on Australia Day, January 26, 1960, amid pomp and circumstance befitting a

national capital. Initiated by diplomats from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan in temporary Australian posts, this act of posterity served as a gesture of welcome, grounded in diplomacy, as well as a foundation for multicultural Islam on Australian soil. The mosque was modest in scale, comprising clean horizontal lines in muted materials, and was surrounded by the native bushland of this verdant capital envisioned by American architect Walter Burley Griffin (1876–1937) from his distant Chicago office in response to an international competition.¹ Perched on a rise in the diplomatic quarter of Yarralumla, the mosque offered few visual clues about the client or the German émigré architects, Gerd (1926–2007) and Renate (1926–1984) Block, who had recently moved to Australia in the immediate postwar context. Nor did the design of the new building make reference to architecture associated with the funding governments. Designed in what is commonly referred to as the universal language of modernism, the architecture matched Griffin's (2008) pledge for "a fresh start" (p. 28) in the Australian Federal Capital City, which was intended to serve as "an expression of the democratic civic ideal and of all that means in accessibility, freedom, wealth, comfort, conveniences, scale and splendor" (Griffin, 2008, p. 30). By resisting rhetorical national architectural references or motifs, the architectural language of the mosque endorsed Griffin's "fresh" image of a fledgling nation founded on immigration and the invaluable contributions of minority communities, all underpinned by principles of diplomacy.

The suburb of Yarralumla was intended as a residential area – Griffin's careful hierarchy of governance specifically conceived it as a society zone for the community supporting the operation of the federal capital – in a valley that was not to be interrupted by infrastructure or industry. In time, this would emerge as one of the primary areas for diplomatic headquarters, due to its proximity to Capital Hill. Located opposite the Malaysian High Commission on Empire Court, the mosque was nestled amid other purpose-built embassies, including those of Norway and Denmark. In distinct ways, many of the embassies responded to the agenda of the National Capital Authority (NCA), which continues to encourage material expressions of – a singular – national identity. In contrast, Griffin had recommended the construction of low-rise, freestanding structures, explicitly advocating "no style", surrounded by the

1 Architect Sir John Sulman promoted the competition to design the 'Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth' at the 1910 Town Planning Conference in London, and it was subsequently published in the proceedings, on April 30, 1911. Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin would have consulted the competition details and plans available at the office of the British Consul-General in Chicago. Griffin was advised he was the winner of the competition on May 23, 1912 by King O'Malley, Minister of Home Affairs.

generous open space afforded in this bush capital (Griffin, 2008, p. 8). The universal language adopted by the mosque's architects was thus more compliant with Griffin's urban image for this democratic capital. While the Canberra Plan has received significant scholarly attention, the architecture from this period is often dismissed and the architecture of the diplomatic set has received little attention despite the contributions of new migrants to the multicultural nation. Moreover, this is the first study to explore the rationale for the design of the mosque, the selection of the architects, or the collaborative process.

Beginning with the design of the Yarralumla mosque (Figure 7.1), this chapter delves into the design and development of three mosques while acknowledging the plans for several new mosques as Canberra's population continues to grow. This discussion represents the first comprehensive study of mosques in Canberra and forms an integral part of a larger project that examines collaborations between architects and Muslim communities in Australia, and contextualises these projects within the broader framework of multicultural Australia. This ongoing study is informed by a rigorous process of consultation with representatives of each mosque community, as well as interviews



FIGURE 7.1 Mosque, corner of Empire Circuit and Hunter Street, Yarralumla, Canberra, 1960–1961

NOTE. DESIGNED BY GERD AND RENATE BLOCK. 35MM COLOUR SLIDE PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER WILLE. STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, H91.244/524, USED WITH PERMISSION

with the architects and local government officials involved in the planning and development phases, to interpret the collaborative process of design. Analysis of architectural drawings has also informed this study, including how the mosques have been altered to accommodate changing needs. Moreover, personal narratives connected to each mosque have emerged in a series of workshops and focus-group discussions. This process reveals the conception, construction, and contextual significance of the selected mosques while knowledge of the historical context is informed by archival documents, contemporary media, demographic data, and secondary literature. The study illuminates the dynamic relationship between architectural vision, community engagement, and the lived experiences in each case study.

This chapter unfolds in three key sections. Firstly, it examines the diplomatic motives that shaped the Yarralumla mosque, placing it in the context of Canberra's considerable growth after the 1970s. Secondly, the chapter considers the construction of two more recent mosques: the Canberra Islamic Centre and Gungahlin Mosque. Thirdly, it considers the architectural design of these mosques in relation to Jacques Berque's linguistic metaphor, specifically the principles of morphology (*thawābit*) and rhetoric (*mutahawilat*), to interpret the mosques' spatial organisation – which is distinguished from decisions about architectural form and aesthetic considerations.

Accordingly, the chapter highlights how the architectural design also functions as a form of diplomatic expression. Studies of the architecture of diplomacy usually focus on the design of embassies which, according to De Maeyer et al. (2021), are traditionally “perceived as the architectural embodiment of state actors abroad, [where] purpose-built embassies have been framed as a tool in the legitimation and identity construction of the sending state on the territory of the receiving state” (p. 1). At the same time, they reflect the ideals and strategies negotiated between countries in historic partnerships. This process of architectural production, which materialises intangible ideals, can also be identified in the foundation of consulates, schools, community centres, or places of prayer. Girardelli (2017) argues that “embassies are, by definition, foreign and atypical. Their being is always, at least in part, *out of place* – and often scarcely accessible or connected to city life – enhancing their symbolic status as semiotic and geo-political machines”.² However, in contrast, we argue that civic spaces of diplomacy, not least the mosque, are an integral part of city life

2 This special issue of *ABE Journal: Architecture Beyond Europe* is dedicated to the space of diplomacy with a focus on the architecture of European embassies and diplomatic buildings outside Europe, exploring the paradoxical condition of being simultaneously here *and* elsewhere.

and a tangible symbol of citizens' connection to city life. Positing an architectural diplomacy, this chapter considers each mosque in the context of a rich, diverse congregation, intertwined with the history of the new capital which is shaped by narratives of migration and encounter. Giving preference to an architectural perspective, the chapter focuses on the design process – from the initial impetus to build a new mosque through to the selection of the architect, funding, planning approval, construction, reception, and function – to reveal an insightful process of negotiation and diplomacy between architect and client, within the community, and beyond to the public.

2 A Mosque for Diplomats at Yarralumla

Griffin's proposal for the Canberra plan was inspired by international models including McMillan's Plan for Washington D.C.,³ Ebenezer Howard's Garden City (Freestone, 2007), and the spectacular World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: popularly known as the White City, it was the spearhead of the City Beautiful movement – and Griffin had visited it in Chicago.⁴ In these models, there was a harmonious unity between the architectural design, urban space, and the natural landscape. Griffin's competition entry for Canberra particularly showcased his sensitivity to the region's topography and vegetation. This appreciation was vividly conveyed through Marion Mahony Griffin's compelling presentation drawings, which highlighted the unique golden tones of the region's bushland and the distinctive peaks of Mount Ainslie, Red Hill, and Black Mountain.⁵

However, this sensitivity to the physical context did not extend to Australia's Indigenous population. Yarralumla, for example, is an Aboriginal place name meaning 'echo', which had already been identified on surveyor Robert Dixon's

3 The 1901 McMillan Plan was named after Senator James McMillan and brought together leading designers including architect Daniel H. Burnham, architect Charles McKim, sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Burnham, Saint-Gaudens, and Olmsted collaborated on the layout for the World's Columbian Exposition together with John Wellborn Root and Charles B. Atwood.

4 Ron Evans (1990) identifies Griffin's visit to the Chicago Exposition in 1893, at the age of 17, as "the single most profound influence on young Griffin's career" (p. 19).

5 While the initial drawings for Canberra were sent by steamer to be considered for the competition which closed on January 31, 1912 (later extended to February 28, 1912), Walter Burley Griffin arrived shortly after his winning entry was announced and just prior to the outbreak of World War I. However, it was not until the conclusion of World War II that the Commonwealth encouraged the establishment of new diplomatic missions.

map of 1829 (Australian Capital Territory Planning and Land Authority, 2004, p. 5).⁶ Instead, Griffin's proposal assumed a "homogenous people of a single race" (Griffin, 2008, p. 30). Moreover, Yarralumla was later identified as a "society suburb" situated in a valley west of Griffin's ceremonial "Capitol" and adjacent to the informal lake which was reminiscent of Olmsted's design for Jackson Park at White City (Griffin, 2008, p. 57).⁷ Following his visit to the site in 1913, Griffin (2008) reported that areas like Yarralumla "might well be characterised by society, clubs, and church assemblages, for that large social group of special character peculiar to a national capital" (p. 57). In this context, it is highly unlikely that Griffin anticipated the presence of a Muslim community and the formalised representation of their presence through mosque architecture.

Yet, the Yarralumla mosque is an important milestone in the long history of Islam in Australia. Australia's Muslim history can be traced to encounters between Macassan fisherman and Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, pre-dating European settlement (Clark and May, 2013). The Muslim cameleers from present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Northwest Frontier Province played a pivotal role, beginning in the 1860s, making pioneering contributions to colonial exploration, discovery, and settlement in the resource-rich continent. These contributions are increasingly recognised in Australian histories (Jones and Kenny, 2010; Stevens, 2003). Little remains of the ephemeral congregational mosques that were built throughout the interior along the networks that connected remote stations from Wyndham, Cue, or Cloncurry to ports like Perth, Port Augusta, or Adelaide. Urban mosques were commissioned in Adelaide in 1888 (Bartsch, 2015), Perth in 1906 (Bartsch et al., 2016), and Brisbane in 1908 (Harris, 2013). The construction of these mosques is notable in a context that was increasingly alienating. Upon Federation in 1901, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* was one of the first laws to be passed by the federal parliament. This legislation consolidated colonial policies aimed at discouraging non-white migrants from settling in Australia (Martens, 2018). Subsequently known as the White Australia Policy, the act would not be repealed for another six decades, echoing a policy of exclusion that had defined a "racial ring fence around the white settlement colonies of the British imperial world, including New Zealand and Canada as well as South Africa" (Bandyopadhyay and Buckingham, 2018, pp. 7–8).

6 The suburb of Yarralumla was first gazetted in September 20, 1928.

7 This decision-making followed Griffin's visit to the site in 1913, and his subsequent report (Griffin, 1918) relating to details of the planning. His recommendations for Yarralumla were described in Section 2.121122 of that report.

By the time Griffin submitted his competition entry in 1912, his proposal echoed concerns about the rising tide of immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon countries (Griffin, 2008, p. 422). A more inclusive vision for Canberra, and Australia, would not emerge until after World War II, at which point 12 missions were present in Canberra. Following the appointment of the first minister for immigration, Arthur Calwell, on August 14, 1945, immigration from continental Europe was actively encouraged. Australia experienced a massive influx of European immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in the postwar exodus. This coincided with the establishment of a number of European embassies in Canberra. Many of these formalised existing legations, in purpose-built structures. The High Commissions of Commonwealth states, including the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and India, also date to this period. Many of these buildings were constructed in the suburb of Yarralumla. By the 1960s a number of missions were established representing South Asia and Oceania, and the impetus for the Yarralumla mosque dates to this period.

The Islamic Society of the ACT attributes the initial idea to the Indonesian ambassador in Australia, Dr. A.Y. Helmi, who presented the concept to the Australian federal minister for the interior and minister for works, Sir Gordon Freeth (Islamic Society of the ACT [ISACT], 2012, p. 2). The embassy of Indonesia played a pivotal role in the construction of the mosque by providing this impetus and the initial funding for the project which made the front page of the local news (*The Canberra Times*, 1960a, p. 1). A committee was appointed to oversee the process of design and construction which included prominent members of the Muslim community in Canberra.

The location of the mosque was carefully selected by the committee on a block of land located at Block 1, Section 22, Yarralumla, ACT. The land was a perpetual grant by the Commonwealth Government at one shilling per annum rental (ISACT, 2012, p. 2). The mosque's location also reflected the committee's wish to establish a visible presence for Islam in the national capital (Bouma et al., 2005). Further support was provided by the High Commission of Malaya and the High Commission of Pakistan: Commonwealth representatives who contributed to the cost of construction, which was approximately £18,000 in 1960 (*The Canberra Times*, 1961). As Amoah (2022) argues, in his study of contemporary relations between China and Ghana, what "a diplomacy of architecture lens offers is a means to probe deeper the cultural intellectual and even financial costs that may not be interrogated because of the elation and satisfaction the tangible architectural forms inspire" (p. 78). By contributing towards the cost of construction of a cultural or religious building, governments not only strengthen ties with the host nation but also shape the urban

space where the building is located. This commitment strengthened the diplomatic ties between the three countries and they would become the founding members of the Canberra Mosque Incorporated (CMI) (ISACT, 2012, p. 2).

Yarralumla was chosen as the site for the mosque due to its proximity to the diplomatic quarter and its central location in the city. The mosque was built on a low rise in the landscape, befitting Griffin's preference to site prominent buildings on loftier ground. The location was seen as a way to facilitate access to the mosque for members of the diplomatic community as well as the wider Muslim community in Canberra. According to *The Canberra Times* (1960b), "Malaysia, Pakistan, and Indonesia will combine to build a mosque so that their diplomatic representatives in Canberra may follow their religion in proper surroundings ... The building will be one more tangible sign of the place of Canberra as diplomatic headquarters for the nation" (p. 24).

To realise the design of the mosque, the committee appointed Gerd and Renate Block, who may have been known among the diplomatic community. The couple had already designed the new German embassy in association with the German Works Department, one of their first prominent projects in 1955, as well as homes for German embassy staff and a residence for the Indonesian ambassador in Canberra (*The Good Neighbour*, 1962, p. 6). This was shortly followed by the positive reception to the Biancardi House in 1958, which was featured in *Best Australian Houses*, the 1961 monograph compiled by the celebrated architect and critic Neil Clerehan (1922–2017). The Blocks emigrated to Melbourne with their infant son in 1951. They had begun practice in Australia at the East Melbourne office of architects H.R. and F.L. Norris. In *The Good Neighbour* (1962), the design of the mosque is introduced as a "Happy Task" (p. 6), and Gerd Block identifies the mosque as "their most interesting job ... built in a bushland setting in Canberra to serve the capital's small Moslem community" (p. 6).

The Blocks had trained together at Karlsruhe Technical University in West Germany to obtain their Diploma-Ingenieur Arkitektur (Diploma of Civil Engineering and Architecture) in May 1950. The design of the mosque is a clear product of their architectural training in modernism and they were among a number of architects who had left Germany during the rise of fascism. Architectural historians Jane Eckett and Harriet Edquist (2019, p. 358) argue that many of these architects introduced the principles of the Bauhaus to Australia, contributing to the built environment as well as education.

The mosque is a low-rise, horizontal structure comprising two tiers which consist of a two-inch-thick concrete 'shell' supported on a steel frame. A modest fibreglass dome surmounts the prayer hall which is orientated west-north-west. The slender, symbolic minaret, which could not fulfil the

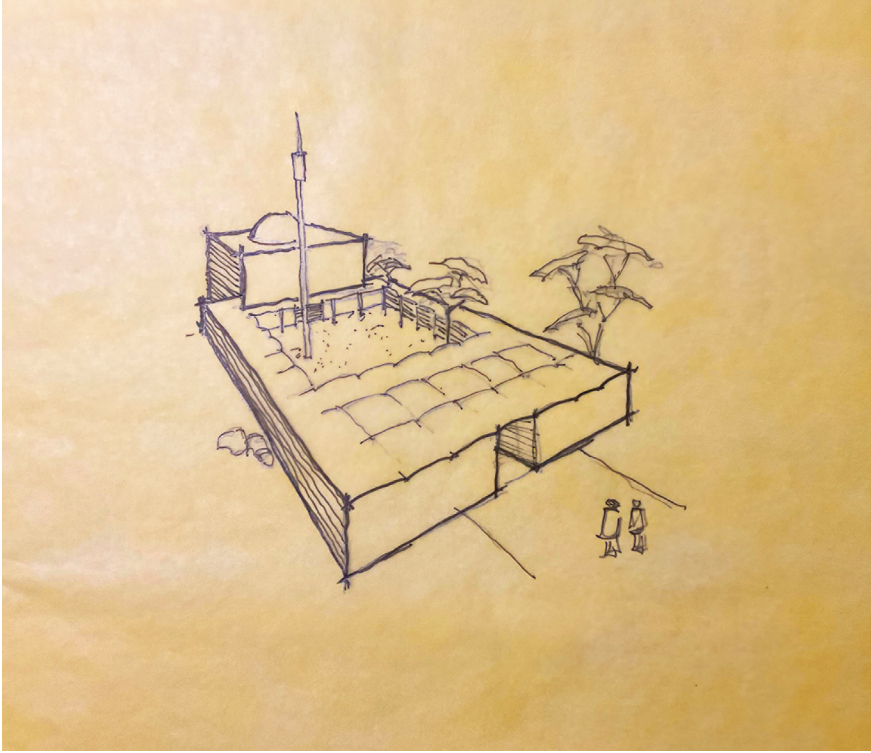


FIGURE 7.2 Drawing by Md. M. Rashid, after Gerd and Renate Block's Mosque Proposal for Canberra, c.1960

ADAPTED FROM ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION IN "A MOSQUE FOR CANBERRA",
HEMISPHERE: AN ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE, 4(4), APRIL 4, 1960, P. 28

function of the *adhan*, is a tubular steel column with an 18-inch diameter rising to 60 feet in height, topped by a crescent moon finial (*The Good Neighbour*, 1962, p. 6). The 40-by-50-foot prayer hall of the mosque is entered through a courtyard which is defined by shallow, modular, inverted concrete shells (Figure 7.2). A small library and caretaker's residence are included in the wings of this courtyard.

The Blocks conducted comprehensive research to shape the ultimate architectural configuration of the mosque. While experts at Mt. Stromlo Observatory provided advice about the orientation (*The Canberra Times*, 1960b, p. 7), the Blocks' approach took into consideration both the climatic conditions of Canberra and the rich cultural traditions of the Islamic faith with the goal of creating a design that combined functionality with cultural sensitivity.

One pivotal design decision was the incorporation of a courtyard, strategically included to serve as an outdoor space where the Muslim community

could gather while also facilitating natural ventilation within the building (Rahman, 2022). Their distinctive design incorporated the courtyard, a typical element of Islamic architecture, into a modern expression. The result was a harmonious synthesis that pays homage to Islamic cultural traditions while being sympathetic to the Australian landscape.

The foundation stone was laid on Australia Day in 1960 by the Indonesian Ambassador, Dr. A.Y. Helmi (Barrow, 1978, p. 85). The Australian press covered the opening of the mosque extensively; many articles highlighted the unique features of the building and the multicultural nature of the event (*The Canberra Times*, 1960). While the day chosen for the opening may be interpreted as a firm statement of belonging and a commitment to the future of Islam in Australia, the auspicious date also coincided with the Muslim feast of the *Al Isra' wal Mi'raj* or Ascension – 27 Rajab 1379 AH, in the Islamic calendar – although this significance received no attention in the local press at the time. The ceremony was witnessed by local Muslims connected to the diplomatic community, the architect Gerd Block, and other invited guests. Malaysia was represented by its acting high commissioner Mr. Harun bin Ibrahim, and Pakistan by its acting high commissioner, Mr. Ihsanullah Khan.

Attitudes to the incorporation of a mosque in Canberra's urban fabric were varied. A.S. Hook, President of the Australian Institute of Architects in 1928, asserted that the design of the Australian War Memorial was not intended to resemble a mosque (*The Sun*, 1928, p. 12), while noting that “mosques were generally very beautiful”. Later, in 1954, Western Australian Liberal Senator Vincent raised concerns about the presence of Islamic architecture in Canberra (*The Canberra Times*, 1954). Despite such reservations, the mosque's design mostly gained broad acceptance and was positively represented in print media. *The Canberra Times* published an artist's impression of the mosque on 30 January 1960, while *Hemisphere* magazine featured two articles in 1960 and 1962 discussing its architecture in detail. Another article exaggerated the city's new “Eastern and Far Eastern” skyline (*The Canberra Times*, 1961). The reception of the mosque by the wider community was mixed: some locals expressed curiosity and interest in the new building, while others felt apprehensive about the arrival of a new religious community. The mosque's construction reflected the national capital's growing recognition of the importance of religious diversity, and the role that cultural institutions and facilities could play in promoting social cohesion (Bouma et al., 2005). Labor Senator Ryan, who laid the foundation stone of the extension to Yarralumla Mosque in 1982, urged the community “to continue with your good work, and may we make Australia an example of a peaceful country where people of all religions can live in harmony” (*The Canberra Times* 1982, p. 3).

Nevertheless, the mosque faced criticism from some quarters. In his review of Canberra's embassies, historian Graeme Barrow (1978) described the mosque as "a dull building. It is long, low, grey, and only a golden dome on top of the prayer room relieves its drabness" (p. 86). Barrow's reservations also extend to his assessment of the "rather bland" Indonesian Embassy, which he felt was somewhat redeemed by the addition of statues depicting characters from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as a loose reference to Balinese temples and the exhibition space 'Wisma Wisata Budaya' – Cultural Tourism Guesthouse – dedicated to cultural artefacts from the archipelago (Barrow, 1978, p. 81). Though these elements only partially represented the cultural diversity of Indonesia, Barrow considered them to be more in line with the National Capital Authority's encouragement for "foreign governments to design their missions to reflect their country's national architectural style. This practice is unique and allows the embassy to be easily identified by visitors to the national capital" (National Capital Authority [NCA], n.d.).

However, the siting of the mosque on a low rise, surrounded by bushland, constructed in concrete, responded closely to Griffin's recommendations for architecture that would be appropriate for the new capital – and his explicit recommendation to avoid neoclassicism. Griffin (2008) suggested a modern architectural language, dressed in concrete, that the Blocks went on to employ:

It would seem that a suggestion of restriction to one material, reinforced concrete, the newest, cheapest, most durable, least limited, most plastic and variable single medium yet introduced into construction, would contribute to [the] dignity and impressiveness of the entire city, while purity in proportion and unity in scale, appropriate immensity in spans and masses with contrasting delicacy in plastic ornamentation; the elimination of useless protective features and connective expedients, uncalled for in monolithic constructions, together with a maximum of repetition and rhythm, and a general simplicity which is best suited to the economic handling of this medium, would with imagination suffice for rational and genuine style.

p. 9⁸

The mosque designed by Gerd and Renate Block realises this rational and genuine style, hinting at the confident architectural expressions that would later

8 The insertion is by Dustin Griffin, who later edited the text of Walter Burley Griffin's competition proposal, and notes that the supporting documentation was originally completed in haste.

be found in the High Court by Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Briggs (1975), the National Gallery of Australia by Madigan (1982), and Romaldo Giurgola's Parliament Building (1980), which is partially buried in the topography that Griffin so admired. While the architects of these projects also highlight the contributions of a rich and diverse migrant community in Australia, the patrons as well as the authors of the mosque exemplified the diversity of Canberra's Muslim community in the 1960s. The mosque does not offer visual references to the architectural language of any of the contributing nations Indonesia, Malaysia, or Pakistan – nations which are extraordinarily complex in their cultural composition and the concomitant architectural manifestations.

Instead, the Yarralumla mosque presents a diplomatic gesture in the nation's new capital that aligns with Walter Burley Griffin's vision for a democratic civic ideal, which was by no means homogenous. This demographic complexity has since multiplied, and today the Yarralumla community continues to contemplate and celebrate this diversity:

There is no one defined community at all ... there are no zones, like, "this area has all the Egyptians and this area has all the Bangladeshis, and this one" ... it's quite diverse, quite mixed, and the way that mosques are frequented is exactly the same. So this mosque, in particular, being the main one, and the first one, would have been the only mosque for pretty much everyone.

Yarralumla Mosque Committee, 2022

In the years since the mosque's opening, it has become an important site of cultural and religious significance for the Muslim community in Canberra. The mosque held its first wedding in 1964 between Miss Janet Louisa Fewster Jameelah, who had converted to Islam the previous day, and Mr. Abdul Salem Haddad (*The Canberra Times*, 1964, p. 12). It continues to host a range of events and activities, including family celebrations, educational programs, and inter-faith initiatives.

3 Community Growth

The Yarralumla Mosque is a testament to the growth of the Muslim population in the ACT. The Blocks designed the mosque for a capacity of 100 people, and it was frequented by approximately 30 families in the 1970s (Abdullatif Al Fozan Award, 2019b). However, in time it could not cater to the number of people attending special events which punctuate the Muslim calendar. When

the population had grown to over 8,000, major celebrations were held at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) attracting between 3,000 and 4,000 people from all over Canberra region (Islamic Society of the ACT, 2012, p. 5; Abdullatif Al Fozan Award, Canberra 2019b).

Today, Islam in Australia represents the second-largest religion after Christianity (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022b). Between 1996 and 2021, the number of people practising Islam in Australia has experienced a significant increase. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, approximately 200,900 individuals nationally identified as Muslims in 1996 (ABS, 2022b). By 2021, the number of people practising Islam in Australia had risen to 813,392 (ABS, 2022a). This growth underscores the increasing presence and influence of Islam within the global religious landscape. Christianity continues to be the most widely practised religion in Australia: 43.9% of the population identified as Christians in 2021, while 38.9% of the population do not identify with any religion (ABS, 2022b). Meanwhile, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religious traditions represent smaller percentages of the population, contributing to a diverse religious tapestry. ABS data presented by Informed Decisions recorded 9,864 Muslims, or 2.2% of the Canberra population in 2016, growing to 14,602 in 2021 (ABS data compiled and presented by Informed Decisions, 2021). Hashim Abdul Rahman, first president of the Islamic Society of the ACT, established in 1972, estimates the population today is closer to 20,000 (Rahman, 2022).

This increase in the Muslim population can be attributed to several factors, including new migration patterns and changes in government policies. One significant policy change that affected Muslim migration to Australia was the introduction of the *Migration Act 1958*, which led to the end of the White Australia Policy and the opening up of the country to non-European migrants (Jupp, 2001). Furthermore, the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of race, ethnicity, or nationality (Jupp, 2001). This legislation played a crucial role in promoting multiculturalism in Australia, and in turn, contributed to the growth of the Muslim population in the ACT. The subsequent waves of migration from predominantly Muslim countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq played a crucial role in the growth of the Muslim population in the ACT. Furthermore, the Australian government's refugee resettlement program has also contributed to the increase in the Muslim population with 20,358 people settling in Australia on a humanitarian visa in the past 10 financial years (Refugee Council of Australia sourced from Department of Home Affairs, 2025). Another contributing factor to the growth of the Muslim population in the ACT is the increase in international students with 14,582 students recorded in the period from January to

September 2021: Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh are included in the top 10 countries of origin (Australian Government, Department of Education, January–September 2021). While campus prayer spaces are provided for Muslim students, the overall growth of the Muslim community has contributed to the demand for additional congregational prayer spaces in Canberra.

4 New Mosques in Monash and Gungahlin

Although the Yarralumla mosque remained the only purpose-built mosque in Canberra for 50 years, the rise in the Muslim population ultimately contributed to new architectural works with hybrid architectural programs: the Canberra Islamic Centre (CIC) in Monash, south of Canberra, and the Gungahlin Mosque in the north of the city. Notably, both projects – which were enabled primarily through community fundraising – are characterised by lengthy periods of time from the initial impetus to build the mosque through to final completion and use. For example, the Gungahlin community commenced efforts to purchase land in 1999; they were initially offered land in Nicholls but the proposal attracted local opposition – this land is now used for an aged care facility – before the current site of approximately 5,000 square metres was purchased for AU\$53,000 (Anis, 2022). Opposition to the construction of the mosque at Gungahlin prompted a lengthy court case, and a subsequent appeal by the mosque's opponents, which ACT Supreme Court Justice Richard Refshauge ultimately rejected, likening their interference to “that of an ‘intermeddler or busybody’” (as cited in Knaus, 2015).⁹ This time frame is in distinct contrast to the short period – less than five years – between the initial proposition and the opening of the Yarralumla mosque, which was realised within a small, insular diplomatic community. Instead, the design and development approval process for both the CIC and Gungahlin mosque were subject to lengthy approval processes involving multiple stakeholders and public consultation within the ACT.

The Canberra Islamic Centre (CIC) was established in 1993, beginning with the Community Hall (Figures 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6). The adjoining Masjid Sabah Al Ahmad was completed in 2018.¹⁰ The entire project has been undertaken in

9 The group, called the Concerned Citizens of Canberra, was led by lawyer Robert Balzola. He also led the Concerned Citizens of Bendigo, creating substantial delays for the Bendigo community after launching a court action in August 2012 (Knaus, 2015).

10 The initial masterplan envisaged a mosque, but the community centre was completed in the 1990s and used as a mosque before the mosque was approved and built in 2018.



FIGURE 7.3 Community Hall, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH



FIGURE 7.4 Community Hall, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

collaboration with Shamsul Huda. The Gungahlin Mosque was completed in 2017 in collaboration with Jalal Anis. Both designers were trained in architecture at the highly regarded Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). Analysis of the architectural design of both projects, considered in relation to interviews with each designer, reveals a new architectural language for a contemporary Australian mosque. While both designs are quite



FIGURE 7.5 Main Hall in the Community Hall, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022

PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

distinct from the modernist aesthetic of their early counterpart at Yarralumla, they similarly challenged a traditional or popular Islamic architectural vocabulary characterised by an Arab-centric or pseudo-Islamic aesthetic, or regional precedents from a specific country. This departure was not without controversy, eliciting some concerns within both communities that a new architectural language might undermine the religious and cultural identity that mosques traditionally represent. However, such a departure can also be read as a profound contextual response whereby the multicultural compositions of the Canberra-based Muslim congregations, on one hand, and the setting of Canberra as the capital of a multicultural state on the other, has informed an



FIGURE 7.6 Artwork in a Corridor of the Community Hall, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022

PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

inclusive approach to mosque architecture whereby the spatial components transcend specific cultural or ethnic associations. Implicit in these works are negotiations across multiple cultural groups that mean the resultant works embrace the heterogeneity of Islam in Australia.

Both mosques integrate the archetypal spatial organisation of a mosque and reinterpret it within an Australian context. Emphasising the importance of the courtyard as a key architectural element, the new projects are organised around these spaces, which serve multiple functions. The CIC masterplan features a large multipurpose hall, learning spaces, a swimming pool for women and girls (not yet built), business suites, and an Australian Islamic Library (Figure 7.7) with more than 4,000 books and a professional librarian. This



FIGURE 7.7 Library inside of the Community Hall, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022

PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH



FIGURE 7.8 Masjid Sabah Al Ahmad, Monash, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

community centre was completed as the first stage of the masterplan alongside the courtyard as it was considered to be less controversial in terms of development approval (Canberra Islamic Centre [CIC], 2022).

The community centre was initially used for prayer until funds became available to build the mosque (Figure 7.8), which were complemented by AU\$1.4 million in donations from the State of Kuwait (Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC], 2016), although that patron's influence in architectural expression is limited to Kuwait's donation of the main chandelier within the prayer hall and decorative sculptures within the grounds in the form of large gold coffee pots. This limited influence on the architectural design itself is notable compared to other mosques that integrate regional motifs or formal compositions that speak to their patronage.¹¹ This funding could be

11 Similarly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provided approximately \$300,000 for the construction of King Fahd School and Mosque in Lakemba, Sydney in 1975, and provided funding for the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1987, and the King Abdulaziz Mosque in Tunis, Tunisia (Saudi Press Agency, 2023). The Turkish government and its Directorate of Religious Affairs provided funding for the Islamic Centre in Tokyo, begun in 1998. Similarly, the Islamic Central Masjid of Seoul, completed in 1974 – though originally opened in 1946 – was built with substantial funding from Saudi Arabia (Song, 2016) together with an exceptional land grant of 5000 square metres from the government of



FIGURE 7.9 Courtyard with view to Mosque, Canberra Islamic Centre, Monash, Canberra, 2022

PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

interpreted as another layer of architectural diplomacy reflecting relationships which transcend geographical borders while reflecting the politics of mosque building (Faleh, 2023). Rizvi (2015) maintains that architecture becomes a symbol or “a gift and ambassador to the recipient nation” (p. 27). The mosque is located opposite the multipurpose hall and features a butterfly roof and a simple façade, distinct from the Middle Eastern influences seen in the vaulted space and smaller openings of the older hall. This subtle architectural shift reflects the evolving demographics of the Muslim community around CIC. Led by a steering committee that emphasises inclusivity of both male and female members, including in the role of leadership, and aims to represent the diverse nationalities within the community, CIC has transitioned from a predominantly Middle Eastern congregation to a more heterogeneous composition.

The community centre continues to offer a hub to accommodate all facets of the life of the community, including education, recreation, weddings, sports, and business activities. For example, the basketball court in the courtyard is a popular and iconic space for Muslim youth (Figure 7.9). During the pilot community workshop involving more than 30 adults, one participant

South Korea and contributions from Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Morocco, and Qatar. In each case, these projects reflect more explicit engagement with architectural references that reflect the architectural language of these patrons, to varying degrees. At the same time, these mosques represent how architectural diplomacy can become a powerful tool to strengthen ties across borders and dialogue between nations.

fondly recalled playing basketball at the mosque after Sunday school, highlighting the strong connection between the space and the community (CIC, 2023). In addition, other members reminisced about playing table tennis, badminton, cricket, or soccer, and several women recorded their participation in fitness activities where they felt included (CIC, 2023). Considered together, the many and varied anecdotes by community members underscored their varied use of the spaces as well as their meaningful attachment to place (CIC, 2023). Moreover, CIC has long been involved in outreach. According to Huda (2022), this extended to education for

all the federal departments and everything like DFAT, when they were sending their people overseas, they used to come [to us] and we had trainers who used to train them in Islamic [sic] language and also the cultural aspects of things [before they travel]. We did that for the Department of Defence, the Department of Social Services, and a whole lot of other departments.

Food is also an important aspect of community gatherings, not least feeding hungry children attending Sunday school (Figure 7.10), as well as at outreach events like Open Day. A large commercial kitchen is another feature that enables the community to celebrate diverse culinary traditions, promoting cultural understanding and cohesion. This diversity is further celebrated in a recurrent sentiment expressed in the pilot workshop: that CIC brings people from “all over the world together” (CIC, 2023) for community gatherings and prayer.

In Gungahlin, the growth of Canberra’s Muslim community is most notable. The 2021 ABS Census shows that of the Territory’s Muslim population of 14,613, 5,358 people or 6.1% live in Gungahlin (ABS 2021). In this context, there was a high demand for a place of congregational prayer. Reflecting on his initial engagement, Anis (2022) stated that “when I first got involved, I had to buy books just to understand the trend around the world. And from the very beginning, we [in collaboration with the Gungahlin Mosque Committee] wanted to find the language for what would be an Australian mosque”. To achieve this, Anis referred to his design concept as “the imaginary box” (Figures 7.11, 7.12 and 7.13). He argued that architects in countries like Australia have a responsibility to break free from common perceptions of “traditional” Islamic architecture and embrace new architectural expressions that respond to the diversity of Muslim communities. Anis elucidated how he skilfully incorporated diverse familiar elements while simultaneously aligning with the values of the Australian Muslim community.



FIGURE 7.10 Sunday school menu at Canberra Islamic Centre, featuring typical Australian fare
MONASH, CANBERRA, 2022. PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH

Planning authorities received the design very positively, as “a breath of fresh air” (Anis, 2022). Moreover, acknowledging negotiation about adequate car parking, utilities and existing trees, the authorities were supportive because of the demand for this facility by the growing community (Anis, 2022). The approach taken in the design of the Gungahlin Mosque aims to establish a foundation for future generations to foster connections with other communities. Similarly, the Gungahlin Mosque committee (2022) emphasised the diversity within the congregation, where individuals from various nationalities



FIGURE 7.11 Main façade, Gungahlin Mosque, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH



FIGURE 7.12 Main façade, Gungahlin Mosque, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH



FIGURE 7.13 External view of *qibla* wall and *mihrab*, Gungahlin Mosque, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY K. BARTSCH



FIGURE 7.14 Skylight at Gungahlin Mosque, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY MD. M. RASHID



FIGURE 7.15 Interior, Gungahlin Mosque, Canberra, 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY MD. M. RASHID

are not only welcomed but also celebrated. This extends to a diverse range of age groups and the more than 50 languages spoken within the mosque as well (Gungahlin Mosque Committee, 2022).

The design incorporates unconventional Islamic forms that take inspiration from traditional Islamic elements. For instance, instead of a traditional dome, there is a circular skylight symbolising a strong connection between worshippers and God (Almighty) (Figure 7.14). The round skylight also highlights the unity of God (Allah), while the eight-pointed star within it represents the Islamic calligraphic tradition. This element provided the greatest challenges for the engineer and builder in comparison to the majority of works which were quite standard (Anis, 2022). In both the Gungahlin Mosque and the CIC, the courtyard is employed as a central compositional element, mediating between and connecting the main prayer hall and community facilities. The Gungahlin Mosque includes a Sunday school, a multipurpose hall, a gymnasium, and a creche, in addition to the main prayer hall (Figure 7.15). For Anis, “the design sought to incorporate traditional and simple mosque planning and

contemporary built form. The simplicity also represents the simple lifestyle of the Australian community” (as cited in Abdullatif Al Fozan Award, 2019c).

In the case of the CIC and Gungahlin, the designers of each mosque identified their intentional departure from the conventional iconography of traditional mosques. The architects opted for simplicity and contemporary expression to ensure ease of construction, within budget, as the funds were primarily raised by the community. Despite offers from various embassies to provide significant funding for the construction of the mosque, with the expectation of showcasing their respective architectural styles – as per the NCA’s preference for a national architectural expression in embassy design – the community humbly declined the offers and aimed to achieve, instead, a more inclusive architectural language. Therefore, both architects opted for a contemporary formal vocabulary that did not subscribe to any specific national or regional architectural tradition. In doing so, the two buildings challenge traditional or popular Islamic architectural vocabularies. Considered together, these mosques offer multigenerational infrastructure for the community. They demonstrate a holistic approach to mosque design, accommodating diverse needs and creating inclusive spaces that reflect the vibrant and diverse communities that they serve.

5 The Mosque and Its Morphology

The three mosques presented in this chapter comprise diverse architectural expressions that have emerged from collaborative efforts between architect and client. Nevertheless, consistent spatial principles can be discerned in each case (Figure 7.16). These principles might be interpreted in relation to the linguistic metaphor proposed by the eminent French sociologist Jacques Berque (1978). Berque proposed that the built environment of Muslim communities can be understood using a linguistic model, with a constant architectural morphology (*thawābit*) and varying rhetorical elements (*mutahawilat*). For Berque, this enduring morphology defines Islamic architecture, transcending history, geography, and culture. Architectural historian Stefano Bianca (2000) concurs, arguing that mosque architecture retains a consistent morphology based on fundamental philosophy and values, while the materialisation may vary according to circumstances.

Given the absence of specific guidelines for mosque architecture in Islamic texts, interpretations are subjective and open to discussion. In Islamic jurisprudence, a mosque is not exclusively defined as a sacred space for daily prayer and

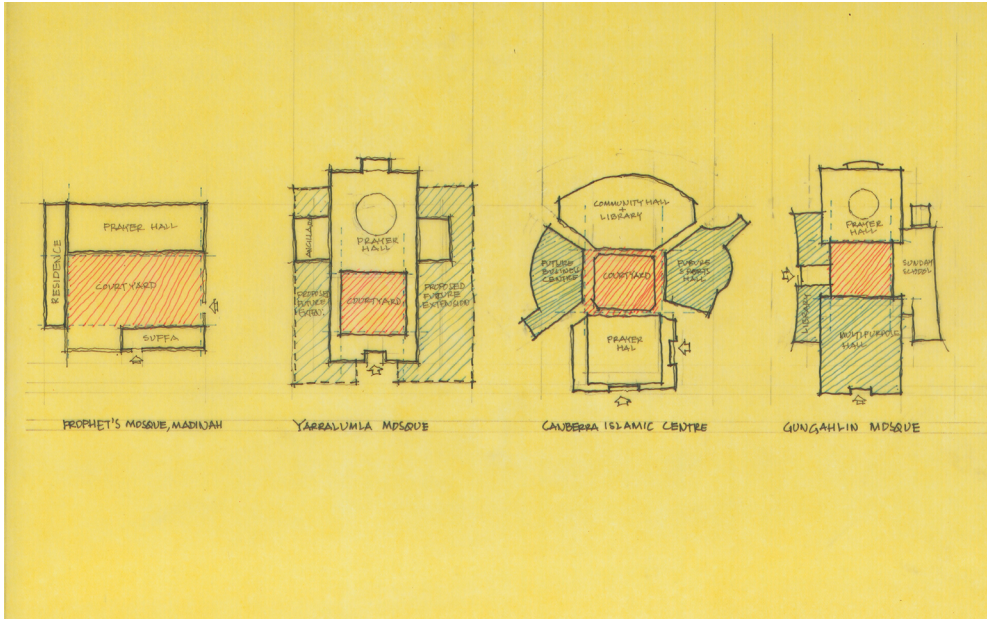


FIGURE 7.16 The House of the Prophet (PBUH) at Madinah compared to Yarralumla Mosque, Canberra Islamic Centre, and Gungahlin Mosque
COMPARATIVE DIAGRAMS BY MD. M. RASHID

the Friday Jumma prayer; it is described as an institution for Muslims. Mosques, then, can function as multifaceted centres encompassing social, political, and religious dimensions. Given the holistic nature of Islam, which encompasses all aspects of a Muslim's life, mosques should be designed to accommodate the diverse activities carried out by Muslims. Consequently, mosques contribute to the identity of the Muslim community, serving as hubs for congregation, information dissemination, education, and conflict resolution.

The first mosque built by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) serves as an example to grasp the mosque's morphology. Spatial analysis of the first mosque identifies four distinct spaces. These include: 1. the prayer hall and the Qibla; 2. the residence of the Prophet and his wives; 3. the *Suffah* or a shaded raised platform near the entrance; and 4. the courtyard. The *Suffah* served multiple purposes, including temporary lodging for the companions who did not have any home or relatives in Madinah; shelter for travellers; a prisoner-of-war camp; an infirmary; and a place in Madinah to meet with non-Muslim tribes. These functions are organised around an enclosed courtyard, which also serves as a gathering space for the community on various occasions and as a recreational space for women and girls, including the Prophet's wives. This arrangement demonstrates that the mosque of the Prophet (PBUH) encompassed all the

essential elements needed for communal life. These buildings were characterised by a simple vernacular architectural language.

These distinct spaces can be identified in each of the three Canberra mosques. The comparative analytical diagram (Figure 7.16) illustrates how each mosque is arranged around a central courtyard to unify distinct functions, forming the core morphology of these mosques. The architectural expression – the rhetoric – of each mosque responds to the specific context in which it is designed. The Blocks' design for the Yarralumla mosque materialises Walter Burley Griffin's preference for a modern architectural language, which is also evident in their design for the German Embassy. Conversely, in the latter two cases, the architects sought a lingua franca to address the heterogeneity within the Canberra Muslim community, adapting their designs accordingly. According to Anis (2022):

The design morphology was to follow a traditional process or layout, in which there will be a central courtyard and the facilities will be surrounding that courtyard ... if people want to talk and mingle, they can come into the courtyard, which is similar to the CIC Mosque at Monash. So we tried to follow the same morphology, you can say.

Similarly, Huda (2022) highlighted the universal morphology of the courtyard: "this whole notion about one of the key elements [of a mosque design] was a central courtyard, and then there is entry and a procession through the courtyard to the mosque". However, in the case of Gungahlin, Anis (2022) conveyed concern that the courtyard is not as useful as it could be because of the cold winters in Canberra: "Future changes may include covering the courtyard for better weather protection".

In the three cases presented here, the architects adhered to this morphology of the mosque in terms of orientation and provision of prayer spaces. At the same time, they have explored contemporary Australian architectural aesthetics, including elements such as corrugated iron roofs, simple façades, readily available materials, and contemporary fenestration. Most significantly, they have integrated additional functions to foster community cohesion. This approach is not only audacious but also distinctly reflective of the innovative spirit found within Australian architecture.¹² By eschewing explicit regional or

12 Due to Australia's considerable distance from other regions and large multicultural migrant communities, it is historically susceptible to a wide range of international influences, leading to significant variations and innovations in architectural expression across different regions.

ethnic formal precedents, these architects explored a new language to address the heterogeneous nature of the Australian Muslim community.

The endeavour of constructing a mosque extends beyond the mere creation of spiritual spaces. The mosque functions as an institution that unites members of the Muslim community, transcending differences in race, colour, or social status. In this context, the mosques in the capital serve as exemplary centres that promote unity among Muslims through a diplomatic architectural language or rhetoric (*mutahawilat*), while maintaining the morphology (*thawābit*) of the prototypical mosque. In doing so, these mosques offer a secure place for prayer while fostering a sense of belonging within a diverse Muslim community and accommodating social, cultural, and religious functions. Although critics may interpret these departures as rejections of traditional motifs, the architects engaged uphold the fundamental principles of mosque design, including correct orientation and unencumbered prayer spaces, while opting for innovation over traditional forms and motifs.

6 Building Faith in Canberra

In conclusion, the Yarralumla mosque stands as a significant landmark in the history of Canberra, representing a successful collaboration between client and architect in 1960. The project embodies the values and aspirations of the emerging Muslim community at the time. Since its opening, the Yarralumla mosque has become an important hub for the Muslim community in Canberra, hosting a range of events and activities throughout the year. Visitors to the mosque include delegations from other countries, as well as local politicians and community leaders. The mosque has also been the site of interfaith events, including open days and dinners, aimed at building bridges between different religious groups and the mosque served as a beacon for Muslims and non-Muslims to gather after the Christchurch Mosque shooting (Sleiman, 2019).

Adjustments have been introduced to accommodate Yarralumla's growing population, such as the installation of new sail structures over the courtyard to accommodate larger congregations (Figures 7.17 and 7.18), however, plans to expand have been resisted since 1977 (*The Canberra Times*, 1977). Expansion in the north and south of Canberra is evident and the Gungahlin Mosque remains a magnet for newcomers in this rapidly growing community. Over 200 children eagerly await enrolment at the CIC (CIC, 2023). Construction of two further mosques is currently underway in Belconnen and Nurrabundah, where architects are already engaged to design the buildings (Australian Associated Press, 2021; Kemp, 2020; Le Lievre, 2018). At the same time, the Yarralumla



FIGURE 7.17 Yarralumla Mosque, Canberra, in 2022
PHOTOGRAPH BY MD. M. RASHID

Mosque committee is navigating the renovations required to maintain this ageing mosque and negotiating with the local council for additional parking that does not disrupt the neighbours. Fundraising continues to be a central concern for each community as they strive to keep pace with growth.

As more mosques continue to be built in the ACT, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical importance of the Yarralumla mosque which represents a tangible outcome of the international diplomatic collaborations that have been integral to Canberra's inception. While the initial reception of the mosque by the wider community was mixed, it has become an important hub for the Muslim community in Canberra, hosting a range of events and activities throughout the year. Despite the National Capital Authority's desire for diplomatic architecture that offers a material expression of the "characteristics representative of the culture of each mission's home country" or an easily identifiable "national architectural style" (NCA, n.d.), the architecture of this diplomatic mosque adopts a universal language. The Blocks' design does not favour any architectural motifs of a particular national, regional, or ethnic architectural style. Similarly, the designs for the CIC and Gungahlin mosque



FIGURE 7.18 Interior of the Yarralumla Mosque courtyard, Canberra, in 2022. Interior of the Yarralumla Mosque courtyard, Canberra, in 2022, showing inverted concrete shells which differ from the initial concept by Block, and the more recent sail structures.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MD. M. RASHID

intentionally avoid reference to any specific culture or ethnicity, representing a diplomatic gesture that embraces the diversity within the mosque community in an increasingly multicultural capital. However, a closer analysis of the spatial configuration of each mosque highlights a morphology (*thawābit*) that can be traced to the prototypical mosque.

This chapter has provided a critical examination of three purpose-built mosques, their history, and their significance in the context of the changing demographics of the ACT. By considering the historical, cultural, and architectural significance of these buildings, we gain a deeper understanding of the role of the Muslim community in the Australian Capital Territory and the contribution of multiculturalism in the region. Mosques serve as dynamic spaces that accommodate the growth of a community, intercultural exchange, and dialogue. Architectural projects provide a lens through which to view and appreciate the richness and diversity of the Muslim experience in Australia,

countering reductive portrayals of Muslim communities in isolation. It emphasises the mosque as a site of cultural exchange, spiritual reflection, and community engagement, inviting a deeper appreciation for the social and cultural contributions of Muslim minorities. In the case of the national capital, this process is posited as a diplomatic exchange where architectural practice, centred on client-architect relationships, reveals processes of negotiation, formal experimentation, and practical decision-making for a more inclusive understanding of Islam in Australia.

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PART 3

Being and Perceiving a Muslim in Australia



Australian Muslim Women's Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence

The Impact of Faith

Balawyn Jones, Amira Aftab and Ghena Krayem

Abstract

Faith plays an important role in the lives of many Muslim women in Australia. This chapter builds upon earlier research that interrogates how faith impacts the decision-making processes of Muslim women in the context of domestic and family violence. Further, this chapter reflects on the role of faith in the design and provision of domestic and family violence services to support Muslim victim-survivors.

1 Introduction

Muslim women in Australia are incredibly diverse, yet their faith plays a central role in many of their lives. Contrary to assumptions often made, many Muslim women find empowerment in their faith. This chapter, first, draws on recent data and literature to outline the diversity that exists among Australian Muslim women and the way that their faith is relevant to decision-making around key aspects of their lives in both private and public spheres – including employment, marriage, and divorce. Against this background, the chapter then considers the ways in which faith is relevant to understanding Australian Muslim women's experiences of domestic and family violence within their private lives. In particular, the chapter investigates the relevance of faith to the prevention of, and responses to, domestic and family violence, including the effectiveness of services designed specifically to support Muslim communities.

Muslim women in Australia come from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is reflected in the statistics that demonstrate the diversity of Australia's Muslim population. Muslims make up approximately 3.2% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022), including both Australian-born Muslims and Muslims from 183 diverse migrant communities (Hassan, 2018). It is therefore important to recognise the cultural and ethnic diversity that shapes Muslim women's experiences.

For scholars and advocates working with faith-based communities, the necessity of applying an intersectional lens to their work is uncontroversial. Intersectionality can be defined as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Crenshaw, 1991, as cited in *Muslim Women Australia*, 2021a, p. 4). As Truong et al. (2020) explain:

[I]t must be recognised that culture and religion are distinct, yet overlapping, concepts. For example, two people – one born in Somalia and one born in Indonesia – identifying with the same religion (Islam) may have entirely distinct cultural and linguistic practices. Although ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ are often used interchangeably, these two related concepts need to be disentangled ... It is important to recognise that there is much religious and cultural heterogeneity across families and communities in Australia, and that this heterogeneity is increasing.

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Even outside of this cultural and ethnic diversity, not all Muslim women’s experiences are the same. Australian Muslim women face different challenges and have different needs shaped by the intersections between their religious identity, gender, and other identities – like disability, sexuality, and class (Bano, 2017). As such, Muslim women living in Western states like Australia cannot be reduced to a single, homogenous voice.

While we acknowledge the diversity of Australian Muslim women, it is clear that for many Muslim women their faith is central to various aspects of their lives. Intersectional feminists, like Bakht (2008) and Razack (2007), argue that culture and religion are inherent aspects of a woman’s identity (see also Quraishi-Landes, 2011; Treacher, 2003). Religion – as a set of social norms – has the capacity to operate in both empowering and disempowering ways for women (see Department of Social Services, 2017; Ghafournia, 2017; Lu et al., 2020); as explained above, this is further complicated by the interaction between religion and culture. Failure to recognise this nuance ignores the lived realities of the many Muslim women who hold their faith central while exercising their agency.

Faith-related agency is important to the ways in which Australian Muslim women respond to the significant challenges they face in terms of being misunderstood and misrepresented in the public sphere (Rozario, 2018). This is evident in relation to the hijab (headscarf), which Western commentators co-opt in their arguments that Muslim women are oppressed and are victims of their faith (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Baghdadi, 2022). These types of narratives reduce Muslim women’s experiences to stereotypes and ignore the agency Muslim

women exercise in choosing to wear the hijab – or choosing not to (Baghdadi, 2022). Overwhelmingly, Muslim women fear that they will be stereotyped or judged in the Australian context (Muslim Women Australia, 2020b). For example, between 2016 and 2017 there were 349 reported incidents of Islamophobia, mostly directed towards Muslim women and girls, in which 96% of the women who were targeted were wearing *hijab* (Iner, 2019; see also Iner, 2022; Iner et al., 2023).

In challenging these reductive stereotypes, Muslim women continue to contribute in notable ways as “agents of change” within Australian society (Krayem, 2010, p. 17). For example, Muslim women in Western contexts draw on “instrumental agency” to pursue education and employment opportunities (Iner and Korbatieh, 2022, p. 64). In doing so, they create space for themselves and other Muslim women to participate in social and civil spheres. Further, Muslim women have proven to be skilful legal navigators within the legal landscape. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of family law when faced with relationship breakdown or divorce, where Muslim women engage with both religious and civil legal processes to resolve family disputes. In doing so, Muslim women have often found ways to achieve outcomes that are beneficial for them while upholding their faith (Krayem, 2013).

While not all Muslim women will turn to religious processes for family law matters, like divorce, what is clear for those that do is the importance of faith in navigating the space between religious and state legal requirements. Ahmed and Krayem’s (2021) research illustrates how the primary goal for Muslim women who pursue a religious divorce in addition to a civil divorce was ensuring adherence to Islamic principles. Although there are multiple reasons why a woman might choose to seek a religious divorce in addition to a civil divorce, one reason was that doing so enabled women to protect and in some ways strengthen their relationship to God; and, in some cases, it was their personal adherence to Islam that motivated them to end the marriage in the first place (Ahmed and Krayem, 2021). Other reasons for engaging with religious divorce processes included to ensure the divorce was ‘Islamically valid’ – regardless of the level of religiosity of the individual – to avoid stigma from the community, to gain closure, or to end emotional manipulation where their husbands attempted to control them by refusing a religious divorce (Ahmed and Krayem, 2021, pp. 37–42).

In addition to engaging with religious processes, many Muslim women facing family relationship breakdowns prefer to turn to non-state avenues of help-seeking in the first instance. Most turn to informal channels – that is, family, friends, or elders within the community – before turning to religious processes, and most certainly before considering civil legal processes (Ahmed and Krayem, 2021). That is not to say that women do not access mainstream

services but rather that they often do so in tandem with informal sources of advice and support, particularly where their partners are reluctant to engage and participate with mainstream services (Ahmed and Krayem, 2021). Further, recent research conducted by Elhelw Wright (2023) documented how, in the context of domestic and family violence, Muslim women tend to turn to informal networks as a “first port of call” (p. 342). This stems from broader cultural norms within Muslim communities of turning to informal networks such as family, as opposed to accessing formal institutions or processes for advice and support (Elhelw Wright, 2023).

As faith is an important factor in Australian Muslim women’s lives in general, it makes sense that faith is also an important factor in the context of domestic and family violence. Research reveals that engaging with Islam and Islamic law can be a powerful mechanism to address gendered violence within Australian Muslim communities, and provide assurance to Muslim women that they do not have to choose between their faith and their safety (Elhelw Wright, 2023; Esmaceli et al., 2022; Ghafournia, 2017; Ghafournia and Easteal, 2021). Australian-based research aligns with international scholarship, which suggests that religion – and Islam specifically – can and does operate as a “useful response to issues related to gender-based violence” (Nyangweso and Olupona, 2019, p. 242; see also Oyewuwo, 2020a; Oyewuwo, 2020b; Yick, 2008). This chapter adds to this body of scholarship, calling for specialist domestic and family violence services to meet the specific religious needs of Muslim women, and mobilising Islam as an empowering force for women experiencing situations of domestic and family violence.

In this chapter we will first discuss contemporary initiatives to combat domestic and family violence within Australian Muslim communities and the central role that faith plays in prevention efforts as well as victim help-seeking and service provision. In the second section, we examine the specific needs of Australian Muslim communities in the context of domestic and family violence, which are currently subsumed within the label of ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) groups in general. In the third section, we advocate for the funding of specialised services for Australian Muslim women to meet this community’s specific needs, and we look to Muslim Women Australia’s ‘Linking Hearts’ model as an example of specialist service provision.

2 Barriers for Muslim Women When Seeking Help from Mainstream Service Providers

In the Australian context, one in three women has reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by a man that they know (OurWatch,

2023). Further, one in four women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former partner since the age of 15 (OurWatch, 2023). While this chapter focuses on domestic and family violence within Australian Muslim communities, these communities do not “have a monopoly on violence against women” (Abu-Lughod, 2015, p. 126). As Sally Engle Merry (2009) explains:

Gender violence occurs throughout the world, but it takes quite different forms in different social contexts. It is located in particular sets of social relationships, structures of power, and meanings of gender.

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Context and language matter, both for the prevention of and responses to domestic and family violence and in order to understand the barriers Muslim victims face to accessing services.

First, it is important to acknowledge that Australian Muslim women face a variety of challenges when it comes to seeking help for, or ‘disclosing’, domestic and family violence. A reluctance to seek support or services for domestic and family violence may arise for a number of reasons, including a fear of facing discrimination from or marginalisation by the broader community and/or mainstream service providers (Elhelw Wright, 2023). As such, ‘disclosures’ of domestic and family violence should not be positioned as the ‘ultimate’ expression of women’s agency. Victims of domestic and family violence seek help for many reasons, including awareness of their legal rights, empowerment through their religion, or because of an innate sense of injustice (Jones, 2022).

On the other hand, there are many reasons why women choose not to identify themselves as victims. As mentioned above, these reasons could be specific to their experiences as Muslim women – for example, fear of marginalisation when seeking help from mainstream services – but the reasons could also be more general, such as fear for their safety or a lack of tangible resources to support themselves and their children. Therefore, although this chapter discusses disclosure of domestic and family violence, disclosure should not be positioned as the ‘ultimate’ goal for victims as, in particular contexts, it may also be an act of agency to choose not to identify as a victim. The element of choice is key, and depriving women of the choice to self-identify – for example, due to a lack of cultural safety in the context of domestic and family violence service provision – is itself a form of victimisation that restricts women’s agency.

Secondly, it has been widely documented that Muslim victims face a range of barriers to help-seeking through mainstream domestic and family violence services – as opposed to specialised services, which are culturally and religiously competent – including Islamophobia and the double bind. For

example, in Aly and Gaba's (2007) study of Muslim women's access to domestic and family violence crisis accommodation, victims interviewed reported an "inability to maintain cultural and religious practices in the crisis accommodation environment" and "anti-Muslim" sentiment resulting in the social isolation of the Muslim community, in particular Muslim women, in the Australian context (see also Muslim Women Australia, 2023). Practically, this included a lack of a space or facilities to pray or to prepare halal food (Department of Social Services, 2015; El Matrah, 2015; Vaughan, Davis, et al., 2015).

Further, in Ibrahim's (2020) study of Muslim women who had experienced domestic and family violence, she found that victims were hesitant to report violence to the police because of Islamophobia, fearing that "the police would judge them" and that reporting would "perpetuat[e] negative stereotypes about Muslims" (pp. 2376–2378; see also Afrouz et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020). The latter concern describes what is known as the double bind, which exists at the intersection between Islamophobia and gender injustice – in this case, domestic and family violence – where Muslim women find themselves subject to criticism both within and beyond their communities in the fight for gender justice (Hussein, 2010).

In addition, Ghafournia and Easteal's (2019) study found that "stereotypes, xenophobia, and racism remain evident in the attitude of some service providers and policy makers", particularly the stereotype that "Muslim men are inherently violent and Muslim women are innately submissive and passive" (p. 9016; see also El Matrah et al., 2011). Such stereotypes are deeply rooted in misconceptions that Islam condones violence: for example, the perception that the Muslim world is uncivilised while the West is progressive and enlightened; that Muslim women are oppressed while Western women are empowered and liberated; and that Muslim men are brutish and violent while Western men are rational and free-thinking. Muslim women's experiences within the domestic and family violence sector must be contextualised within their broader experiences of Islamophobia and religious discrimination in Australian society. As discussed above, Islamophobia – and the systemic discrimination that follows – locks women out of important spaces, including domestic and family violence services, despite their needs (El Matrah et al., 2011). The stereotypes of Muslim women as 'oppressed victims' and Muslim men as 'violent perpetrators' continue to play powerfully into how the Muslim community perceives the intervention of the non-Muslim mainstream into issues of domestic and family violence, and therefore affects Muslim women's help-seeking from generalist services (El Matrah et al., 2011).

There are also a number of general barriers to accessing services, including limited understanding of domestic and family violence and/or their rights

under the Australian legal system; fear of losing custody of their children if they report violence; lack of financial stability or independence; and community stigma, or fear of social isolation within their communities (see InTouch, 2010; Krayem and Krayem, 2022; Lu et al., 2020; Vaughan, Block, et al., 2020). Studies have found that these general barriers are compounded by the unique barriers faced by Muslim women. In other words, even if mainstream services are available and victims are aware of these services, service provision that is not culturally and religiously competent – or is perceived not to be – is an added barrier which prevents women from Muslim communities seeking help (Afrouz et al., 2020).

Based on the barriers faced by Muslim women accessing mainstream domestic and family violence services, it can be concluded that there is an acute need for culturally and religiously appropriate services and, relatedly, the need for adequate funding (Truong et al., 2020). In fact, scholars and advocates have long recognised the need for culturally and religiously competent domestic and family violence service provision (Crisp et al., 2017; Ghafournia, 2017; Krayem and Krayem, 2022; Vaughan et al., 2020). However, this evidence base has not yet been adequately translated into government policy and, relatedly, funding of specialised domestic and family violence service provision.

3 The Specific Needs of Australian Muslim Communities in the Context of Domestic and Family Violence

The current approach of the Australian Government is to group all culturally and religiously diverse people under the ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) umbrella. However, the CALD umbrella obscures important differences between its constituent groups, in particular the specific needs of Muslim victims of domestic and family violence. As established above, the category of ‘Muslim women’ contains a plethora of intersecting identities as opposed to being a homogenous group. The complexity within faith-based communities lends itself to the argument that domestic and family violence services should be further specialised in order to adequately meet the multifaceted needs of women who fall within the category of ‘Muslim women,’ which would be otherwise obscured by the broader category of CALD women in general. As Joumaneh El Matrah (2015) argues:

Generalised or generic approaches, which seek to work broadly with CALD communities, have no benefit for Muslim women. Furthermore, recognition of structural impediments or unique challenges that face

CALD communities only go part of the way in recognising factors which need to be addressed in tackling family violence for Muslim communities.

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In addition to El Matrah's (2015) work, previous research (Afrouz et al., 2020; Aly and Gaba, 2007; Ghafournia, 2017) has demonstrated how important it is that social workers and service providers be familiar with Islamic principles and values when working with Muslim clients. The analysis in this section illustrates how the overgeneralisation of women's experiences under the CALD umbrella has led to the neglect of issues specific to the experiences of Muslim women. We argue that in addition to the need for culturally and religiously appropriate domestic and family violence services, cultural and religious competency must extend to all aspects of advocacy to combat domestic and family violence, such as educational and behavioural change programs in the community.

As mentioned above, the existing literature establishes the importance of religion both to the way in which people live their daily lives and to gender justice advocacy, including in relation to domestic and family violence (Afrouz et al., 2020). For example, it is common for perpetrators of domestic and family violence to use "cultural norms", including drawing on religious language and concepts, "to justify, excuse or minimise violence against women" (Lu et al., 2020, section 4.3). Domestic and family violence interventions in Muslim communities must therefore strongly reject "notions of violence as culturally [or religiously] legitimate", while avoiding reliance on racist, colonial, or paternalistic tropes (Lu et al., 2020, section 4.3). Cultural beliefs and religious interpretations that justify, excuse, or minimise violence against women must be challenged, but this needs to be done by people who are qualified and well positioned to do so – that is, by Muslim organisations committed to women's equality (El Matrah, 2015).

Muslim women are not merely passive victims of their religion who are subjected to the "external" imposition of social norms; instead "social norms are the necessary ground through which the [female] subject is realized and comes to enact her agency" (Mahmood 2011, p. 196). Therefore, both domestic and family violence expertise and religious expertise are "required to effectively respond to violence in faith-based communities" (Vaughan, Sullivan, et al., 2020, p. 13). In other words, there is a demonstrated need for cultural and religious competency in the domestic and family violence space. This need is even more acute given that Muslim victims of domestic and family violence tend to seek assistance within their own communities, and due to the fact that Muslim victims continue to face compounding barriers to accessing mainstream services including Islamophobia and the double bind.

4 The Argument for Specialised Domestic and Family Violence Service Provision

As faith is an important factor in how Muslim victims seek help and how they are treated when seeking help, in this section we argue that the funding of specialised domestic and family violence services for Muslim women is essential to meeting victim needs (Afrouz et al., 2020; Aly and Gaba, 2007; El Matrah, 2015; Ghafournia, 2017). Further, this section elaborates on how a specialised service would better meet such needs, drawing on Muslim Women Australia's 'Linking Hearts' model as a blueprint. We turn to Muslim Women Australia's model given the organisation's rich history of community outreach within Islamic communities, informed by a combination of "Islamic principles and feminist approaches to addressing domestic violence" (Krayem and Krayem, 2022, p. 79). These two principles provide the foundation for Muslim Women Australia's domestic and family violence service provision model, thus offering a rich case study both in the ways Islam can empower Muslim women experiencing domestic and family violence, and what is lost through generalist rather than specialist services.

By way of background, Muslim Women Australia was established in Sydney in 1983 by migrant Muslim women to allow for the full participation of Muslim women in Australian society, and delivers an array of culturally and religiously appropriate intervention and support services, as well as implementing community development and capacity building initiatives. For over 35 years, Muslim Women Australia has operated as a specialist domestic and family violence service provider, implementing and advocating for culturally and religiously appropriate best-practice models of service provision, and delivering holistic support including prevention and early intervention, safe and supported crisis and transitional accommodation, rapid rehousing, and intensive support for clients with complex needs. Muslim Women Australia's multidisciplinary service provision model – now known as 'Linking Hearts' – can also be described as 'wrap around' service provision or 'a one stop service centre' to meet victim's religious, cultural, legal, and socio-economic needs.

Between 2015 and 2020, Muslim Women Australia's Linking Hearts supported over 5,000 clients from 90 different ethnic groups (Muslim Women Australia, 2020a). As a faith-based community organisation, Muslim Women Australia is uniquely positioned as a domestic and family violence service provider based *within* the communities it serves. The following section summarises how the Linking Hearts model responds to the needs of Muslim victims of domestic and family violence. To clarify, the Linking Hearts domestic and family violence service is not run specifically for, or limited to, the Muslim community but it is auspiced by Muslim Women Australia; therefore the service model

has been developed consistently with the organisational ethics of Muslim Women Australia more broadly.

With respect to Muslim victims' barriers to access domestic and family violence services, Muslim Women Australia recognises the specific and complex needs of Muslim women and respects their agency to make decisions that work best for them. The organisation has achieved this using an intersectional framework that is culturally and religiously appropriate. For example, Muslim Women Australia has an organisational ethos that both respects religion and treats all women with dignity regardless of religion. The service model is based upon Muslim Women Australia's organisational ethos that faith has the capacity to be empowering for Muslim women. The practical religious needs of Muslim women are also catered for in the service model: for example, the service offers ablution and private prayer facilities, *halal* meat, and an alcohol-free environment (Krayem-Abdo, 1996). In addition, staff are highly trained in their respective professions and provide culturally and religiously relevant counselling to clients. The organisation also employs bilingual and culturally diverse Muslim women at all levels (Krayem-Abdo, 1996).

Most mainstream service providers lack engagement with culture and religion, taking a 'colourblind' approach; in contrast, Muslim Women Australia mobilises both "Islamic principles and feminist approaches" to addressing domestic and family violence, including the adoption of a "zero-tolerance approach to men's violence against women and children" supported by Islamic texts and scripture (Krayem and Krayem, 2022, p. 4). As a part of this approach, staff are knowledgeable on the rights of Muslim women under both Australian and Islamic law (Krayem-Abdo, 1996).

Notably, Muslim Women Australia has also developed a culturally and religiously informed perpetrator prevention program, and works with religious figures to advise abusive partners that Islamic scriptures do not support their behaviour (Muslim Women Australia, 2015). Muslim Women Australia officially launched its 'Saving FACE (Faith and Cultural Empowerment)' primary intervention initiative in September 2023. The Saving FACE program acknowledges that the faith of Muslim communities offers contextually specific "challenges and opportunities" in terms of addressing domestic and family violence, where faith is conceptualised as a tool for positive change and a key part of the solution (Muslim Women Australia, 2023).

The Saving FACE program draws on literature from the United Kingdom which looks at the role of faith in addressing domestic and family violence, actively combating the assumption that faith has a negative or causative relationship with violence (Chowdhury, 2023). As mentioned above, faith plays a key role in the way in which victims seek help in domestic and family violence contexts and, we have argued, it should therefore play a key role in service

provision. The Saving FACE program takes this one step further and seeks to engage faith-based principles in primary prevention efforts, positioning faith as a “positive driver in the prevention of violence against women and children”, including by using scripture to condemn violence and promote gender equality (Muslim Women Australia, 2023). By engaging with faith-based “language, phrases and symbols”, the Saving FACE primary prevention program respects Islamic values while emphasising respectful relationships and masculine gender norms that are based on leadership rather than control (Muslim Women Australia, 2023; see also Cuevas and Cudmore, 2017).

Muslim Women Australia’s Saving FACE program goes beyond cultural and religious competency to promote a “Faith-Centred Approach”, an initiative which is “the first of its kind” in the sector (Muslim Women Australia, 2023). It is not the first initiative that has been pioneered by Muslim Women Australia. As explained in Krayem and Krayem’s (2022) study of Muslim Women Australia’s organisational model, the organisation previously ran a specialist domestic and family violence service for Muslim women – the Muslim Women’s Support Centre – before this specialist service was amalgamated into a generalist CALD service – that is, Linking Hearts – during New South Wales (NSW) government funding changes in 2014.

In 2012, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services released the consultation report that ostensibly shaped the Going Home Staying Home (GHS) reforms and which, among many other things, recognised stakeholders’ belief in “the importance of specialised knowledge and experience to ensure the ‘right’ decisions are made about the individualised approach for a particular client in a particular context” (p. 6). However, the finalised GHS reforms, released two years later, flattened specialised services and combined domestic and family violence services with homelessness services in a move that has been argued to have reduced the issues of domestic and family violence victims to matters of “residential and tenancy status” (Heward-Belle, 2019, p. 186). While NSW family and community services minister Gabrielle Upton and NSW citizenship and communities minister Victor Dominello deemed Linking Hearts “vital for the region due to its cultural diversity” (Kozaki, 2015), the GHS reforms resulted in the decline of “small local organisational services and specialist services” (Onyx et al., 2016, p. 175). This shift in government funding from specialist to generalist service provision was described as “taking the sector back to the era before the 1980s where the needs of Muslim women were unmet and misunderstood” (Krayem and Krayem, 2022, p. 95); as explained above, this is because the specific needs of Muslim women are not necessarily accommodated in a generalist service model (Krayem and Krayem, 2022, p. 95; see also Roude, 1990).

The current CEO of Muslim Women Australia, Hajjeh Maha Abdo, explained that the shift in funding from specialist to generalist service provision placed extraordinary pressure on the organisation's services, meaning that:

there have been times where they have had to turn away Muslim women because of a lack of room. This has meant that once again the community have had to try and accommodate women and children in an ad hoc and informal way, reminiscent of the 1980s before the establishment of the Muslim Women's Support Centre ... [T]he need that we started with is re-emerging – [Muslim victims of domestic and family violence] are asking for a specialised service that meets their cultural and religious need[s].

KRAYEM and KRAYEM, 2022, p. 95

Hajjeh Maha Abdo made the above statement before the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, the pandemic and associated lockdown measures in Sydney have exacerbated the demand for, and the pressure on, Muslim Women Australia's already limited services (Muslim Women Australia, 2020a; Muslim Women Australia, 2021b). During the pandemic, social distancing measures "triggered trauma and increased stress and anxiety" (Muslim Women Australia, 2021b, p. 9) for many clients, while lockdown measures that restricted people to their homes escalated domestic and family violence. In response, Linking Hearts caseworkers conducted twice-daily check-ins with clients and provided virtual and in-person support, as well as advocating for clients especially where digital literacy skills and the lack of access to internet, laptops, and/or tablets compounded barriers to accessing services. The increase in domestic and family violence during the pandemic, coupled with increased reliance on Linking Hearts' services, placed "significant pressures on service resources" (Muslim Women Australia, 2020a, p. 13). The stretching of available resources across the broader CALD community under the revised post-2014 funding arrangements has meant that both before and after Covid-19, Linking Hearts is unable to assist all Muslim victims who seek assistance from its services.

The above conclusions are supported by Ahmed and Krayem's 2021 study of family dispute resolution processes in Australian Muslim communities, which found that:

a greater role for Muslim women's advocacy services like Muslim Women Australia would see the most vulnerable women being supported in a holistic way and addressing various needs such as housing, legal advice,

financial support, and counselling in a religiously and culturally appropriate manner.

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Further, recent community consultations conducted by Muslim Women Australia to gauge the level of support for a specialised Muslim women's domestic and family violence service were met with overwhelming support, which reflects the need for such a service at the community level (Krayem-Abdo, n.d.).

5 Conclusion

Given the central role that faith plays in Muslim women's lives and the particular barriers faced by Muslim women in the context of domestic and family violence, prioritisation of funding for specialised service provision would undoubtedly lead to better outcomes for Muslim victims. On the basis of the above analysis, it can be concluded that mainstream domestic and family violence services – including services for CALD communities in general – are overwhelmed by demand and critically under-resourced, creating structural limitations to the services' ability to adequately cater for the complex needs of Muslim women in a culturally and religiously competent way. Funding of domestic and family services is currently underpinned by the conflation of multiple communities under the homogenising label of 'CALD' as well as the collapse of the distinction between domestic and family violence and homelessness following the 2014 reforms. As domestic and family violence continues to claim women's lives at an alarming rate (Bahr, 2023), there remains a critical need to engage with the nuances of this crisis and to remedy the failure to address these nuances through adequate and targeted funding. The literature illustrates a need to turn away from generalising Muslim women's experiences under the CALD umbrella and towards the funding of specialised services. The services offered by Muslim Women Australia before the 2014 funding changes, and, subsequently, as part of the Linking Hearts service model, provide a blueprint for culturally and religiously competent domestic and family violence service provision that is appropriate for Australian Muslim communities.

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Pakistani Muslim Immigrant Women in Australia

Self and Izzat (Honour)

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Abstract

With a view to filling the gap in the literature on the nature and extent of similar transmission of cultural notions of *izzat* (honour) in Australia, this chapter explores the notions and experiences of Muslim Pakistani women in the Perth metropolitan area. The chapter explores the prevalence of the concept of honour (*izzat*) among South Asian societies with a focus on Pakistani culture(s). It briefly discusses the history of immigration from Pakistan to Australia, and the changing demographic features of these immigrants with a focus on Western Australia. Then the chapter explores notions of honour among Pakistani women in Western Australia with reference to data gathered through qualitative interviews with 15 Muslim women of Pakistani origin. It argues that the notions of honour reflect both a continuity and change in the way these women relate to the concept of honour. This is manifested in their ideas and lived experiences, thus adding a dimension of both travelling identities and agentic activism on their part.

1 Introduction

The notion of honour (*izzat*) constitutes an important dimension of the South Asian sociocultural milieu. It defines how individuals, families, and the communities ought to conceive of their identities and behave in private and public spheres, and it emerges as sets of ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate in any given circumstance. As such, it includes duties of commission and omission, and the affiliated costs and benefits of fulfilling or ignoring these duties. The operationalisation of these ideas ranges from how someone dresses and relates to immediate and extended family networks to the person's ideas of modesty, respect, and gender relations. If the act of observing the limits delineated by the notions of *izzat* results in a sense of "self-respect" and "prestige", the failure to do so results in "shame", and loss of "self-respect" and "prestige" (Takhar, 2016, pp. 186–189). *Izzat* is located within the framework

of integrated communal identities; the costs and benefits extend beyond the individual to include family and societal networks. A person who does not operate within the parameters of honourable behaviour also brings disrepute to their immediate and extended family (Takhar, 2016, pp. 186–187). This, in turn, can impact the health of those affected by the contravention of assumed notions of *izzat* (Gunasinghe, Hatch, and Lawrence, 2019). It also creates justification for those “impacted” to divest themselves of the shame by taking what they consider to be appropriate responses (Solotaroff, Pande, and World, 2014).

Despite its apparently gender-neutral nature, the concept of *izzat* in South Asian societies has a gendered dimension: women’s moral values and actions are linked more to the perpetuation or violation of family’s honour than those of men (Kaplanian and Gill, 2019). Lives of Pakistani women, who constitute 49.6% of the country’s total population (Bank, The World Bank Data, 2022), are shaped by these overarching notions of *izzat*. Pakistan’s identity as a Muslim-majority state also contributes to sustaining and justifying prevalent notions of honour/*izzat*. Because 95–97 % of its total population identify as Muslims, Islamic injunctions as encoded in the Qur’an and Hadith are often used to justify and defend the gendered application of notions of *izzat* (J. Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Yilmaz and Ahmed, 2018). Though Islamic feminists and those exposed to Western ideas contest the tendency to locate *izzat* in the body and morals of a woman (Zubair and Zubair, 2017), it continues unabated.

As more than 10 million Pakistanis live overseas, these views and related behavioural patterns have also been transmitted across international borders. Gunasinge (2015, pp. 56–80) demonstrated that young Pakistani women in the UK continue to subscribe to ideas of *izzat*, knowing the associated costs of non-compliance with these cultural norms. The sense of obligation in this respect sustains behavioural patterns that can be sometimes detrimental to the health of the young Pakistani female diaspora. Baloch et al. (2023), Zaidi and Shuraydi (2002), and Jamal (2021) share similar ideas with reference to Pakistani women in Western societies.

No similar studies exist on Muslim women in Australia – including those of Pakistani origin. References to family honour are sometimes mentioned in relation to, for example, young Muslim women’s access to higher education (Al-deen, 2019). Mostly, however, the literature on women and *Shari’a* implicitly addresses ideas related to honour among Australian Muslim women (for example, Akbarzadeh, 2010; Rozario, 1998). With a view to filling this gap in the literature on the nature and extent of similar transmission of cultural notions of *izzat* in Australia, this chapter explores the notions and experiences of Pakistani Muslim women in the Perth metropolitan area. These women form part of the overall South Asian community of immigrants to Australia

which stood at 1,080,888 in the 2021 Australian Census. In addition to 89,633 Pakistanis, these include migrants from India (673,352), Bhutan (12,002), Bangladesh (51,491), Nepal (122,506), Sri Lanka (131,904), and a small number of Maldivians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). While Nepalese are the fastest growing community in Australia, registering 124% growth since 2016, Pakistani and Indian immigrants have also increased by over 40% and Indian immigrants rank second in the list of five top countries of birth, excluding Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explores the prevalence of the concept of honour (*izzat*) among South Asian societies with a focus on Pakistani culture(s). It briefly discusses the history of immigration from Pakistan to Australia, and the changing demographic features of these immigrants with a focus on Western Australia. The second part explores the notions of honour among Pakistani women in Western Australia with reference to data gathered through qualitative interviews with 15 Muslim women of Pakistani origin. The third part explores the continuity and change in the way these women relate to the concept of honour.

2 Pakistani Immigration into Australia: the Context for Notions of *Izzat*

Immigration to Australia from what constitutes Pakistan today pre-dates its creation in August 1947. In the 19th century, a settler named Landells brought some Pathans from what was called the North West Frontier Province to “take part in the first relief expeditions sent to find the missing explorer Burke” (Westrip and Holroyde, 2010, p. 140). Soon other Muslims and non-Muslims hailing from British India arrived in Australian colonies to avail opportunities offered in the wake of the gold rush, and to assist in the opening of the interior of Australia as cameleers (Westrip and Holroyde, 2010). After Pakistan’s independence from British rule in 1947, some descendants of these early settlers remained in Australia while others returned to the newly created state to settle permanently. Still others opted for maintaining links with Australia and traveling between the two states on somewhat regular basis. But overall, the number of Pakistani immigrants in Australia remained limited (Yasmeen, 2009).

The end of the White Australia Policy in 1973 altered this trend with some arriving to benefit from the mining boom and demand for professionals in Australia. However, their number stayed relatively small due to a preference among Pakistanis to emigrate to the UK, America, and later Canada. The new millennium witnessed a shift in this preference as those countries

were perceived as more hostile to Muslims, and Pakistanis started considering Australia as a possible destination. Coupled with increasing numbers of international students from Pakistan, who totalled 23,000 in 2023 (Australian Government, 2024), the total number of Pakistani immigrants to Australia has increased manifold. According to Australian Census data, the total number of Australians born in Pakistan increased from 30,221 in 2011 to 89,633 in 2021, of whom an overwhelming majority (92.2%) identified as Muslim (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Women constitute 41.2% of the Pakistani diaspora in Australia and an overwhelming majority arrived as part of the family migration patterns. According to the ABS Census data, their educational patterns vary: 9.1% have Certificate or Advanced Diploma levels, and 20% have postgraduate degrees. Of these, 28.8% of the women are employed either on a full-time or part-time basis – an increase of 4.7% from Census 2016. The percentage of women seeking employment has remained steady at around 7% during the 2016–2021 period. Most of the Pakistani immigrants live in the eastern states: New South Wales records the highest proportion (33,902), followed by Victoria with 30,945 Pakistani-Australians.

Western Australia, the largest state in geographical terms with a total population of 2.7 million, has also recorded an increase in the number of Pakistani immigrants (Government of Western Australia, 2021). It ranks as the third most preferred destination for Pakistani immigrants – reflected in the relatively sharp increase in their numbers from 5,441 in 2016 to 7,615 in 2021. Although it does not rank among the top 10 countries of birth for overseas-born residents of Western Australia, there has been a 40% increase in the number of Pakistanis arriving in the state since 2011 (Government of Western Australia, 2024, pp. 17–18). Further, the Pakistani diaspora in Western Australia mirrors the national picture of Pakistani immigrants: the majority (7,191 or 90.8%) identify as Muslims; 3.4 % identify as Christians, 4% as no religion, and the rest include a small number of Hindus and Sikhs. Women constitute 41.8% of this population, 36.8% of whom have received a bachelor's degree and postgraduate levels of education. According to the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Pakistani-Australian women in WA are participating in the labour force, while 32% are not in the labour market (Government of Western Australia, 2021).

To gain an insight into the notions of honour (*izzat*) held by Pakistani-Australian women and the impact on their lived experiences, we conducted qualitative interviews in 2020 with 15 women in the Perth Metropolitan area. Selected through snowballing, these participants were interviewed for approximately 90 minutes each after we secured their permission to participate. They were asked to reflect on their views on honour, the meanings they assign

to the concept, its manifestations in personal and public spheres, and the extent to which migration to Australia altered their views and associated lived experiences.

Of the total sample, eight participants were aged 20–39, and seven participants were aged 40–59. Of these, one had never been married, two were divorced, and the rest were married. Except for one student, the rest were employed part time and full time as professionals. Apart from one Australian-born participant, the rest had lived in Australia between a range of 1.5 and 20 years, and all but one had acquired Australian citizenship. We purposely only selected women who identified as Muslim to gain an understanding of how cultural notions of honour may intersect with their religious understandings.

3 Pakistani-Australian Women: Inherited Notions of Honour

The interviews revealed that the participants considered the notion of honour (*izzat*) to be a broad concept encompassing different ideas, and they were of the view that it played out differently in individuals' and families' lives. But there was a sense that certain variables communicated the meaning of honour and that operationalisation of these meanings contributed to the state of being honourable. The concept of honour was, hence, defined in terms of having good morals, having good character, knowing what is right and what is wrong, and being honest. The operationalisation of honour occurred in multiple spaces that included how an individual related to others, their educational and employment status, and willingness to observe the limits inherent in the idea of honour. The operationalisation of these values in everyday life, in the opinion of the participants, was associated with the social status of an individual, family, and community. As such, honour appeared to be both a value and a product of the values as manifested in behavioural patterns and their perception by the community.

Hence, the concept of honour was seen as being relational in nature and intertwined with perceptions of others, be they the immediate or extended family or the community in which an individual operated. The extent to which an individual was considered honourable was therefore linked as much to the inherent values held by a person as to how others viewed their actions. If 'others' did not consider an action honourable, it resulted in shame for the individual and/or their families. Viewed from this perspective, the relational dimension of honour contained an element of mutual responsibilities: those acting honourably expected similar behaviour from others.

These ideas were not age-specific and were shared by participants of all ages. One 32-year-old woman, for example, stated:

The word 'honour' kind of encompasses notions of respect to being respectable and also one's reputation, you know in society, like being honourable you would be considered to have a good reputation or having good morals or inner reflection of morality.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

This respect, for her, was closely tied to having a good education. She pointed out that her father was very highly educated with a doctorate, and that her mother was also "quite well educated for someone, a woman of her generation." The educational attainment of her parents had contributed to the standing her family enjoyed in the community, and it also opened up pathways for her and her siblings to be educated.

In somewhat similar vein, a 28-year-old participant, who was undertaking higher degree at a university, articulated her notion of honour that stressed the significance of education. She defined honour as "to do something that is proud for you and your family." In her words:

For me, the honour is about those things which I will do in my life ..., that makes my family proud and in front of other families or in front of other friends, makes my family proud of me. To say, yeah, ... "My daughter is studying abroad," this is honour for us. For me, that is honour.

PARTICIPANT #7, 28 years old

The relational dimension of honour was elaborated by a participant in her mid-fifties who considered it broad in nature, stating:

you could use honour in terms of honouring someone giving someone respect. You could, it could be culturally speaking ... someone who's in an honourable position. So very high up in this sort of hierarchy in terms of their status. Or honour could be ... especially in cultures that we come from, Asian cultures, it is more about morality. So more about the moral code and ... how you understand the moral code. So, whether that's considered honour. So, yeah ... it's quite broad, but it depends on who uses it, where they use it.

PARTICIPANT #4, 55 years old

Further elaboration of how honour manifests itself in private and public spheres drew attention to the gendered application of the concept. Almost all participants reflected that behavioural standards assumed to constitute honour were invariably different from those for women. While men were allowed to move freely in public space, women were often denied this freedom. Men also enjoyed more freedom than women in choosing their life partners. One participant also pointed out that men are not always questioned if they engage in domestic violence [Participant #5, 32 years old]. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be more submissive, give up their jobs to bring up children, and be more accommodating. When reflecting on the operationalisation of honour in Pakistan, the same participant stated:

Working, for women ... you know ... it might be changing now but you know my understanding is that generally it's not considered a very honourable thing, particularly if you are married and have children. Then, you know, ... not being the primary caregiver for your children being at home with them ... it's often looked down upon ... from that perspective.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

Several participants also drew attention to the fact that more stringent standards of modesty were placed on female than male members of a family. These were combined with an assumption of what were acceptable or unacceptable forms of attire. A participant mentioned that her mother asked her in Pakistan to cover up her legs as others might be watching. This was while her brother was allowed to wear shorts. The different standards, she narrated, sometimes made her question the expectations. Interestingly, later she imposed similar standards on her daughter in Pakistan [Participant #4, 55 years old].

The role of the family – both nuclear and extended – was significant in shaping the participants' notions of honour and associated behaviour patterns. One participant, for example, credited her parents for raising her with good morals such as “being honest and truthful, being courteous and compassionate towards others.” She stated that it had “obviously influenced the person that [she is]” [Participant #5, 32 years old]. Reflecting on growing up in Pakistan, some of the women recalled being taught about honour and being honourable by their parents. Others recounted the significant role played by their grandparents, who guided them on how to behave appropriately. One of them said:

I wouldn't say that my thinking would differ very much from my grandparents, not because they never really forced their values on us but because, as a family, we are very close ... I have always looked at my grandparents as mentors, and teachers, because, you know, they've lived life. Yes, they

live life in different time, but obviously, not a lot has changed, things have changed. ... I've learned from my grandparents ... to keep your word and to ... not to judge.

PARTICIPANT #3, 23 years old

The intergenerational transmission of notions of honour was not considered static: the women were cognisant of the shifting nature of these understandings and narrated how with the passage of time, their respective families modified the associated behavioural patterns of being honourable. The standards of modest dress code shifted among some parents and grandparents in Pakistan. The meanings associated with honourable professions also changed: as one participant mentioned, her grandmother would label her choice of becoming an actor by profession as “not honourable,” whereas her father was more likely to say “go with it” [Participant #3, 23 years old].

Geographical location, economic status, educational levels, and cultural interpretations of the respective families were mentioned as significant variables in the women's discussion of how honour was understood and operationalised. Some participants mentioned that Pakistanis living in rural areas tend to have limited access to education, and subscribe more to traditional notions of honour. These notions, in turn, shape dress codes for women, their access to the labour market, and even their choice of life partners. One participant, for example, contrasted her situation – where her parents sought her approval before responding to a marriage proposal – with others:

In some families, girls and boys, they are not asked, just they are forced to do it. Whatever the reason is, and some girls, they even, they don't want to get married in the first place, they have to marry because of the parents. But in my family, not that case. So, it was arranged, but with my permission.

PARTICIPANT #6, 52 years old

Others referred to the prevalence of an oppressive honour code for women in some towns of the northern areas of Pakistan. While suggesting that her parents would respect her choice of life partner, she contrasted her fortunate situation with others by saying:

[I]n Pakistan many people feel like if some girl likes some boy and all this stuff, that's not honour for everyone. Many girls get killed. Northern area, not in my town where I live. They kill their daughters because they feel like it's a shame for us, it's not honour for us.

PARTICIPANT #7, 28 years old

These understandings of *izzat* were invariably grounded in the participants' Muslim identity. In their discussion of what honour meant to them, participants referred to the framework Islam provided for human beings to live their lives as moral beings in their society. They also spoke of the rights granted to women in Islam, and referred to the notion of honour communicated in religious texts, including gender-neutral criteria of piety [Participant #2, 45 years old]. But the elaboration of their ideas highlighted a diversity of interpretations of how Islam shaped their behaviour, and how they viewed the relationship between religious and cultural norms. One participant, for example, explained her dress code with reference to Islam and the requirements of saying prayers. In her words:

honour is about dressing up [appropriately] in our religion in Islam. I'm Muslim. So it talks about dressing in moderation. So you're meant to hide your bosom. So your breasts shouldn't be showing. Obviously for us that means [in Pakistan] that you cover your legs. You try to cover your arms especially because we pray ... and you have to dress up modestly. You have to dress up in a particular way to pray, you have to wash yourself, five times a day before ... prayers because you have to be pure and pious when you're in connection with the highest being, or God, as we call it.

PARTICIPANT #4, 55 years old

This contrasted with the scepticism expressed by another participant: she was of the view that "certainly chastity and modesty are concepts that are drawn from and are influenced by [Islam]" but considered that these ideas were "kind of skewed a bit by the culture, just to justify what the culture feels it [Islam] is" [Participant #5, 32 years old].

In this context, the participants drew attention to how religion intersected with patriarchal norms, and the way misinterpretation of Islam in Pakistan was employed to justify violence against women. Such views, shared without direct quotes from the Qur'an or Hadith, echoed the arguments presented both Islamic feminists and progressive Muslim women in Pakistan. One participant, after recounting the rights Islam granted women, mentioned that in Pakistan men consider women's rights through a cultural prism. In this respect they mentioned the practice of honour killings, and of marrying a daughter to Qur'an in some areas of Sindh province to prevent division of inherited property. One participant, for example, said:

Most honour killings are happening [in Sindh]. ... Because it's a feudal system, so they have a lot of land, lot of money. And if the girl is not

marrying into the family the money goes to another family. And they don't want that to happen. So they make an excuse, and kill their sister or their daughter. And then they make it honour killing, because they think if they commit a crime for honour, they will, according to *Shar'ia* law, they will get less punishment. So they just make an excuse, and just kill the girl ... So it's not honour actually, it's killing the notion of honour, I think actually.

PARTICIPANT #1, 56 years old

All those who drew attention to these variables were keen to distance themselves and their families from such erroneous interpretations of Islam. As such they placed themselves on the moderate or progressive end of the spectrum in terms of their Muslim identity.

4 Migration and Honour: Continuing the Traditions

Migration into Australia has been marked by both change and continuation of practices linked to the value and operationalisation of honour among Muslims from Pakistan.

At one level, the notions and associated behavioural patterns learnt in Pakistan continue to operate in Australia. The continuity is grounded in perceived differences between Western and Pakistan/Muslim norms and values, and assumption that Pakistani/Muslim moral standards are superior to those of the host Western liberal society. Present among immigrants from other Muslim-majority and Asian states, this assumption of moral superiority shapes the nature of the family sphere, and gender relations. It also determines the social circles in which members of the Pakistani community operate: the reference to 'the community' essentially means the Pakistani community which provides the main social circle(s) for individuals and families. This also has implications for interaction with the wider community which often remains limited to the economic sphere, including the place of employment or education.

Though this is not specific to immigrant Muslims from Pakistan, the interviews reflect that identification with Pakistani culture and religious traditions forms part of the calculus of being honourable. A participant mentioned that her parents probably wanted their children "to hold on to the Pakistani culture because it is also considered an honourable thing in the community." Reflecting on growing up in Perth, she said:

[S]o if you practise your culture, that was seen as seen as an honourable thing so ... we've had an upbringing where we're well aware of, you know, the different cultural traditions or celebrations and religious [traditions] ... you know, saying prayers and Ramadan and going to the mosque.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

The identification with what is assumed to be Pakistani culture also impacted on gender relations within the family sphere. As among other immigrant families, some Pakistani families adopt more rigid attitudes in the name of remaining true to their Pakistani/Muslim identity. In these spaces, men are considered heads of the household and women are identified as the nurturers. Even professional women continue to carry the primary responsibility for cooking and caring for the family. Any deviation from what is considered 'normal' is queried by, for example, elders in the family.

The gendered nature of honour also continues to manifest itself in what is considered a modest dress code. As in Pakistan, these ideas particularly apply to women and girls: the participants pointed out that while men could dress up in any way they wish, modesty for women is linked to wearing Pakistani dresses. As one participant mentioned:

[F]or men, ... there's no criteria. You can dress Western or Eastern or it doesn't seem to matter. But for women, it's very important ... to cover and to really wear Eastern clothes or to wear the Pakistani dress. So, even if you are wearing, you know, something that is still quite covered up and ... fairly loose fitting, when it is a Western outfit, ... you would still be considered to be kind of you know, too modern or too Western, not in a good type of ... not in the same kind of ... maybe not be of the same level, same honour as someone who was more traditional.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

The same participant also drew attention to the double standards applied to women and men if they fail to conform to what is considered moral and honourable among the Pakistani/ Muslim families:

It's a lot harder for a man to lose his honour compared to a woman. For women, you know, to be accepted to be honourable, that standard or even the expectations are so high. You have to dress a particular way. Talk a particular way. You have to, you know, be well educated and not have any relations or contact with anyone that would be considered slightly dishonourable. ... Whereas the men, I think I feel like, it's very ... hard for them to lose their honour, even if they you know commit like ... you

know ... a crime. They do even temporarily lose their honour but then it is very easy for them to regain it. Whereas for a woman ... I think ... once you lose it, or ... what the [Pakistani] community or society decides that is dishonourable, it's actually impossible to regain it. You're always somehow tainted.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

The continued incorporation of imported gendered ideas of honour into Australia was apparent in the way the Pakistani community treated divorced or separated women. Two such participants, hailing from two different provinces in Pakistan, narrated remarkably similar stories of how their marital status impacted on their interaction with other members of the Pakistani community.

One of them recounted how she had endured the disapproval of her extended family in Pakistan when she decided to seek divorce from her husband – a decision supported by her nuclear family. Her decision drew upon the permission granted to women in Islam to seek divorce in return for forsaking her claim to dower and mehr, referred to as *khula*. Notwithstanding the difference of opinion among Muslim scholars on the necessity of securing the husband's consent for such a divorce (Ali, 2006; Yilmaz and Ahmed, 2018), Pakistan family law facilitates a woman's right to seek such a divorce without offering any detailed reason for her decision (Tahir, 2024). Despite accessing this facility, the participant was criticised for not observing cultural norms and seeking the divorce in the form of *khula*. Her friends were prohibited by their families to socialise with her while in Pakistan. The assumption that a divorced woman is less honourable continued to impact on her life when she arrived in Australia. In her words:

I had to move to another country, find my life here. And over here. It's also very hard ... because I, I think the Pakistani families bring the same views here as well. So with women, they always think, and they always say to me, as "well, what happened?"... Initially, I used to try to explain what happened. And they would say, "Oh, those are little things," or, like ... "My husband also used to do this, but you know, I know, your husband must not have done it to that level," ... or "He must have something else to offer that you stayed." ... So then I stopped explaining to people ... And the other very hard thing that has happened, that I've felt is women think if ... you're a single woman because you are divorced, they think something is wrong with you, you must be wrong, something wrong.

PARTICIPANT #2, 45 years old

Another participant shared that due to her status as a divorced woman, some women in the Pakistani community offered her unsolicited advice on how best to live her life:

Honour actually has shaped me a lot. Being a single woman, sometime in my country, you feel that when you get divorced, ... women are thought to be not that ... respectable. In fact, when I moved here, a lady from Pakistani community called me and told me that “I have heard” – I didn’t know her much – she called me and she just picked up the phone and took my number from someone, and she said to me that “I’ve heard that you are divorced,” and in our society – she was talking about Pakistani society – a woman who is widow is respectable, but a woman who is a divorcee, she has no respect. So, I should go back to my husband.

PARTICIPANT #1, 56 years old

According to one of these two women, male members of the Pakistani community considered her fair game: they would make unwanted advances and assume that she would reciprocate favourably. In her words:

[M]en think definitely something wrong [because I am divorced], but they think you are available as well. So they keep on making advances. Trying to say things ... saying inappropriate stuff, ... just because, you know, they can say those things. Sometimes I think they say these things to me, they misbehave with me, because they know, there is no-one to stand up with me. Like, for example, in a Pakistani traditional thing will be like, if a man misbehaves with a married woman, he has to really think hard because that means that that woman’s husband can come and tell him off, or will misbehave with his wife ... So I have consistently seen that ... men treat married women who have husbands differently than they have treated me. So they misbehave with me. Sometimes I feel very sad that ... this is still how our society is operating even here, that they think ... it’s okay to misbehave with me.

PARTICIPANT #2, 45 years old

The discomfort it caused ultimately prompted her to either isolate herself from the Pakistani community or claim that she was living in Perth with the approval of her husband.

Divorce also impacted on the social status of children of the family. A younger participant narrated how her family was considered honourable until her parents separated. In her words:

[My parents] were divorced when I was 13, which is very atypical of a Pakistani family ... And it wasn't considered an honourable thing ... in the Pakistani community so I think I myself, I witnessed the change in status almost of my family from ... before because my dad was very well educated and had a very different ... kind of reputation in the community to when, then, my parents divorced. Then it was completely different because it wasn't considered an honourable thing. ... But what I remember as a teenager was just losing a lot of friends in the community. So friends that I had of my age in the Pakistani community, their parents ... told them not to keep in touch with me anymore. You know there were no more playdates or anything. So it was just literally, ... I guess, because it was about losing of honour, those families didn't want to have any links or have any relation to us and that was quite hard as a teenager to see that, ... and to not understand why something that was out of your control was, you know that you were having to deal with the consequences. Yeah, that was, that was the main thing as a teenager and then I guess also been questioning your own identity always. Because this is a community that we were quite closely attached to and involved with.

PARTICIPANT #5, 32 years old

The (Pakistani) community's reaction to the divorce, she mentioned, informed her relationship with them in future. Importantly, it also affected the religious orientation of her younger siblings, who also had to face the Pakistani community's reaction. While she continued to practise Islam, and her mother also identified as a Muslim, her siblings had "definitely renounced their religion." The renunciation, in turn, shaped their choice of spouses as they were "not looking to have any relationships with Muslims, any Muslim partners." The siblings also distanced themselves from extended family members in Pakistan as they did not wish to be judged or respond to questions linked to their personal religious and cultural orientation [Participant #5, 32 years old].

Although existing literature is silent on the religiosity of Muslims in immigrant situations due to family breakups, the conceptions and operationalisation of the concept of honour shared by the participants is not unique to Australian Muslim women of Pakistani origin. Women in South Asia and the Middle East assign different meanings to 'honour' and live their lives accordingly. They internalise the varied meanings and equate honour, or its loss, with shame (Isgandarova, 2019), thus remaining silent when faced with domestic violence. This diversity of meanings and experiences also exists among diasporic communities from the subcontinent living in Western liberal states (Khan, Saleem, and Lowe, 2018; Viridi, 2013). In the wake of young Pakistani

woman Aqsa Parvez's 2007 murder in Canada in the name of family honour, women from South Asia including Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs drew attention to the ever-present references to the concept of *izzat* among their communities (Mucina, 2021; Zine, 2009). The complex interplay between religion, culture, and tradition is also to be observed among American Muslim immigrant women: Shaikh, Ossege, and Sears (2018, pp. 63–64) concluded from their qualitative research on honour killings the blurred lines between concepts of religion, culture and tradition. Drawing upon qualitative interviews with women from South Asia, they also established that different standards apply to how women and men experience different consequences for their actions that could be assumed to include issues of *izzat*. The relevance of such gender-differentiated perspectives on honour is also apparent in the workplace identities assumed by migrant Muslim women in Canada and United Kingdom (Latif, Cukier, Gagnon, and Chraibi, 2018), as it is with reference to the social representations of virginity among British Arab women (Rasmussen, 2015). While literature on Australian Muslim women does not directly address issues of honour, literature on their identities reaffirms the perpetuation of complex notions of honour and its ability to shape behaviour of these women in an immigrant space (Afrouz, Crisp, and Taket, 2023; Khoei, Whelan, and Cohen, 2008; Ralph and Gibson, 2023).

5 Honour: Change amid Continuity

The qualitative interviews reveal that the perpetuation of traditional norms and associated behavioural patterns among the Pakistani community is mixed with some signs of change. Although some families have adopted even more stringent standards of behaviour for fear their children will lose connection to Islam and Pakistani culture, gender dynamics in other families have shifted as the Pakistani immigrants settle into Western Australia. A participant explained it with reference to the additional responsibilities shouldered by women upon arrival in a new country. Unlike in Pakistan, where women operate within the family sphere and men are the breadwinners, in Australia women have to shop for groceries, clean the house, and also contribute financially. In her view, under such circumstances, gender-specific rights and responsibilities do not operate the same way as in Pakistan. Women are able to work in different professions which may not be considered appropriate in Pakistan. Under these changed circumstances where “no-one is dependent on others,” in her view men end up sharing the position of the head of the household with their wives: the two discuss and share ideas and know the limits of imposing their views on others [Participant #6, 52 years old].

Shifts in family dynamics also open the space for the younger generations to choose their life partners. In Pakistan, often parents or grandparents make these choices, but some Pakistani parents in Australia appear more willing to permit their children to select their spouses. Although this concession is more accessible to men than women, there appears to be a reduction in linking a son or daughter's decision to choose their life partners with authentication or undermining of the family's honour. A trend which was emerging at the turn of the new millennium has gained slightly more currency: youth are conditionally allowed to marry someone of their choice. They are expected to marry "within not so much the [Pakistani] community but definitely within the religion. Marrying someone of the same religion [is] considered an honourable thing" [Participant #5, 32 years old]. Hence, as one of the participants observed, it is becoming very common for Pakistani youth to choose a non-Pakistani partner, and families have no issues. But she clarified:

[W]e prefer [the spouse] to be Muslim. Non-Muslim is a big issue. They don't want it, and if someone does like this, ... others [in the Pakistani community] ... talk about it. So they prefer [their children's spouses] to be Muslim [from] any country.

PARTICIPANT #6, 52 years old

The shifts in meanings ascribed to 'honour' are also gradually changing views among some Pakistani women on what constitutes a modest dress code. One participant narrated how her notions of an honourable dress code metamorphosed after some time. She mentioned that initially she applied "different beliefs and a different moral code" that she had grown up with. This challenged her perception of women who did not dress up along the lines she had learnt to consider honourable or appropriate. But after a while, especially as she joined a tertiary institution as a mature-age student, her ideas changed. In her words:

And when I came here ... I see boob tubes and ... singlets and stuff ... I would look at them and then I would just feel a bit of shame that "Oh my god, they are actually like naked," you know? That was the thought ... And now it doesn't even bother me ... I suppose, one thing is exposure, plus I think the education really helped me because as I was a mature-age student. So, education really helped sort of change my views, and my thought process. And it wasn't about how they dressed up. It was the way I was looking at these people. So they had done nothing wrong. *It was just my thinking that was a bit skewed.*

PARTICIPANT #4, 55 years old, emphasis added

Interestingly, for some women the idea of what constitutes a social circle also expands with their modified view of honour. While these women identify closely with friends from within the Pakistani community, the circle expands to include their class fellows and work colleagues. Employing the relational notion of honour, one participant had the following to say about her non-Pakistani social circle:

We never really talked about honour, ... [such as] “What is honour for you?” or anything like that. But again, it’s the way I feel that ... for me it’s more about respecting them. And they respect me for who I am. So, it’s mutual, you know, honouring each other for how we are all ... just giving regard to where we come from. ... I have a multicultural sort of group of friends. And each one of us is different. We come from different backgrounds, different beliefs. But, you know, when we’re together, it is respecting each other’s code, respecting one another’s sort of ideas, or beliefs or even religion, for that matter. And if we don’t sort of say, “Oh you shouldn’t do this ... this isn’t allowed,” or the other person say, “Oh this is morally wrong.”

PARTICIPANT #4, 55 years old

Although most of the interviewees commented on how the shifting notions of honourable behaviour shape their families, some women also focused on the impact of migration and honour on them personally. In doing so, they reflected what Eickelman and Piscatori (2018) had referred to in their discussion of transnational Islam as the reimagining of the mythical home and a desire to both return to it while “traveling” again. Mandaville (2002) encapsulated this dynamic as “travelling theory” – a process in which Muslims become aware of new or previously denounced interpretations of their religion. The process results in a reimagining of the self, religion, and authenticity of Islamic knowledge. Ingrained into such a ‘travel’ is the condition of both nostalgia for what is left behind and the adventure of what is to be experienced. In this vein, some participants expressed feeling a sense of independence and freedom after arriving in Australia, and an ability to ‘reclaim’ their lives. Participant #1, who was shamed for initiating her divorce as a woman, shared her view that by moving to Australia and living by herself, she had gained a lot of dignity and honour. “A lot of people,” she said, “respect me. They respect me as a mother because I have raised ... beautiful children single-handedly ... [who are] very valuable citizens of a new country” [Participant #1, 56 years old].

Some of the women acquired greater agency in the public sphere as well, and questioned how several members of the Muslim and Pakistani community

operationalise the concept of honour with impact on public spaces. One participant, for example, related her disapproval of organising religious events with complete segregation. She questioned why women had to be always behind a screen while praying tarawih during Ramadan. She also gradually encouraged some of the male members of the Pakistani and wider Muslim community to reassess their insistence on gender segregation in social events. Such segregation, she argued, would deny young people the possibility of meeting people of the opposite gender and finding life partners.

6 Concluding Reflections

The interviews reflect a continued conflation of religious and cultural norms among Australian women of Pakistani origin. As in Pakistan, the intergenerational communication of what constitutes appropriate behavioural patterns and values continues to shape the living experiences of the women living in Western Australia. There are signs, however, of agentic activism among some of these women: while continuing to practise Islam, they question the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and interpretations of Islamic injunctions. Though this activism is done gently and not strongly, it is slowly shaping the space in which Pakistani women operate as Australian Muslims.

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Australian Muslim Youth's Access to Online and Offline Islamic Legal and Religious Knowledge

Ihsan Yilmaz

Abstract

The emergence of the internet has transformed the dynamics of Muslim engagement with religious authority and knowledge, creating a vibrant space where Islam intersects with the digital realm. Despite the wealth of surveys and existing studies, the qualitative exploration of Muslim youth's access to online and offline Islamic religious and legal information in the digital era is under-studied, particularly from their own perspectives. Drawing from a comprehensive analysis of 64 semi-structured interviews with young Muslims in Melbourne and Geelong, this chapter examines how young Muslims juggle traditional and digital Islamic religious and legal sources, shedding light on the complexities of navigating Islamic authority offline and online. The chapter confirms earlier research that despite the wealth of online resources, concerns about misinformation are in the minds of many young Muslims while they navigate cyberspace for Islamic knowledge. Based on the participants' detailed responses sharing their motivations and reasoning, the chapter also shows why their personal connections with family, friends, and teachers remain foundational in accessing religious knowledge, despite their awareness that digital platforms broaden their access to Islamic knowledge. Also, many participants' use of the internet for Islamic knowledge is limited to accessing the foundational texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith. Finally, despite the proliferation of online resources, a third of the participants have continued to seek guidance from imams and religious scholars offline. However, the chapter also shows that gender disparities persist in accessing offline religious authorities, underscoring the need for inclusive religious spaces.

1 Introduction: the Proliferation of Diverse Islamic Authorities

The advent of the internet has brought about profound changes in the way Muslims connect and interact with one another (Anderson, 2005, p. 252). This intersection of Islam and cyberspace represents a dynamically evolving field, fuelled by digital technologies (Cusi and Berghout, 2023, p. 383; Slama, 2018,

p. 1). In an era when authority networks transcend geographical boundaries, and when digital proficiency can be more important than religious status, there has been an evolution in the dynamics of Islamic authority and leadership. Today, digital technology is reshaping how Muslims across vast territories relate to religious authorities in fulfilling spiritual, mystical, and legalistic agendas (Bunt, 2022, p. 19). The internet has added a layer of complexity to the transmission of knowledge, particularly within the realm of Islam. Gary Bunt (2018) employs the term “cyber-Islamic environments” for this intersection.

The source of religious authority is no longer held and monopolised by the ulama (traditional religious authorities), who were raised in the traditional higher education system and mastered the Islamic foundational texts (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003; Eickelman and Piscatori, 2004; Yilmaz 2005). Jon Anderson (2003) argues that the internet is expanding the Muslim public space, ushering in a “new information age” that differs from traditional modes of transmission facilitated by institutional spokesperson-activists. Instead, this new era draws upon a diverse range of interpreters who operate online. Anderson (2003) describes the internet as creating a public arena where a new class of interpreters can redefine Islamic authority and expression on their own terms (pp. 46–48).

Recent research on the multiplicity of emerging voices on Islamic knowledge includes the digital contestation of Islam and religious authority, cyber clerics, the online – offline nexus, digitisation of Muslim religiosity, the use of social media among diaspora Muslims, and the creation of virtual communities (Bunt, 2018; Kayıkcı and d’Haenens, 2017; Larsson, 2016; Possamai and Turner, 2014; Rozeňnal, 2019). Online members now share the same resolve as part of an imagined community that Mandaville (2003) sees as a “new embodiment of the global umma” (p. 146). El-Nawawy and Khamis (2009) propose the concept of a “virtual Ummah”, likening cyberspace to a virtual community where Muslims unite under various identities (pp. 113–114); they draw from Benedict Anderson’s notion of ‘Imagined Communities’ to suggest that the sense of belonging and unity among Muslims transcends physical boundaries.

The proliferation of online platforms has facilitated the widespread dissemination and democratisation of religious knowledge, including within the realm of Islam. This diverse array of online resources enables individuals to access Islamic teachings, engage in discussions, seek guidance, and participate in religious communities from virtually anywhere with internet access, thus reshaping the dynamics of religious learning and interaction in the digital age (Whyte, 2024, p. 63). Consequently, this democratisation of religious practice has enabled new actors to emerge who are involved in creating new religious discourse. These new religious actors are called religious

entrepreneurs or celebrity religious figures whose opinions hold sway despite their non-traditional scholarly backgrounds (Bunt, 2018; Howell, 2013). Even though these new religious actors do not have a strong Islamic religious educational background, their popularity is very strong, especially among urban young people (Triantoro et al., 2023, p. 173). The development of modern information technology and mass education does not necessarily weaken traditional religious authorities. Some of them have adapted to popular culture in digital fatwas on social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. All these have paved the way for the emergence of preachers who package their preaching messages with popular narratives (Akmaliah, 2020). The development of modern technology has provided opportunities to deliver their fatwas digitally, thereby attracting the attention of modern young Muslims (Triantoro et al., 2023, pp. 169–170).

Emerging modes of communication and the increased accessibility of Islamic texts online empower Muslims to shape their religiosity autonomously, diminishing reliance on established authorities and fostering a deeper awareness of their cultural diversity as a community (Possamai, Turner, Roose, et al., 2016, p. 1). It has been noted that in the digital age, where platforms like the internet, Twitter, Facebook, and SMS facilitate rapid communication, imams have failed to compete with celebrity imams who offer online advice and fatwas that resonate with young Muslims (Ali, 2020). This proliferation of diverse authorities (Turner, 2007) has led individuals to seek opinions online that resonate more closely with their own beliefs – a phenomenon often termed “fatwa shopping” (Possamai, Turner, Roose, et al., 2016, p. 1) that scholars such as Bunt (2003) and Linjakumpu (2010) have observed. While some studies argued that that traditional religious authority is being replaced by the presence of new actors (Turner, 2007), caution was warranted in proclaiming the complete erosion of traditional religious authority, particularly in contexts where it remains resilient (Possamai, Turner, Roose, et al., 2016, p. 2). Several studies have shown that traditional religious authorities can adapt to technological developments (Hosen, 2008; Rahimi, 2022; Riedel, 2016). For instance, contrary to the notion that the internet and new media would diminish religious institutional authority, Possamai and Tittensor (2022) argue that technology adoption by Christian communities has reinforced offline institutional authority online.

All in all, in contemporary society Muslims are navigating a complex landscape of religious authority, particularly the younger generation. Traditionally, sources of religious guidance such as the Qur’an, Hadith, imams, religious scholars, family, and community have held significant sway over the beliefs and practices of Muslims. However, the advent of digital technology and the proliferation of online platforms have introduced a myriad of additional influences

vying for the attention and allegiance of Muslim individuals in cyberspace. In this context, research is important to explore the evolving nature of religious authority and practice vis-à-vis the experiences, attitudes, and behaviours of Muslims in the digital age in searching for Islamic knowledge. This will inform discussions and debates surrounding the role of technology in shaping religious identity, community dynamics, and societal norms within Muslim communities and beyond.

A few studies have looked at how Muslims try to gain Islamic knowledge in the cyber age. One survey asked 300 Australian Muslim respondents whom they trust most in seeking Islamic knowledge (Whyte, 2022b, 2024). Another survey on Islam in Australia asked the “most influential sources” (Rane et al., 2020). There are also a few relevant studies, if not directly so, based on extensive interviews. A project with 38 focus group-participants in South East Queensland in 2015 explored the thoughts, motivations, experiences, and identity negotiations of young Muslims and the impact of radicalisation on Muslim youth (Bull and Rane, 2019; Rane and Bull, 2019). Similarly, Lam and Mansouri’s (2020) study looks at the process through which young Australian Muslims navigate their complex identities within a backdrop of political misrecognition. Vergani et al.’s (2017) study, based on semi-structured interviews with 48 participants and four focus groups, as well as a survey of 96 practising Muslims in Melbourne, examines the relationships between Islamic religiosity and civic engagement in Melbourne (p. 5). Another project, based on interviews with 80 young Australian Muslims aged 17–25 from immigrant backgrounds in Melbourne and Brisbane, involved examining civic participation among young Australian Muslims (Harris and Lam, 2019, p. 642) and the strategies employed by young Muslim Australians to navigate surveillance and suspicion (Harris and Karimshah, 2019). Johns et al.’s (2015) study explored Muslims’ sense of citizenship and belonging in Melbourne using 96 surveys, 49 interviews, and five focus groups with self-identified ‘practising’ Muslims from diverse demographic and immigrant backgrounds.

However, none of these interview-based studies looked at Muslim youth’s access to Islamic knowledge. In addition to the abovementioned survey with 300 ordinary Muslims, Whyte’s (2022b, 2024) study on Islamic religious authority also includes 40 in-depth interviews. However, these were done with imams, academics, and educators from Australia’s major mosques, peak Islamic bodies, and universities teaching Islamic studies (Whyte, 2024).

One of the very few studies that looks at how Muslims search for Islamic knowledge in the cyber age is Possamai, Turner, Roose, et al. (2016). It focused only on how various Muslim communities online practise and experience *Shar’i’a*, and it analysed the content of fatwa sites, online chat rooms, and

discussion lists, interrogating assertions of religious authority's demise on the internet (Possamai, Turner, Roose, et al., 2016, pp. 3–4).

A much more relevant interview-based study on Muslim youth's access to Islamic knowledge is Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016). Providing a rare glimpse into Muslim youth's use of, thoughts, interpretations, perceptions, and evaluation of different and competing sources of Islamic knowledge, this study explored *Shari'a*'s role in Australia by interviewing Muslim respondents about their views on the alignment between legal traditions, with interview questions structured around various subject matters (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016). Involving 57 Muslims in Sydney (predominantly from Bangladeshi and Lebanese backgrounds), this study mainly looks at how these individuals negotiate their observance of Islam within the framework of Australian law. The study has a question that is directly relevant for this chapter – “When dealing with *Shari'a* issues, who do you ask first for help?” – and finds that the three top sources of information for matters dealing with *Shari'a* were the internet (58% of the sample), Islamic scholars (58%, with a higher proportion for scholars based in Australia than scholars based overseas), and family (25%) (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 349). The paper explains the reasoning of the respondents in dealing with these. However, since the paper covers several other issues, it does not elaborate on this question much. Also, the authors note that their sample reflects the attitudes and opinions of Muslims living in Sydney, and that more research will be needed to compare these findings with samples of Australian Muslims in other geographical locations (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 353).

This chapter addresses research gaps by building upon the study conducted by Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016). While that study provided valuable insights into the use of various sources of Islamic knowledge and the negotiation of Islamic observance within the Australian legal framework, its limitations included its specific focus on Sydney's Muslim population, and its lack of scope to extensively explore the question of whom individuals turn to for help regarding *Shari'a* issues.

While previous research has contributed valuable insights into the ways young Muslims access religious knowledge, there remains a significant gap in understanding their experiences with both traditional offline sources and digital platforms. This chapter aims to fill this void in the literature by conducting qualitative research from the perspective of Muslim youth on their access to Islamic knowledge in both offline and online settings in the digital age. To address this gap, the study conducted 64 semi-structured interviews with young Muslims in Melbourne and Geelong. Through these interviews, the research offers a detailed examination of how these individuals navigate

the realms of traditional sources, such as mosques, imams, scholars, family, friends, and teachers, as well as digital platforms like websites, social media, and online forums, in their quest for Islamic knowledge.

By exploring the dynamics between offline and online sources of authority, the study aims to complement previous research and provide a more detailed understanding of the challenges, preferences, and strategies employed by young Muslims in accessing religious knowledge, shedding light on the complex interplay between tradition and technology by Muslim youth in accessing religious knowledge.

2 Australian Muslims' Search for Islamic Knowledge

Ann Black and Nadirsyah Hosen's (2009) study showed that Australia ranks highly in terms of requesting online fatwas from overseas websites (p. 422). Whyte's survey with 300 ordinary Muslims found the internet was the second largest platform (21%) participants used in Australia after books (23%). Likewise, Rane et al.'s (2020) survey found 17% of Muslims agreed the internet is a "very influential" source for their understanding of Islam, and a higher percentage favoured scripture and scholarly books (Whyte, 2024, p. 180). As already seen above, the three top sources of information that Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016) list in response to the question of how their respondents find information about *Shari'a* were the internet (58% of their sample), Islamic scholars (58%, with a higher proportion for scholars based in Australia than scholars based overseas), and family (25%) (p. 349).

Whyte's (2022b) survey also asked whom respondents trust most in seeking Islamic knowledge. Imams and sheikhs constituted the most trusted actors among survey respondents, nominated by 35.6% of participants; 19.3% preferred local-based imams, while 16.3% went to overseas-based clerics. This was followed closely by 34.3% of participants who selected academics. Together, imams and academics constituted 70% of participant responses. The remaining sources of information included family/friends/elders (11%), Muslim community leaders (6%), and others (13%) (Whyte, 2022b, pp. 5–6). Muslim community leaders did not rate highly compared to other actors, despite their prominence in Muslim community organisations (Whyte, 2024, pp. 75–76).

To the question "What platforms do you use to obtain Islamic knowledge?", the participants responded that their most sought-after platforms were books (22.5%), websites (21%), sermons (15%), and community-run Islamic classes (14.5%). Under 'other,' participants cited podcasts, YouTube, social media, Qur'anic study circles, local imams and institutions, family, friends, and

Islamic retreats (Whyte, 2022b, p. 6; 2024, p. 76). Others remained cynical about trusting any religious actor (Whyte, 2024, p. 76). On average, each respondent accessed three platforms, highlighting that Muslims are not one-dimensional in their search for knowledge (Whyte, 2024, p. 77). Also, Whyte (2022a) found that only 26% of the respondents actively search for fatwas. Among them, 33.3% consult local imams/muftis, 27.8% access fatwas online, and 21.1% seek guidance from overseas imams/muftis (Whyte, 2022a).

These results differ from the earlier research of Halim Rane et al. (2020), whose survey on Islam in Australia reported the “most influential sources” to be the Qur’an (82.5%); followed by Hadith (66.4%); scholarly books (41.2%); imams, sheikhs, and ulama (29.9%), family (28.4%); academic scholars (22.2%); mosque and madrasa classes (21.3%), the internet (16.7%), friends (12.3%), social media (9.5%), school (8.6%), and university (6.4%). In total, 1,034 Muslim Australian citizens and permanent residents participated in this survey. The survey respondents were largely committed, practising Muslims for whom Islam is important to their identity. Rane et al (2020, p. 9) note that their results differ somewhat from the findings of a survey of Muslims in Canada (EnviroNics Institute for Survey Research, 2016), which ranked its respondents’ main sources of guidance as: Local mosque/Muslim organisation (22%), family (11%), local imam/sheikh (10%), Qur’an/holy book (5%), friends/community members (3%), and self-guidance/research (2%). Whyte (2024, p. 78) explains that the differences in results could be related to the options provided and participants’ worldviews, as well as the questions’ wording.

When presented with an issue pertaining to Islam, the largest segment of respondents to the survey by Rane et al. (2020) said they would first consult the Qur’an and Hadith (39.2%), followed by the Qur’an only (13.8%), contemporary traditional Islamic scholars (12.4%), classical Islamic schools of thought (9.5%), and contemporary progressive Islamic scholars (7.4%). Only 0.7% of respondents selected “Hadith only”, while 6.2% were “unsure”, and 10.9% chose “other” (Rane et al., p. 10).

According to Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al.’s (2016) study with 57 Muslims in Sydney, 58% of respondents seek information about *Shari’a* on the internet; 58% of them consult Islamic scholars online and offline; 50% of them consult their families; 34% of them consult their friends; 26% of them make use of Islamic courses and lectures; 20% of them use scholarly books; 16% of them use the Qur’an, Hadith, and other religious texts; and 10% of them use informal study groups (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 350). They also note that the majority of these respondents “did not look for fatwas or answers to complicated or controversial issues on the internet because, with all the different opinions available, they found that it only further confused

their issue” (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 351). Also, they note that almost all interviewees who sought information in cyberspace reported that they only consulted websites that they trusted (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 351).

3 Methodology and Data Gathering

The 64 interviews were sourced via word of mouth and social media outreach in Melbourne and Geelong. The decision to focus on Melbourne and Geelong stems from a combination of practical and theoretical considerations. Both cities are home to diverse and growing Muslim populations, making them ideal for exploring how communities access Islamic religious knowledge. Melbourne, as a multicultural hub, provides a snapshot of how Muslims navigate religious knowledge in an urban, pluralistic context. Geelong, being a smaller city, offers a contrasting exploration of how Muslim communities function in less dense and resource-rich settings. Melbourne hosts a wide variety of Muslim communities, including those from the Balkans, Turkey, South Asia, the Middle East, and South-East Asia, offering rich diversity in perspectives on Islamic religious knowledge. Geelong, while smaller, has seen a notable increase in its Muslim population, reflecting broader migration trends. These areas allow for a comparative approach to understanding urban and regional differences in access to religious resources. Geelong’s relative distance from major Islamic centres in Melbourne presents unique challenges. In particular, Geelong lacks the extensive network of mosques, Islamic schools, and study centres available in Melbourne. This creates dependency on limited local resources or necessitates travel.

Melbourne boasts several well-established Islamic schools, such as Mt. Hira College, Ilim College, Sirius College, and Al-Taqwa College; and institutions like the Islamic Council of Victoria and Turkey’s Diyanet provide access to imams, lectures, and study groups. However, demand often exceeds supply, and geographical spread can still be a challenge. Geelong has a smaller number of mosques and informal study circles which, while active, cannot cater to all needs. Many Muslims rely on resources in Melbourne or online platforms for more comprehensive religious learning. The composition of Muslim communities in Melbourne is broadly similar to that in other major Australian cities like Sydney, Perth, and Adelaide, and is characterised by significant diversity in cultural, linguistic, and sectarian backgrounds. Similarly, the Muslim population in Geelong reflects the composition of many other big regional cities in Australia where Muslim communities reside, such as Wollongong and

Toowoomba, where smaller and often newer Muslim communities face unique challenges in accessing Islamic religious knowledge.

As a result, while this study does not aim to be representative of all Muslims in Australia, focusing on Melbourne and Geelong allows us to derive insights that may resonate with Muslim communities across both metropolitan and regional settings nationwide.

A snowballing technique was employed, reaching out to individuals in various ethnic communities. Care was taken to ensure a representative sample based on gender, age, marital status, and other variables that influence participants' perspectives. To ensure participant anonymity, they were assigned pseudonyms aligned with their ethnicity and gender, reflecting contextual essence. Guided by a questionnaire of 50 open-ended questions, the semi-structured interviews probed various aspects of identity, media perceptions, social interactions, political engagement, and faith matters. The survey had 34 questions on demographics, social media use, and a few multiple-choice questions on civic and political participation in Australia.

Some of the relevant interview questions were: "Do you often use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram? Which platforms do you use and for what purpose?"; "Is social media good or bad for Muslims? Can you explain?"; "Have you ever used the internet to seek clarification on a matter of Islamic law?"; "Have you asked an imam or an Islamic scholar for clarification on Islamic law or an issue in relation to Islam or Muslims?"; "Have you discussed any issue with an imam or an Islamic scholar?"

The detailed transcription process from mid-2018 to 2020 aimed for accuracy and reliability in gathering qualitative interview data. Verbatim transcription and a subsequent verification process ensured fidelity and minimised errors.

The participants' backgrounds and understandings of their Muslim identity were diverse. The participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions. Forty-six of them identified as Sunni Muslims. Twelve participants identified as Shi'a (Ja'fari), and six as "non-denominational" Muslims. In all, there were 38 female and 26 male participants.

Fifteen participants had an Arab background – mostly Lebanese and Iraqi, with two Palestinians – eight participants had a Turkish background, including one of Cypriot and one of Eastern European origin; seven were from Pakistan; seven were of Indian origin; and six were Afghan from either Hazara, Pashtun or Arab backgrounds. Four of them were Indonesians, another three were Bosnians, two were Iranians and two were Bangladeshis. The remainder were Malay, Uighur, Kurdish, Albanian, Sri Lankan, Kenyan, Pakistani-Fijian, and Anglo-Australian.

In a study examining Muslims' engagement with Islamic knowledge, religious sources and *Shari'a*, it is imperative that a significant majority of the respondents are practising Muslims since non-practising Muslims would not normally be expected to search for these sources. Even though this study did not specifically try to find religious Muslims, the sample was mostly practising Muslims. Out of the 64 participants, 47 considered themselves religious and told us that they fast every day of Ramadan and regularly pray at least four times a day. Five of the respondents were "medium" level religious: they fast every day of Ramadan and usually pray every day a few times. Eight of the participants were low-level religious: they were not regularly fasting during Ramadan and were rarely praying. Four of the respondents stated that they were non-religious: non-practising but spiritual. This is more or less in line with the cohort in Rane et al.'s (2020) study: a large majority of 77.1% said they prayed "daily", while 6.9% pray "weekly", 1.2% pray 'monthly', 12.4% pray "only on occasions", and 2.5% said they "never pray". Similarly, in another study of 90 young Muslims in Brisbane and Melbourne, 91% of the participants expressed that Islam was "very important" to them – a rate exceeding the established estimate of observance among Australian Muslims (Harris and Lam, 2019, p. 635). Another study (Vergani et al., 2017) which included 96 surveys, 49 interviews, and five focus groups with self-identified "practising" Muslims from diverse demographic and immigrant backgrounds, found that younger individuals were more likely to identify as practising Muslims compared to older age groups. Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al.'s (2016) study with 57 Muslims from Western Sydney also found that 96% of the sample were practising Muslims, and nearly 90% defined *Shari'a* as guiding all aspects of Muslim life.

4 Using the Internet to Seek Clarification on a Matter of Islamic Law

Patel (2022) observes that Muslim youth often engage with religious authorities through social media interactions, manifesting in actions such as follows, likes, and retweets of religious content (pp. 38–39). Similarly, Zaman (2008) introduces the concept of the "Cyber-Mufti" to highlight the transnational nature of "virtual Islam", which allows Muslims to access diverse Islamic content beyond their local and communal boundaries (pp. 469–470). Drawing on qualitative interviews with 278 self-identified Muslims from across Canada, Selby and Sayeed (2023) examine how Muslim Canadians engage with sources of religious authority online. They both agree and disagree with scholarship that characterises the internet as democratising the traditions of Islam (Bunt, 2018; Eickelman and Anderson, 2003), and with those who see it as unchanging (Berkey, 2016). They also observe that foregrounding religious authority

figures' familiarity with texts in the traditions of Islam allows them to capture elements of authority that other facets – such as charisma, lineage, or affiliation – might miss. Selby and Sayeed (2023) highlight the importance of textually grounded scholarship in analysing Islamic religious authority online. They found that texts – broadly consisting of the Qur'an, Hadith, and all forms of commentaries – retain their centrality in constituting Islamic authority both before and after the advent of the internet, even beyond their materiality (p. 18). Possamai and Turner (2014) also find that offline (religious) authority appears to intrude on the reflexive online world, because actors on the internet still inhabit an offline world and their communications in both worlds are heavily but unsurprisingly influenced by the habitus that has been inevitably constructed in the offline world (p. 17).

To the question “Have you ever used the internet to seek clarification on a matter of Islamic law?”, 53 out of 64 (83%) respondents in the study said yes, while only 11 answered in the negative. Even the non-practising Muslims and low-level practising ones used the internet for these purposes. Nine of the 11 participants who did not use the internet for *Shari'a* knowledge were religious and two of them were medium-level religious. This proportion is significantly higher than previous researchers have found: Whyte's (2022b) survey with 300 ordinary Muslims found the internet was the second largest platform (21%); and Rane et al.'s (2020) survey found 17% of Muslims agreed the internet is a “very influential” source for their understanding of Islam. In the Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016) study, 58% of the respondents found information about *Shari'a* on the internet (p. 349).

The pervasive presence of social media in the daily lives of many young Muslims has created a natural inclination for them to engage with faith-related matters on these platforms. Even when they may not actively seek out religious information, their regular interaction with social media exposes them to religious content through posts appearing on their news feeds. For instance, this convenience came about for S6, a Lebanese male participant, in the form of getting news feeds with useful Islamic information as opposed to reading full-length books. The young Australian confessed he never read religious books; rather he preferred Islamic groups or followed them for daily or weekly news feeds. He said,

I don't really read those kinds of books, but I look at posts about religion on social media and stuff; that is what I mostly do.

SY04 explained how he went about seeking knowledge by following online mufti videos. He explained,

I do not ask them [imams] directly; I watch videos. There is this bloke called Israr Ahmad from Pakistan. He is sort of a Sheikh. The Sheikh that is from Zimbabwe, Mufti Menk.

S5, for instance, expressed that the internet stood out as the most accessible and immediate avenue for her to seek information regarding matters related to faith. When asked whom she goes to with her questions about faith-related matters, she said,

Just Google; I just try to find the best answer, whichever.

SY15 agreed:

Obviously the 'Sheikh Google' is the best way to go but it is the most accessible way.

SY08 concurred:

Google search and then whatever seems suitable. Like the ones that look reliable.

Z1, an Iraqi female participant, explained that she would find several online sources and take an average:

I think I like to use the internet to clarify things that I hear people say about Islam because sometimes people claim a particular hadith that means this or a particular imam said this and they just say it because they have just heard it from other people, and I like to go on the internet to sort of see of exactly what was said or even to clarify bits of the Qur'an, because I think it is really good instead of just focusing on one scholar says and then to look at what a couple of scholars say, and then wanna take an average of that.

Several others like C6, a Turkish-Macedonian female participant, said that they would do the same but then go and check with friends:

Google is a really good source because when you have got a couple of sources claiming the same thing and if they are reliable. Worse case I will probably put it out there to my friends – which they are pretty much coming from the same background and the same religion or probably

more – they might know the answer or they might not, or they might know someone to contact for that.

Participants cited the internet's accessibility and immediacy as primary reasons for resorting to it for religious inquiries. Many expressed reliance on search engines like Google to find answers to specific questions about halal practices, Islamic teachings, or interpretations of the Qur'an. Some individuals emphasised the importance of consulting multiple online sources to ensure accuracy and credibility, while others supplemented their online research with discussions among friends or within their social circles. Despite the prevalence of internet usage for religious queries, a few respondents mentioned their preference for seeking knowledge through alternative means, such as watching online mufti videos or consulting trusted scholars. They highlighted the value of personal interaction and guidance from knowledgeable individuals in deepening their understanding of Islamic teachings. While the internet serves as a convenient tool for accessing information on Islamic law, some individuals still prioritise traditional avenues of learning and seek validation through personal interactions within their communities as they are wary of the authenticity of the sources in cyberspace.

C₃ aired her concerns over online websites and also presented a solution she had in place to authenticate information on the internet:

It is a very tricky area because you don't know what to trust on the internet, anyone can write anything on the internet at this day and age, so I will do my research, but I will be cautious with what I am reading.

Z₃ tried to avoid the internet and preferred consulting her parents to be better guided. She had not been able to find a way to completely trust the information relating to Islam on the internet. She said,

Yeah, like mainly I would go to my parents and ask them, they know more about it, and I would trust them more than the internet.

On the other hand, for people like IJT₃, it was hard to trust the internet. She admitted trying to authenticate information from various sources but felt that nothing on the internet on faith-related matters could be taken too seriously. ZY₀₉ concurred:

No, not really, I mean I kinda steer clear of forums because I don't think they are legit people, that they know what they are saying, so I try to [do]

my own research, like find the authentic hadith and read the Qur'an if I can, and try and understand it.

While the internet provides a convenient avenue for accessing information on Islamic law, some individuals exhibit a preference for traditional methods of learning, relying on personal interactions within their communities.

In total, 11 participants expressed a reluctance to use the internet to seek Islamic knowledge, and said they do not do so. Their reasons vary but generally centre on concerns regarding the authenticity and reliability of online sources.

S1, S4, S6, S7, and S9 cite the diverse beliefs and potential conflicts encountered in online communities, which lead them to be sceptical about the accuracy of information found on the internet. They express apprehension about the credibility of websites and the anonymity of their creators, which may contribute to misleading content. S1 said,

Because the internet is a big community basically, and you will see people with different beliefs and they might conflict with my beliefs basically.

S9 was sceptical of the people running these websites:

I feel like the internet is misleading and you never know who is running the website or who is behind it. I don't trust it.

MY04, MY06, and MY08 also express reservations about using the internet for religious inquiries, citing concerns about misinformation and the potential for inaccuracies in online content.

ZY06, SY03, and SY14 echo similar sentiments, expressing distrust in online platforms and preferring to seek guidance from trusted sources within their offline communities, such as family members or local imams. SY14 specifically emphasises the importance of obtaining information from certified sources, highlighting a preference for direct communication over email rather than relying solely on internet searches.

This inclination stems from scepticism regarding the authenticity of online sources. Concerns over the potential for misinformation and the ease with which anyone can contribute content online prompt them to approach internet-based information with caution. They tend to prioritise seeking guidance from trusted family members over utilising online resources, citing difficulties in fully trusting internet-derived information. Even those who utilise the internet express a reluctance to rely solely on online sources, emphasising

the importance of cross-referencing and verifying information through other means.

5 Those Who Access Only Trusted Websites

To the question “What platforms do you use to obtain Islamic knowledge?”, 21% of the participants in Whyte’s (2022b, p. 6; 2024, p. 76) study nominated websites. However, it is not clear if they only use these websites or they use websites in addition to other online sources. In the study by Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016), this question was clearer. According to their study of 57 Muslims in Sydney, “almost all interviewees who sought information in cyberspace reported that they only consulted websites that they trusted” (Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al., 2016, p. 351). This contrasts with this chapter’s findings: only about one-tenth of the respondents reported that they only use specific websites as reliable sources of Islamic knowledge. These platforms, such as IslamQandA.com and Bayyinah.com, were praised for their authenticity and credibility, and are often managed by legitimate religious organisations or esteemed scholars.

For S02, in addition to going to imams directly, certain websites were great sources of information. She explained that she only followed pages or groups she considered authentic because they were run by a legitimate religious organisation or a mufti she followed. She felt her questions on web forums at these platforms were answered by religious scholars, as opposed to random people on the internet:

There are websites where you can question. There are answers that do come from legitimate sources, and I do seek answers from those websites for some questions.

ZY04 agreed, choosing to consult:

[t]he websites, QandA websites and usually, you know, the elderly people in your family. So, you know, I wouldn’t say I have been to imams or scholars but I rely mostly on the elder people in the family or again, Islam QandA.

A few more respondents mentioned the same website. SY13 said,

I use, so often when I search Islamic questions, IslamQandA.com comes up and they seem to answer questions from the Shari'a law.

SY09 explained how the website works:

I haven't personally asked anyone but I don't think so, but you know the Islam QandA page. Yeah, if I have any concerns I go there and imams post stuff there and so it is mostly reliable. It is like where people discuss questions: let us say, "Can you fast without having your morning meal?" Something really small like that. If you search it up, the Islam QandA page they have imams, so reliable scholars replying to you and saying, "Okay, this is right" or "This is wrong," and "This is what the ruling is." So, it is not like their own fatwa or anything, so, they tell you what the Prophet did or what happened in his time or what does the Qur'an say predominately. The imams are from various backgrounds because I haven't seen one imam that is replying; there are so many. I think they are Arab mostly.

Black and Hosen (2009) noted 15 years ago that Australians were strongly represented as questioners in overseas fatwa banks including Islam QandA, which attracted 1,112,998 requests for fatwas from Australia. Thus, it is not surprising that several of the respondents mentioned the website. However, there were a few other fatwa websites mentioned. One of the respondents mentioned Bayyinah.com and another mentioned AskIslam.com.

The consensus among these few respondents was that these websites serve as valuable resources for seeking clarification on matters of Islamic law. Overall, the recognition of and reliance on these websites reflect a broader trend of utilising online platforms as supplementary sources of religious knowledge, alongside traditional avenues of learning and consultation with trusted elders or religious figures within one's community.

6 Those Who Use Cyberspace Only to Access Fundamental Texts

As part of their survey on Islam in Australia, Halim Rane et al. (2020) reported the "most influential sources" to be the Qur'an (82.5%), followed by Hadith (66.4%). When presented with an issue pertaining to Islam, the largest segment of respondents said they would first consult the Qur'an and Hadith (39.2%), followed by the Qur'an only (13.8%). Only 0.7% of respondents selected "Hadith only" (Rane et al., 2020, p. 10). According to Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al.'s (2016) study, 16% of their 57 respondents use the Qur'an, Hadith,

and other religious texts (p. 350). However, it was not clear how many of the respondents who used the internet for accessing Islamic knowledge used it only to access the Qur'an, Hadith, and other main religious texts.

In this study, about one-third of the respondents in the study mentioned using the internet to access fundamental texts of Islam such as the Qur'an, Hadith collections, and prayer books. Some participants emphasised the challenges of interpreting the Quran without proficiency in Arabic, and their need to clarify misunderstandings, particularly when encountering misinformation on social media. They turned to the internet for translations and clarifications, citing instances where ignorant individuals online took verses out of context.

S₃ explained:

So, the thing is I have read the Qur'an and stuff but the thing is I can't speak Arabic and I haven't really – like I don't understand, like I can read it and everything but I don't understand it, so there is an English version as well, but that is hard to read as well because it is like written in olden-day language. And yeah, there are certain things, like sometimes you come across really ignorant people on social media especially, especially in comments sections of posts and stuff they are like, "Oh, Islam is that and Islam is that," and they are like, "Oh, look it up here, in this verse and on this page," and when you do check that it is taken out of context and everything. So, like that is how I like to clarify and see what they are talking about, like put it in the context, so that is the only clarification I have done.

ZY12 mentions using the internet for clarifying aspects of prayer and Qur'anic verses.

I don't really remember, maybe something associated with prayer or something to get clarification on about the Qur'an or certain things.

ZY09 said. "I try to [do] my own research, like find the authentic hadith." SY13 also looks for the Hadith collections: "I try to work by the Hadith in Sahih Bukhari or the sahih (authentic) ones." Other participants, such as ZY03, express a preference for online resources for in-depth research on Islamic topics, particularly reputable scholars' works and translations like Muhammad Asad's.

The findings highlight the significant role of the internet in providing access to Islamic texts, translations, and scholarly interpretations, especially for those facing linguistic barriers or seeking clarification on specific religious topics.

While there are challenges, such as discerning reliable sources from misinformation, many participants find online resources invaluable for their research and understanding of Islam.

7 Friends, Family, and Teachers

In the recent Whyte (2022b, 2024) survey of 300 Australian Muslim participants, 11% of the participants consulted family/friends/elders. In the Halim Rane et al. (2020) survey on Islam in Australia with 1,034 Muslims, the percentages were family (28.4%), friends (12.3%), school (8.6%), and university (6.4%). According to Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al.'s (2016) study of 57 Muslims, 50% of participants consult their families, 34% of them consult their friends, 26% make use of Islamic courses and lectures, and 10% use informal study groups (p. 350).

In this study, about half of the respondents indicated a strong preference for seeking guidance on Islamic matters from friends, family, and teachers, rather than relying solely on imams or online sources. Many participants mentioned turning to their parents for clarification on religious issues, and some also mentioned the involvement of imams if necessary. Participants often cited family members, especially those with knowledge and experience, as trusted sources of information. Additionally, they highlighted the significant role of teachers, particularly those who are knowledgeable about Islam, in shaping the understanding of religious teachings, especially during schooling years.

MY1 said that

I would refer to my basic knowledge; if I couldn't get a proper answer, I would ask my father who has better knowledge and experience; if we couldn't find a response, I would refer to an online platform.

SM3 sought information

[f]rom my parents and my friends from my school I get information about Muslim and about Islam from my parents, my family, my friends, and my teachers especially. In here I get information from my community, something like that.

For SY01,

I just do not ask the imam. But [I] ask the friend who knows, he is more Muslim, like have more knowledge than me so I just ask him.

And S₃ said:

I usually do that with my friends, like we ask each other. I don't think they have asked either. So, I just think it is just within ourselves what we think is a certain thing is.

Moreover, those who studied in Islamic schools, or schools in Muslim-majority nations, underscored the significant role of teachers in shaping understanding, especially during schooling years. ZY01 consulted:

My high school Islamiyat teacher, who had done his education and stuff, so he was a scholar.

Asked about consulting teachers, SY11 replied:

Yes, a lot of times, my teachers back in Indonesia, teachers not here but my senior here who stayed longer here.

The inclination towards seeking advice from trusted individuals within personal networks reflects a preference for interpersonal interaction and established relationships over anonymous online sources. While some participants acknowledged using the internet for minor clarifications or as a supplementary resource, they emphasised the importance of direct communication with knowledgeable individuals, such as parents, teachers, and mentors, for deeper understanding and guidance on religious matters.

8 Asking Imams

Rane et al.'s (2020) survey found, regarding Muslim community organisations, that respondents expressed the most trust for Islamic schools and colleges (52.3%), the national board of imams (48.9%), state board of imams (49.4%), and state Islamic councils (46.1%), followed by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (42.3%). The organisations respondents considered to be "not very" or "not at all" trustworthy were the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (33.0%), followed by Islamic schools and colleges (25.1%), state Islamic councils (22.2%), state board of imams (21.3%), and national board of imams (20.3%) (Rane, 2020, p. 15).

Whyte's (2024, p. 90) survey results show that participants approach imams about a range of issues – worship, scripture, morality, and social and political issues. Participants selected that they approach imams for questions about

Islamic rituals and worships (25.2%), social issues (20%), morality and ethics (19.2%), Islamic scripture (16.7%), marriage (12.6%), and political issues (6.3%) (Whyte, 2024, p. 90). They were also asked how often they visited or accessed the guidance of an imam or sheikh. Participants were provided with five options. They answered sometimes (43.3%), never (28.3%), regularly (13.67%), often (10.7%), and always (4%). The 18–35 age group had limited access and contact with imams: 37.6% sometimes accessed an imam, while 31.7% never accessed an imam for advice (Whyte, 2024, p. 110). Men and women shared similar statistics when it came to the limited frequency of seeing imams: 45.4% of men sometimes saw an imam compared to 40.5% of women; 32.2% of women said they never did (Whyte, 2024, p. 110).

In this study, 21 participants out of 64 (33%) reported having posed questions to an imam or Islamic scholar “for clarification on Islamic law or an issue in relation to Islam or Muslims”.

S2 explained:

Yes, definitely. Well, it depends on what happens because Islamic laws are applicable to a lot of things in what would you do in your life on a day-to-day basis, they do extend to how people behave in public places. So, I have a lot of personal questions in relationships with how my everyday transactions are going on. So, I would seek all sorts of help that is necessary to make a better life as a Muslim.

S4 expanded:

Take an example of the interest that you pay in Australia. Islam does not allow us to take or pay interest but here in Australia it is something that you have to do. So, my father took a suggestion from this imam in Iran and where he asked if we were allowed to pay or take the interest because it is what we have to do, and the imam did say yes, that we can pay the interest because it is the regulation of the land that you have to follow there. So, like I think we do go to imams if we need them.

Z4’s question was about the intergroup contact with non-Muslims (cf. Yilmaz et al., 2021):

You know, I guess, the big thing that I was questioning was that how we should be towards non-Muslims and, you know, you hear a lot of different things, a lot of different ways of approaching it but, you know, luckily I had a very good imam and he was a good person and, you know, he

would basically just tell me that, you know, getting along with people that aren't Muslims is very important and he was just all for it, and I am not saying that I know imams that aren't for it but I guess [I] wanted clarification of, you know, how an imam, someone who knows a lot about Islam would have said [about] Muslims should only stick with other Muslims.

S8 went to an imam to ask about the Islamic diet:

Yeah with Islamic law I do ask for clarification, with regards to alcohol and pork and that sort of things. The dude's Albanian. I go to the same mosque he works in and I stop and ask him about rules and laws and to clarify.

SY05, a Bosnian male participant, said:

I have got a Bosnian imam that I speak to about Islamic teachings in general and from him I learn certain things. What are they, the way to speak to people, treat people, how to follow your religion, how to do everything according to your religion, to God's liking, et cetera.

Participants have had positive experiences when speaking with imams or scholars. None of the participants reported directly experiencing a negative incident. For instance, ZY08 said:

We, a lot of us went up to the imam at the Centre for XYZ. So, we have got a lot of English people come though, so mostly English. The people we have had are very good. Any questions that I have gotten up to them with they have always been very good with sort of unpacking the issue and then explaining why that the thing is a certain way.

SY07, a Bangladeshi female participant, contacts imams through more religious friends:

Usually through someone I know who I know is a bit more practising than me. So, like I have a lot of friends, actually there is a lot of gatherings and stuff that happen inside the community so I will just probably message them and take me to talk to an imam or, "Could you let me know?" So, like I would say they are more connected, and I get information by that person going and contacting that imam.

It is not clear from the participants' responses why only 21 out of 64 chose to approach an imam or an Islamic scholar to get Islamic knowledge. This could be due to a disconnectedness from the leadership in the Muslim communities (Sohrabi, 2016). A decade ago, Akbarzadeh (2013) highlighted the challenge faced by imported imams in Australia who struggle to effectively engage with young Australian Muslims due to their limited understanding of Australian culture. However, despite the importance of *Shari'a* to many Muslims, the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) has struggled to effectively engage with grassroots Muslims. Internal divisions, language barriers, and a lack of informal social engagement with congregations weaken Muslim clerics' effectiveness and have paved the way for alternative voices within the community; individual activists and celebrity clerics have stepped in successfully (Ali, 2020). Both the Whyte (2024) and Rane et al. (2020) surveys also indicated some trust issues with the leadership. However, in the current study, the respondents did not elaborate on their reasons for not approaching imams. Possamai, Turner, Cheng, et al. (2016, p. 349) reported that many informants did not have high opinions of their local imams. In this study, the respondents did not elaborate on why they did not consult imams; but it seems that it was a practicality issue, or having the internet, friends, and family as convenient ways of accessing Islamic information.

9 Difficulty of Accessing Imams: a Gendered Problem

Out of these 21 individuals who contacted an imam, 14 of them (67%) were male, and only seven were female, representing 33% of the participants who contacted an imam, and 11% of the total number of participants; they are identified here as S2, S9, ZM6, ZM8, SM16, MM4, and MM7. One of these is the daughter of an imam; it remains uncertain whether she would have approached an imam for guidance if he were not her parent. Nevertheless, unlike Whyte's (2024) survey, the disparity of six or seven out of 21 underscores a gender imbalance in accessing imams for counsel.

As a matter of fact, out of those participants who did not ask an imam a *Shari'a* question, C3, C4, C5, C6, S5, S10, SM09, and SM14 either talked about the difficulty of reaching imams, or mentioned how they would ask them questions indirectly. All these participants except C4 are female. C4 did not have an accessibility problem but did not feel connected to the imams:

No. Because I don't see an imam in an area and I don't feel I connect with [them]. So, I would rather go online. I would definitely go online to seek clarification on Islamic law on that, I would definitely find a mufti that

I connect with, so to say that I love to talk, like a hundred per cent, and what they believe in.

Perhaps this is a matter of differences in mentality, not an accessibility problem. The reason IJT1, a Turkish female participant, gave for not approaching imams seems to be similar to C4's:

No, I usually tend to educate myself; I don't really rely on them; I mean, it is good to listen to them because that is why they are there but often-times it is not what I want to hear. Like, they just have a very one way of thinking because they are educated in such a tight institution, it is so reflected in their personality, like they are so rigid, so, yeah. They are all very similar; I feel like they could be the same person. I wouldn't know the difference.

But for the other female participants, it is clearly an accessibility problem. C3 said:

If I would have an issue or I would need clarification, I would do research on my own, if not I will, I guess I will use my parents as a means of getting to the imam to ask questions on behalf of me but I personally wouldn't talk with them myself.

C5 said, "I ask someone to ask for me." C6 said she "wouldn't go like to the ... Mosque's imam so that is what I mean. The last time I went in a mosque was like five years ago." S10 said that

I don't have contact with any imams. Oh! Yeah, I kinda like have a relative who is a family friend who has kinda like memorised the Qur'an and he knows well about religion and we have kinda asked.

S5 said that they could ask their questions indirectly, not face to face or in person:

So, yeah, there is there is this place called XYZ and they had those – youth night for girls towards the end of last year and they had a questions session, so you write questions and put it in the box and the box would go to the mufti of the centre and he would be on the projector screen so, we don't really go and see him but he would answer the questions from that. Other than that we could ask his wife.

SM14 said she asks her dad to ask the imam questions for her:

Whenever I question about like something Islamic related I ask my dad to ask the imam in the mosque. And then he gets back to me.

On the other hand, SY09 thought it is disrespectful to ask imams questions:

Not really, no. It is more so the khutbas (sermons) and stuff when you are receiving the sermon, you are not questioning them. I have been told that the imam that the position they have is you need to, in Islam, you really need to respect them and don't question them as much. I do not say they are saying something wrong; it is good to not disrespect them because they probably have more experience than you do.

The experiences shared by the female participants shed light on the challenges many young Muslim women face in accessing imams for *Shari'a*-related inquiries. Their accounts highlight a common theme of difficulty in reaching imams directly or a reluctance to approach them directly with questions. This reluctance may stem from various factors, including geographical barriers, cultural norms, and personal reservations.

10 Conclusion

The advent of the internet has undoubtedly ushered in a new era of connectivity and interaction for Muslims worldwide, creating a dynamic fusion of Islam and cyberspace. This chapter has examined the landscape of Islamic authority and leadership in the context of digital technologies, given how traditional boundaries are transcended and digital proficiency at times supersedes religious status. While existing studies have provided valuable insights into the online (digital) and offline (traditional) pathways of young Muslims' access to religious knowledge, this chapter highlights a critical gap in the literature: the lack of qualitative research from the perspective of Muslim youth regarding their access to offline and online Islamic knowledge in the digital age. To address this void, the study conducted 64 semi-structured interviews with young Muslims in Melbourne and Geelong, offering a nuanced examination of how they navigate the realms of traditional and digital Islamic sources of authority.

The chapter confirms earlier research that despite the wealth of online resources, concerns about misinformation are in the minds of many young Muslims while they navigate cyberspace for Islamic knowledge. Based on the

detailed of the responses of the participants, the chapter also shows their motivations and reasoning for why personal connections with family, friends, and teachers remain foundational in accessing religious knowledge despite their awareness that digital platforms broaden their access to Islamic knowledge. While some participants acknowledged the use of online platforms for minor clarifications, they stressed the importance of direct communication with knowledgeable individuals, highlighting the role of family, community, and educational institutions in shaping individuals' religious beliefs and practices. Also, many participants used the internet for accessing the foundational texts of Islamic knowledge: the Qur'an and Hadith. Finally, despite the proliferation of online resources, a third of the participants have continued to seek guidance from imams and religious scholars offline. However, the chapter also shows that gender disparities persist in accessing offline religious authorities, underscoring the need for inclusive religious spaces.

Looking ahead, further research is essential to understand the broader implications of these findings and to develop strategies for promoting informed engagement with Islamic knowledge in the digital age. By bridging the gap between traditional and digital sources of authority, future initiatives can empower individuals to navigate the complexities of contemporary religious discourse with confidence and discernment.

The gender disparity in accessing imams observed among young Muslims also warrants further investigation to uncover its underlying causes. This phenomenon may stem from a multitude of factors, ranging from structural barriers such as segregation within communities to practical constraints such as geographical distance from accessible imams. Additionally, cultural norms and societal expectations are likely influential in shaping individuals' comfort levels and willingness to seek guidance, particularly on topics perceived as sensitive or traditionally associated with gender roles. It is conceivable that societal taboos and expectations surrounding discussions on feminine issues contribute to a sense of embarrassment or reluctance among female Muslims to approach imams for guidance. Furthermore, the lack of female representation and leadership within religious institutions may exacerbate feelings of exclusion or discomfort among women seeking spiritual guidance.

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'Progressive Except for Islam'

Profiling Islamophobia Sentiment

Rachel Sharples, Rhonda Itaoui and Kevin Dunn

Abstract

Research has established the prevalence of Islamophobia in a cross-section of Western societies, including in Australia. A rise in anti-Muslim attitudes and experiences of racism among Muslim communities has led to research on the varied manifestations of Islamophobia sentiment. A recent study on Islamophobia in Victoria, Australia uncovered five segments of Islamophobia, ranging from a very progressive pro-Muslim stance to a strongly anti-Muslim disposition. This chapter builds on this research by focusing specifically on the three largest and non-polemic segments: *Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies*, *Undecideds*, and *Progressives who have concerns about Islam*. The chapter explores the demographic attributes of these segment groups, including factors such as age, political affiliation, geographical location, socioeconomic status, and gender. Attitudinal variations are also critical, and the research looks to the role of liberal discourses, including liberal feminism, to explain the wider than expected reach of Islamophobia in liberal Western democracies like Australia. The chapter proposes key approaches and solutions to transform and improve Islamophobic attitudes, including better utilising the existing support for anti-racist action; leveraging comfort with intercultural contact to create greater exposure and education opportunities that could help reduce Islamophobia sentiment; and a focus on building trust and establishing strong leadership on this issue in order to establish a better and more sensible public discourse about Islam and Muslims.

1 Introduction

There is a clip in the Australian documentary *Is Australia Racist?* where a middle-aged white man confronts a woman wearing the niqab in a public space.¹ He

1 The 2017 documentary *Is Australia Racist?* was released on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), an Australian national public-service broadcast network. The documentary investigated the experience of racism and discrimination in Australia and was underpinned by research conducted by the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University.

angrily yells at her: “We helped save you from where you’ve come from, from where you’ve been persecuted, and you wear things like that.” He then tells the woman that she should dress like other Australians and become part of “our” culture (Willinge, 2017). In that one sentence the man combines paternalistic ownership (“we saved you; you owe us”) with assimilationist thinking (“you’re only acceptable if you forgo your culture for the Australian one”), to abuse one of the most racially targeted groups in the world – the visibly Muslim woman. We mention this clip because it captures some of the key aspects of Islamophobia in Australia today. It covers the typical racial abuse experienced by Muslims, but also the complex and differing articulations of Islamophobia. For example, some articulations are cached in assimilationist thinking, hidden behind liberal Islamophobia viewpoints where people are progressive ‘except for Islam,’ and where risk and threat can have both political and cultural meaning (Mondon and Winter, 2019).

Islamophobia has become a touchstone of racial supremacists (Peucker and Smith, 2019), and our segmentation analysis has revealed a deeply Islamophobic group of the Australian population whose antipathy towards Islam is a political conviction associated with far-right beliefs of sociobiology and supremacy. But the problem of Islamophobia is broader than this group, and this pertains across Western societies (Barkdull et al., 2011). This chapter looks beyond the extremes to the non-polemic segments of Islamophobia in Australia. Research specific to the Australian context has shown the extent of this problem (Akbarzadeh et al., 2009; Dunn et al., 2021; Johns et al., 2015; Mansouri and Vergani, 2018). This includes: a rise in anti-Muslim attitudes (Blair et al., 2017); increased experiences of racism among Muslim communities (Iner et al., 2021); the impacts on sense of belonging in and across public spheres (Itaoui, 2016; Itaoui and Dunn, 2017); racially motivated terror attacks against Muslims (Itaoui and Iner, 2022); the construction of the Muslim as ‘other’ and as a civil and cultural threat (Briskman, 2015); threat rhetoric that is politically driven and exacerbated by media platforms (Bliuc et al., 2019; Ewart and O’Donnell, 2018); municipal-level opposition to mosques and Islamic schools (Al-Natour, 2010; Dunn, 2021); and the targeting of Muslims and Islam by white supremacist groups (Razack, 2022). This research shows that Islamophobia is permissible and legitimised by certain sections of the community, and prevalent in ways that have long-lasting impacts on Muslim communities (Cherney and Murphy, 2016), posing a broader threat to social cohesion and community safety (Fozdar, 2014). The widespread nature of Islamophobia is the reason racist groups use it to mobilise support and build their political base.

A significant concern across this chapter is the breadth and differing articulations of Islamophobia in the Victorian population who were the focus of

this study, and the need to develop responses and approaches that directly target such articulations. The aims of this chapter were therefore twofold. Using survey data that segmented the Victorian population into five groups based on their perceptions of Muslims and Islam, we focus on the attitudes and behaviours of the three largest and non-polemic groups: *Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies*, *Undecideds*, and *Progressives with concerns about Islam*. We hypothesise that these three groups are where the scope lies to effect a substantial change in attitudes and behaviours. We then propose key approaches and solutions to transform and improve Islamophobic attitudes among these groups.

2 The Differing Articulations of Islamophobia

The Islamophobia manifest in the form of right-wing extremist action that targets Muslims with catastrophic outcomes has been well documented (Peucker and Smith, 2019). Most relevant to the Australian context were the 2019 terror attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, by an Australian perpetrator with links to global right-wing extremist organisations (Battersby and Ball, 2019; Dunn and Sahin, 2023; Kolig, 2019). The perpetrator killed 51 people and injured 40 and received a life sentence without parole. The New Zealand prime minister at the time, Jacinda Ardern, established a Royal Commission of Inquiry which found, among other things, that there had been “an inappropriate concentration of counter-terrorism resources on the threat of Islamist extremist terrorism”, and that the security agencies had largely neglected to monitor the rise and risk of far-right extremism (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques, 2020). The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has made similar comments in the Australian context: its Director-General stated that ASIO had seen an increase in the threat from racist and nationalist violent extremists (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2021). These events show clear links between Islamophobia sentiment and right-wing extremist action against Muslims.

In addition to examinations of violent forms of Islamophobia, there has been a growing body of literature that recognises how Islamophobia extends beyond extremist prejudices against Muslims, demonstrating a complex array of attitudes, ideologies, and institutional biases. Central to this discussion of its diverse manifestations is the understanding that Islamophobia cannot be confined to singular or context-specific definitions (Mondon and Winter, 2019). Mondon and Winter (2017, 2019) have categorised the intricacies

surrounding Islamophobia's definitions and discourses into two main articulations: illiberal and liberal types. Illiberal articulations refer to treatment of certain groups particularly based on ethnic and/or cultural traits, and the possibility of circumventing laws, the constitution, and elections should the threat of such groups be considered serious enough. This type commonly presents Islam as monolithic and innately threatening or inferior. Meanwhile, liberal types refer to obedience to the constitution and rule of law, and in particular to the equal treatment of citizens. This type commonly presents Muslim culture and community as inherently homogenised and opposed to the core values of the West such as freedom of speech, and gender and sexual equality (Mondon and Winter, 2017, pp. 65–67).

Other researchers have demonstrated that the broad spectrum of Islamophobia is evident across varied global contexts. For instance, European researchers have offered categories such as "liberal Islamophobia", "post-liberal racism", "identity liberalism", and "enlightened Islamophobia" (Opratko, 2019). Meanwhile, Islam (2018) introduces the concept of "soft Islamophobia", which underscores the systemic disenfranchisement of those most affected by Islamophobia. This form is particularly prevalent in liberal, left-leaning US spaces, where Islamophobia often becomes reduced to interpersonal dialogues, sidelining the deep-seated structural roots of the phenomenon (Islam, 2018). Massoumi et al. (2017) present the "five pillars of Islamophobia", which include elements of liberal, left, secular, and feminist movements in the UK.

Australian researchers have also offered categorisations of Islamophobia, which are often associated with the influence of other cultural attitudes and political touchstones. In their study on racist attitudes in Australia, Blair et al. (2017) found a contradiction between pro-assimilationist views and Islamophobic attitudes within the celebration of cultural diversity, reflecting the tangled web of attitudes to cultural diversity, nationhood, and migration, specifically in relation to Muslim groups. According to Poynting and Briskman (2018), the influences of right-wing groups have permeated mainstream institutions in Australia, where their views find resonance in media, policies, and legal frameworks. This is reflected in the general populace's passive response to their views, which could be interpreted as tacit approval (Poynting and Briskman, 2018). For example, Poynting and Briskman (2018) draw on the political evolution of Pauline Hanson from an extremist in 1996 to an accepted political figure by 2016 as a reflection of the normalisation of Islamophobic views in Australian politics. The research in each national setting generates specific categorisations. For example, in Poland the unique national political and social conditions – the absence of a significant Muslim population – generated a distinctive version of Islamophobia (Bobako, 2018). The versions

and categories in Australia are likely to be different again, and inflected by Australian political settings.

These perspectives highlight the significance of analytical differentiation between 'liberal-progressive' and 'illiberal-conservative' anti-Islamic discourses to understanding multifaceted Islamophobia. This is essential to develop and implement appropriate interventions. The following section reviews emerging perspectives around 'liberal-progressive' forms of Islamophobia, which are useful in interpreting our data around the three non-polemic segment groups of Islamophobic attitudes in Australia.

3 Islamophobia and the Limits of Liberalism

A key argument of this chapter is that liberal discourses and national security concerns around political and cultural fit can explain the wider than expected reach of Islamophobia in liberal Western democracies like Australia. Within broader discussions around the diverse articulations and mechanisms of Islamophobia is a growing body of work covering the subtler yet pervasive form: liberal Islamophobia (Lentin and Titley, 2012; Mondon and Winter, 2017). As Mondon and Winter (2017) emphasise, to understand this phenomenon it is crucial to situate the terms 'liberal' and 'illiberal' in their broader context. The former is associated with constitutional obedience, equal treatment of citizens, and democratic deliberation processes, while the latter implies a bypass of these elements when faced with perceived threats (Mondon and Winter, 2017).

According to emerging perspectives, liberal Islamophobia manifests in both extreme and 'mainstream' spheres. Within these spheres, liberalism becomes a tool through which actors articulate their opposition to Islam and Muslims (Mondon and Winter, 2017). For instance, in France, which banned hijabs and burqas, or the US, where figures like Bill Maher popularised Islamophobic sentiments under the banner of security concerns, the limits of liberal perspectives were tested and ultimately facilitated the rise of overt Islamophobic sentiments in mainstream discourse (Mondon and Winter, 2017), as well as media (Opratko, 2019). Building on the US context, Massoumi et al. (2017) argue that the war on terror was not just an invention of neoconservatives, but rather was normalised by Obama liberals. Rooted in the consensus in support for the war on terror was the idea of a 'Muslim problem,' reflecting how liberal policies may not always be as progressive as they appear and can even exacerbate underlying issues (Husain, 2021). It is through discourses which position Islam as a cultural relic, and as a source of threats to national culture

and values, that the outsider status of Muslims is reinforced, reflecting a deviation from cultural pluralism and liberalism (Opratko, 2019; Poynting and Briskman, 2018).

Islam (2018) further extends our understanding of the limits of liberalism in relation to Islamophobia in the limited approach of liberal allies for Muslims. According to Islam (2018), among anti-racist movements there exists a persisting discomfort with and erasure of Islam as a faith, a lack of structural analysis of anti-Muslim hate, and a transformation of 'Muslim' from a faith-based identity to a cultural category which limits the ability for liberals to fully support Muslims in the context of Islamophobia (Islam, 2018). These perspectives illustrate that a rethinking of racism is imperative, and Bobako (2018) aptly calls for analyses that shift from overt expressions of racism to the subtler, but equally damaging forms.

This is particularly the case in relation to white feminism and anti-racism, which has been found to further ostracise Muslim women within liberal frameworks of women's rights. In recent years, scholars have brought attention to how the discourses surrounding Islam, particularly concerning women's rights, serve as a revealing crossroad where liberal Western feminism and Islamophobia often converge. According to these perspectives, the traditional dichotomies of 'right' and 'left' seem to disintegrate when it comes to women's rights, suggesting a need to more intricately understand their intersection in the face of Islamophobia (Poynting and Briskman, 2018). Tensions between feminism and Islam have been documented in Australia, whereby Dunn et al. (2007) uncovered, surprisingly, how women exhibited higher levels of concern about Muslims than other 'out groups,' hinting at the potential role Islamic stereotypes play in fuelling misconceptions. Further, Ho (2007) observes that in Australia, rhetoric around protecting women's rights is sometimes weaponised to depict Islam as inherently misogynistic, linking it to national security concerns and creating a dichotomy of 'egalitarian West' versus 'oppressive Islam.'

The convergence of feminism and Islamophobia is a complex, layered connection that elucidates the tensions between progressive liberalism and Islamophobia. Understanding this convergence requires an intersectional lens that appreciates the nuances of both feminism and the diverse experiences of Muslim women. What has not yet been captured are empirical accounts of how these liberal Islamophobic discourses shape attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. This paper seeks to provide this data through a detailed analysis of attitudes among the three identified middle groups: *Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies*, *Undecideds*, and *Progressives with concerns about Islam*. This examination will establish the evidence base required to develop targeted solutions amongst these groups.

Perspectives referred to as the ‘white saviour complex’ highlight that while Western feminism often aims to empower women, it can unintentionally perpetuate oppression when trying to ‘rescue’ Muslim women without appreciating their cultural nuances (Quinn, 2019; Taramundi, 2015). The saviour narrative, where white individuals feel compelled to ‘save’ Muslim women from Muslim men, is prevalent not only in right-wing media but also among individuals from various backgrounds who express concern for Muslim women, inadvertently veiling their Islamophobic biases in the garb of compassion (Poynting and Briskman, 2018; Quinn, 2019). Using feminist rhetoric, anti-veiling legislation in European contexts racialises Muslims and implies that veiled Muslim women lack agency, reinforcing historical precedence by echoing the civilising missions of colonial eras when the West perceived itself as saviour. Panighel (2022) highlights the use of *laïcité* (secularism) as a tool for justifying discriminatory laws in France, and identifies the underlying postcolonial structures of domination and control which, paradoxically, expose the gender oppressions that persist in societies claiming to champion emancipation. Today, these narratives manifest in modern discourses where the veil becomes a symbolic battleground and Western feminism inadvertently positions itself as the saviour of Muslim women (Bjoernaas, 2015). These are important political narratives as they have wide purchase across society, and are not only a narrative of the far right.

4 Method

This chapter reports on an examination of the data from an online survey on Islamophobia in Victoria. The survey generated a completed sample of 4019 respondents. The survey was conducted in November 2019, and was largely representative of the Victorian population across age, gender, and location. The survey asked Victorian residents for their attitudes towards cultural diversity, racial equality, and privilege; trust and fairness; Muslims and Islam; and other ethnocultural groups in Australian society. The survey also asked respondents about their experiences of racism and discrimination, their contact with Muslims and knowledge of Islam, and their political affiliation. Using a combination of locally appropriate scales and globally established survey scales that have empirically studied Islamophobia, the survey asked 14 closed-response questions that were used as primary indicators of Islamophobia; these were then used to develop a latent class analysis. We used latent class analysis to classify respondents into groups based on their perceptions of Islam. The latent class analysis identified five groups: *Progressives*, *Progressives with*

concerns about Islam, Undecideds, Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies, and Islamophobic. In this chapter we focus specifically on the three largest and non-polemic segments: *Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies* (hereafter referred to as *Assimilationist*), *Undecideds*, and *Progressives with concerns about Islam* (hereafter referred to as *Progressives with concerns*). Together these three non-polemic groups form 72% of the total sample, constituting a significant proportion of the Australian population that has troubling views about Muslims and Islam. We argue these three largest and non-polemic groups are susceptible to attitudinal change, and we propose that targeted interventions can help move these groups toward a more progressive viewpoint on Muslims and Islam.

We should also note that, while this study focused on Victoria due to study design and funding constraints, future research could extrapolate this method to a national sample. Understanding this segmentation of Islamophobia sentiment at a national level would have important implications for upscaling the work and ensuring positive and targeted interventions that challenge Islamophobia in the broader Australian society.

5 Segmenting Islamophobia Sentiment

The *Progressives with concerns about Islam* group accounted for 32% of the sample. They are aged across a mid-section of society (35–64), identify as Christian and vote right-wing on the political spectrum. They are more likely to have a higher education qualification and are more likely to be in precarious employment (casual, part-time) or retired. They tended to agree with questions that accept Muslims and see them as equal citizens. They disagree that Muslims do not fit with Australian society. They strongly disagree with counter-terrorism policies and practices that target Muslims. They do not see Muslims as a threat and are not at all concerned with a relative marrying someone from a Muslim background. However, they neither agree nor disagree that Islam is compatible with Western society, suggesting that stereotypes around the Islamic religion may have some influence here.

The *Undecided* group accounted for 17% of the sample. They are aged across a mid-section of society (35–64), identify as Christian and vote right-wing on the political spectrum. They are more likely to have a trade or TAFE qualification as their highest education, and they were more likely to be in full-time, part-time, or casual employment. They are typified by their non-committal stance on key questions about Islam and Muslims. They tended to be slightly concerned about a close relative marrying someone from a Muslim background. While

this group does not have well-considered positions on most items, of concern is that they may drift towards the more Islamophobic segments without some sort of anti-racism intervention to prevent that.

The *Islamophobic with assimilationist tendencies* group accounted for 23% of the sample. This group is more likely to be aged across a mid-section of society (35–64), more likely to vote right-wing on the political spectrum, and relatively more likely to identify as Christian than non-Christian, or to have no religion. They are more likely to have a trade or TAFE-level qualification and they are less likely to be unemployed, home duties, or students. Half (52%) of this group would be concerned or very concerned if a close relative were to marry someone from a Muslim background. They agreed that Muslims pose a threat to Australian society. They tended to disagree that Muslims belong in Australian society and that Islam is compatible with Western society, and 60% agreed that Muslim women should not be allowed to wear head coverings like hijab, which suggests that an assimilationist position sits behind their Islamophobia.

There are some significant associations when it comes to the demographics of the three groups. All three groups are more associated with right-wing voting patterns: more likely to vote Liberal Party or One Nation Party than vote for the Australian Labor Party. This suggests political ideology is strongly associated with the sorting of respondents into these groups. The religion data shows secularism is more associated with anti-Islam – though not necessarily anti-Muslim. Similarly, those who identify as Christian are more likely to be associated with anti-Islam sentiment, but they differ from the secular in that they are more associated with anti-Muslim sentiment as well. When it comes to gender variations, the *Assimilationists* are more likely to be male, while the *Progressives with concerns* and *Undecideds* are more likely to be female. This aligns with research that highlights the gendered dimension of more extreme views (Agius et al., 2020) and Islamophobia (Ho, 2007). In this instance assimilationism is associated with male more than female respondents. But between the *Undecideds* and *Progressives with concerns* gender was not – or is no longer – a key discriminator when it comes to Islamophobia. The absence of a gender effect demonstrates the flattening effect of liberal Islamophobia, which we discuss further below. There was not much distinction across the age and education demographics. When it comes to employment, the *Assimilationists* and *Progressives with concerns* were fairly similar across employment categories, except for retirees who were significantly present in the *Progressives with concerns* and *Undecided* groups.

With this understanding of the segmentation of the three groups, we now move to discuss four key themes that emerge from the attitudinal data. These

themes align with our research aims to better understand the differing articulations of Islamophobia and to identify anti-Islamophobia intervention points, as well as with emergent themes from a theory-driven examination of the international literature. They include: Diversity and prejudice, Risk and threat, Liberal Islamophobia, and Anti-racism interventions.

6 Diversity and Prejudice

The respondents in this survey showed a very strong level of overall support for cultural diversity (78.1%), which is consistent with national surveys over the last decade (Blair et al., 2017; O'Donnell, 2022). However, when we look at some of the specific group attitudes, important patterns are observable. *Progressives with concerns* are significantly more likely to agree that it is a good thing for a society to be made up of different cultures: 93.4% compared to 65.8% for *Assimilationists* and 60.3% for *Undecideds*. This is significantly higher than the general sample (78.1%), suggesting that acceptance of cultural diversity is instrumental to this group. However, their acceptance is tempered somewhat by an associated assimilationist criterion for that acceptance. When asked if Australia is weakened by different ethnic groups sticking to their old ways, almost half of the *Progressives with concerns* and two-thirds of the *Assimilationists* agreed with this. This could be the basis for illiberal disposition towards religious diversity, and Islam specifically, in a context where cultural diversity is overwhelmingly valued.

When it comes to acceptance that racial prejudice exists in Australia, all three groups show relatively high levels of acceptance. This is important for anti-racism action as it indicates a low level of denial which can be leveraged. Interestingly, when it comes to admitting individual prejudice, the *Assimilationists* were significantly more likely to admit to racial prejudice than the other two groups: 25.9% compared to 7.6% for *Undecideds* and 5.5% for *Progressives with concerns*. Research over the last decade have usually put individual prejudice in the 10–12% range (Blair et al., 2017; Sharples and Blair, 2020), suggesting *Assimilationists* are confident to admit their prejudice. This perhaps indicates the greater tolerance of racist and prejudicial views in mainstream society and the growing confidence of certain sections of society to express those views and in some cases have them legitimised. Almost one-third of *Assimilationists* deny there is white privilege in society, while a little under one-third of *Progressives with concerns* also deny white privilege. The denial and acknowledgment of cultural privilege is not starkly different between the two groups; the undecideds vary only in their being less able to

TABLE 11.1 Diversity and prejudice

	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Total
It is a good thing for a society to be made up of different cultures ($p < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	7.3	26.1	65.8	100% (n:932)
Undecideds	2.0	37.7	60.3	100% (n:687)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	0.8	5.8	93.4	100% (n:1279)
Australia is weakened by people from different ethnic backgrounds sticking to their old ways ($p < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	18.9	21.8	59.4	100% (n:927)
Undecideds	19.8	53.9	26.2	100% (n:685)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	20.4	29.8	49.8	100% (n:1276)
There is racial prejudice in Australia ($p < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	9.8	20.9	69.3	100% (n:929)
Undecideds	6.2	38.8	55.1	100% (n:686)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	7.3	14.4	78.3	100% (n:1281)
I am prejudiced against other races ($p < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	40.7	33.4	25.9	100% (n:928)
Undecideds	43.5	49.0	7.6	100% (n:686)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	73.4	21.1	5.5	100% (n:1280)
Australians from a British background enjoy a privileged position in our society ($p < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	33.9	31.4	34.8	100% (n:928)
Undecideds	19.1	59.2	21.6	100% (n:687)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	29.5	34.8	35.8	100% (n:1280)

SOURCE: ISLAMOPHOBIA PROJECT, VICTORIAN SAMPLE, ONLINE SURVEY, NOVEMBER 2019

offer a view. The existence of white privilege and the underlying structural racism in society remains under-acknowledged and is therefore a significant barrier to anti-racism action.

7 Risk and Threat

The findings when it comes to risk and threat attitudes are perhaps the most striking across the dataset. This is not surprising given the tenor of public debate over the last two decades that has linked Muslims and Islam with terrorism and Western incompatibility (Husain, 2021; Mondon and Winter, 2017). Table 11.2 shows *Assimilationists* have high levels of concern across all the threat and risk indicators. They strongly agree that Muslims are not a fit to Australian society, that rights and freedoms are threatened by Muslims, and that Muslims are a threat to Australian society. Their responses are associated with a desire for Muslims to be culturally the same. They perceive a threat from the unrecconciled difference that would follow from the retention of specifically Muslim cultural traits (e.g. hijab-wearing in Table 11.3). Therefore, this group sees Islam as culturally inferior. Assimilationist thinking drives the Islamophobia in this group (Blair et al., 2017). This is demonstrated in their perception of Muslims and Islam along a cultural hierarchy and aligns with the so-called “new racism” which relies not on the “old racism” criteria of “biological heredity, but the irreducibility of cultural differences” (Balibar, as cited in Mondon and Winter, 2017; see also Islam, 2018). This segment has an attitude profile towards Muslims that is driven by threat perception, and they are closer to the extreme *Islamophobes* – not analysed here – than to the other two non-polemic groups.

The *Progressives with concerns* group showed lower levels of concern about Muslims on the risk and threat indicators. Generally, they agreed with Muslim fit, lack of threat, and the need for even treatment. However, they showed high levels of concern about terrorism; this aligns with our arguments in the next section around liberal Islamophobia, which forgoes the liberal viewpoint when it comes to touchstone issues such as terrorism, but also hijab wearing and mosque development (Poynting and Briskman, 2018). Nonetheless, the *Progressives with concerns* are a large segment and they overwhelmingly disagree with the other three threat perceptions, making them close to the pro-Muslim *Progressives* – also not analysed here. This indicates that it is the threat narratives that are most effective at re-sorting two of the middle groups towards the poles of opinion. The *Undecideds* are less influenced and remain unsure.

TABLE 11.2 Risk and threat

	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Total
Muslims do not fit into Australia society ($p = < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilation-ist tendencies	11.6	34.2	54.2	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	13.2	80.2	6.5	100% (n:688)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	80.4	18.2	1.4	100% (n:1283)
I am worried that our rights and freedom are threatened by Muslims in Australia ($p = < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilation-ist tendencies	7.5	16.9	75.6	100% (n:928)
Undecideds	5.3	73.0	21.6	100% (n:688)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	59.7	30.6	9.6	100% (n:1279)
I worry about terrorism in Australia ($p = < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilation-ist tendencies	8.1	15.7	76.2	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	4.2	40.8	55.0	100% (n:688)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	16.8	21.4	61.7	100% (n:1282)
Muslims pose a threat to Australian society ($p = < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilation-ist tendencies	10.7	31.9	57.3	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	7.5	87.0	5.4	100% (n:686)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	79	20.0	1.0	100% (n:1282)

SOURCE: ISLAMOPHOBIA PROJECT, VICTORIAN SAMPLE, ONLINE SURVEY, NOVEMBER 2019

8 Liberal Islamophobia

In our data we found some important distinctions that seem to support the research on liberal Islamophobia (Islam, 2018; Mondon and Winter, 2017; Opratko, 2018). We have called this 'progressive except for Islam,' indicating

that this group has progressive attitudes along most diversity criteria except when it comes to Islam, which is essentialised as a threat to Western ideals, values, and freedoms (Mondon and Winter, 2017; Poynting and Briskman, 2018). Over one-third of *Progressives with concerns* have a problem with women wearing facial coverings, a performance often perceived to represent the patriarchal nature of Islam (Jailani, 2016; Panighel, 2022). While this is significantly lower than the *Assimilationist* group, it is also significantly higher than where the *Progressives with concerns* group lies on other indicators such as fit, threat, and compatibility. This suggests that while the *Progressives with concerns* group has fairly liberal attitudes towards these latter criteria, their Islamophobia is embedded in touchstone political issues such as hijab wearing, mosque development, or terrorism (Quinn, 2019; Taramundi, 2015). This forms a pattern where otherwise liberal attitudes are replaced with paternalistic Western supremacy narratives that target the visibility and theology of the Islamic religion as a threat to Western liberal and democratic principles.

The remarkable influence of the perception of Islamic patriarchy is further demonstrated by comparison to attitudes about other liberal issues like equal opportunity and same-sex marriage. *Progressives with concerns* hold liberal views on gender equality (77.4% think women deserve equal opportunities to men) and homosexuality (70.8% agree same-sex marriage should be allowed). They are much more likely to hold liberal views on these matters than the *Undecideds* and *Assimilationists*. But the extent of the variation in opinion regarding Islamic cover is much more modest. Support for gender and marriage equality is almost twice as high as their acceptance of the visible aspects of Islam – women's face coverings. This connects to the stereotypical views that many progressives hold about gender inequality in Islam (Jailani, 2016), as well as about homophobia among Muslims (Safdari, 2019).

When it comes to social distance measures, 40% of *Progressives with concerns* say they have some level of concern if a close relative were to marry a person of Muslim faith. Compared to the *Assimilationists* group, 89.6% of whom have some level of concern, this group would seem more comfortable with close association with Muslims. However, this still means that almost half the *Progressives with concerns* group have some level of concern about Muslims – a point that could be targeted in any anti-racism interventions. While *Progressives with concerns* show a closer alignment with this liberal Islamophobia viewpoint, *Assimilationists* seem more closely aligned to the traditional racist views that present Muslims and Islam as monolithic and a threat (Poynting and Briskman, 2018). In either case, targeted and bespoke interventions are required.

TABLE 11.3 Liberal Islamophobia

	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Total
Women should not be allowed to wear face coverings like the niqab and burqa in Australia (p = < .000)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	9.1	11.3	79.5	100% (n:927)
Undecideds	6.5	48.4	45.1	100% (n:688)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	34.8	27.1	38.3	100% (n:1282)
Marriages between two men or two women should be permitted (p = < .001)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	28.0	22.5	49.4	100% (n:928)
Undecideds	16.3	45.5	38.1	100% (n:685)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	14.7	14.5	70.8	100% (n:1278)
I try to persuade others that women deserve equal opportunities to men (p = < .001)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	7.6	25.7	66.7	100% (n:931)
Undecideds	4.7	42.4	52.9	100% (n:686)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	4.3	18.4	77.4	100% (n:1279)
In your opinion, how concerned would you feel if one of your closest relatives were to marry a person of Muslim Faith (p = < .000)				
		Not all concerned	Some level of concern*	
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	10.5		89.6	100% (n:928)
Undecideds	31.4		68.6	100% (n:685)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	59.2		40.8	100% (n:1281)

*From *Slightly concerned* to *Extremely concerned*

SOURCE: ISLAMOPHOBIA PROJECT, VICTORIAN SAMPLE, ONLINE SURVEY, NOVEMBER 2019

9 Intervention Points for Anti-racism Action

We have laid out some of the key concerns of the three largest and non-polemic segments when it comes to attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. In this section we report on an examination of what distinguishes the three groups, identifying leverage points for anti-racism action. *Progressives with concerns* agree (80.6%) that something should be done to minimise or fight racism in Australia. This is a strong leverage point as it shows a high level of willingness to take anti-racism action. While the *Assimilationists* and *Undecideds* are significantly lower in their willingness, the data still show that nearly half of these two groups are willing to support action. This, alongside their support for cultural diversity, could be better utilised to generate critical self-reflection on Islamophobia, especially among the *Undecideds*.

The *Progressives with concerns* group express a high level of comfort in being around Muslims (92.9%). Two-thirds of the *Assimilationists* group also express this comfort. This suggests interventions with an intercultural contact component could be effective here. Research has been consistent in showing that meaningful contact with people from other groups is associated with less prejudice toward the out-group (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). This could be leveraged to create greater exposure and education opportunities that could help reduce Islamophobia sentiment. This would likely assuage anxieties and help exorcise assimilationist thinking.

Research has shown the importance of leadership in setting the tone for reasonable debate and to establish values and norms conducive to anti-racist action on these issues. The data on trust in institutions is important in this respect. *Progressives with concerns* express low levels of trust in Australian political parties (19.9% trust) and the media (19.6% trust). While *Assimilationists* show higher levels of trust (31.1% and 29.7% respectively), these statistics paint a poor portrayal of trust in key institutions. In addition, only one-third of the *Assimilationists* group and *Progressives with concerns* group trust the government to do the right thing by Australians. Low levels of trust in key public institutions are endemic globally (Edelman, 2022; Kamp et al., 2023); however, given that trust is essential in establishing a politically, economically, and socially successful society, a focus on building trust and establishing strong leadership on this issue is instrumental to anti-racist action. Our data would suggest that a key intervention could be achieved through a better and more sensible public discourse about Islam and Muslims. This requires political restraint, public leadership, and better media practice, which together would substantially contain the spread of Islamophobia in these non-polemic groups.

TABLE 11.4 Anti-racism action

	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Total
Something should be done to minimise or fight racism in Australia ($p = < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	9.5	32.7	47.8	100% (n:926)
Undecideds	3.6	47.9	48.5	100% (n:685)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	3.4	16.0	80.6	100% (n:1280)
I would feel very comfortable speaking with a Muslim ($p = < .000$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	10.2	27.0	62.8	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	4.8	54.7	40.5	100% (n:687)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	2.5	4.7	92.9	100% (n:1283)
I have trust in Australian political parties ($p = < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	45.9	22.3	31.1	100% (n:931)
Undecideds	38.1	44.3	17.6	100% (n:687)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	54.4	25.7	19.9	100% (n:1281)
I have trust in the Australian media ($p = < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	46.4	24.0	29.7	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	32.8	52.9	13.9	100% (n:686)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	50.6	29.8	19.6	100% (n:1280)
The Australian government can be trusted to do the right thing for Australians ($p = < .001$)				
Islamophobes with assimilationist tendencies	37.7	27.4	34.9	100% (n:930)
Undecideds	24.4	54.3	21.3	100% (n:685)
Progressives with concerns about Islam	34.6	35.1	30.2	100% (n:1281)

SOURCE: ISLAMOPHOBIA PROJECT, VICTORIAN SAMPLE, ONLINE SURVEY, NOVEMBER 2019

The *Undecided* group is the least known across the data and it represents unpredictability. It ought to be a focus of more research so that we can better determine their attitudes and help predict and avoid triggering worse levels of Islamophobia. However, some points seem evident. Anything that confronts assimilationist assumptions will likely prove effective for this group. Education that de-centres stereotypes and re-humanises Muslims will also build resilience to the influence of Islamophobia in this group. Stories and representations that demonstrate the ordinary hopes of Muslims – family, education, and work – and their civic participation through volunteering, donating, and local charity work would have positive effects by leveraging the strongly universalist position on rights in this group. Also, the profiling of celebrity (Australian Muslim) journeys, such as Muslim sports or media stars, will allow members of this group to find local affiliation and human association. Work at the level of locality (sports and community groups), and in schools, will have enduring benefit and virtue.

10 Ways Forward

Over the course of this chapter, we have shown the breadth and differing articulations of Islamophobia in the Australian context. In particular, we identified articulations that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary Australia: those that are cached in assimilationist thinking, hidden behind liberal Islamophobia viewpoints, and where risk and threat can have both political and cultural meaning. We were also concerned with mechanisms for attitudinal change, in particular targeted interventions that could help move the members in these groups toward a more progressive viewpoint on Muslims and Islam. With this in mind, our findings suggest a number of ways to transform and improve attitudes among these three non-polemic groups.

We reinforce the importance of targeted education. One of the most formidable tools against prejudice is education. Organisations, political bodies, and communities need to increase internal education and training on racial justice, focusing on dispelling misconceptions and building a deeper understanding of Muslim communities. Particularly by addressing misconceptions, such education can create connections across racial, religious, and ideological boundaries to cultivate a collective approach to addressing Islamophobia (Al-Rawi et al., 2022). Relatedly to this, we must centre the leadership and narratives of Muslims, especially those most vulnerable to policies and actions borne out of prejudice. These stories should span a spectrum, highlighting the diversity within the Muslim community to address misconceptions and

misunderstandings (Al-Rawi et al., 2022). This would also support a more reasonable and sensible debate around these issues and set the tone for political and media rhetoric on Muslims and Islam.

In highlighting some of these key distinctions in attitudes and behaviours across these three large and non-polemic groups, we are better able to develop targeted interventions that will bring positive and impactful change in the sentiment toward Muslims and Islam in Australia.

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'New' Religious Knowledge and the Influence of Religious Authorities on Relations between Muslims and Non-Muslims

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Abstract

Australia experiences high rates of anti-Muslim sentiment, concerns about Islam, and Islamophobia. However, the views of non-Muslim and Muslim Australians regarding Islam are quite divergent; the overwhelming majority of Muslim Australians express a view of Islam as peaceful and advocate good relations with non-Muslims. Moreover, recent research on covenants in Islam points to peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims as normative in the primary Islamic sources, the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. However, covenants have been under-studied and under-represented in discourses about Islam. This chapter presents findings of reception analysis concerning historic documents known as the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad. These findings highlight the important role of religious authorities in regard to the acceptance of covenants as 'new' religious knowledge, and their potential influence on general public perceptions of Islam as a religion that advocates peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims.

1 Introduction

Muslims and non-Muslims share extensive historical memories of the other (Penn, 2015; Tolan, 2002). In the Western context in general, long and fruitful periods of peaceful coexistence between the peoples of Islamic and Western-Christian civilisations, both in pre-modern and modern times, are often overshadowed by narratives permeated by conflict, enmity, and violence (Bulliet, 2004). In the Australian context, Indigenous peoples share historical memories of mutual respect, cultural exchange, and friendship with South-East Asian Muslims that pre-date British colonisation (Ganter, 2008; McIntosh, 2005), as well as kinship ties with South Asian Muslims that extend from the settlement era to contemporary times (Stephenson, 2010). For white Australia, however, Islam and Muslims came into focus in the past two decades following

the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Western media reporting that associates Islam and Muslims with this event, as well as with groups such as al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), and with terrorism in Australia and around the world (Rane et al., 2014), has cultivated high levels of anti-Islam/anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia that we continue to grapple with today (Dunn et al., 2021; Esposito and Kalin, 2011; O'Donnell, 2023).

Many of the anti-Islam discourses that have confronted Western publics over the past few decades identify the religion of Islam as the central threat faced by Western-Christian nations and civilisation (Duderija and Rane, 2019). This brings into question the normative position of Islam regarding interreligious relations and coexistence with non-Muslims. As we discuss below, the notion that Islam is inherently hostile toward non-Muslims and encourages interreligious enmity is not only a feature of far-right discourses (Harwood, 2021) but also prevalent in some academic and journalistic analysis that associates Islam with the conduct of pre-modern Muslim empires and contemporary non-state actors such as al-Qaeda and ISIS (Courty et al., 2019). However, a fair assessment of Islam, particularly what is normative regarding interreligious relations in Islam, must be argued on the basis of Islam's primary sources, the Qur'an and *Sunnah* – the 'conduct,' 'example,' or 'way' of the Prophet Muhammad – and the perspectives of Muslims, particularly Muslim religious authorities (Krämer and Schmidtke, 2014; Zaman, 2012). As one renowned scholar of Islam puts it: "the true reference to what is Islamic is nothing other than the Word of God, the original source and the founding document of Islam, the Qur'an, and the example or *Sunnah* of His Prophet" (Auda, 2017, p. 21).

This chapter discusses what recent research on covenants in Islam tells us about Islam's normative position regarding interreligious relations. It examines the role of religious authorities in influencing how Muslims and non-Muslims, specifically those involved in interfaith organisations, receive such 'new' religious knowledge – specifically, the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad (c.570–632) – and discusses how this may help counter prevailing anti-Islam/anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia. This study selected interfaith actors as its focus due to their cognisance of the dynamics and challenges of interreligious relations, and their work as agents involved in facilitating and improving interreligious dialogue and understanding. As such, their perspectives should be considered uniquely important with respect to the potential of Islamic covenants to positively contribute to contemporary interfaith relations. This pilot research on interfaith actor reception is a first step. Future research on reception of covenants in Islam may shed further light on their potential to improve interreligious relations. The chapter begins with an overview of

Muslim and non-Muslim views of the other and discusses the concept of normative and historical perspectives of Islam, or what might be understood as the original message of Islam versus the 'Islamic' tradition that developed over subsequent centuries. It then turns to the role of religious authorities in relation to 'new' religious knowledge derived from the study of the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad and considers how this may influence wider views on interreligious relations in Islam.

2 Muslim and Non-Muslim Views of the Other

Over the past two decades, Australia has experienced high rates of anti-Islam/anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia. Regarding attitudes toward different faith groups, the latest report on social cohesion in Australia found the highest negative response was towards Muslims (27%) by a substantial margin (O'Donnell, 2023). Negative attitudes toward members of other faith groups were far lower, including Buddhists (4%), Jews (9%), Hindus (11%), Sikhs (13%), and Christians (16%). Such sentiments relate to what is often termed 'Islamophobia,' which is generally defined as fear, hatred, and/or prejudice against the religion of Islam and Muslims (Esposito and Kalin, 2011). A recent study of Islamophobia in Australia found that 13% of the population could be considered Islamophobic, while another 74% have some concerns about Muslims, and only 13% have no concerns about Muslims (Dunn et al., 2021). Other research on anti-Islam social media groups in Australia suggests that negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims tend not to be based on concerns with the basic tenets of the religion *per se* but a fear of a radical, politicised Islam (Miller, 2017). Studies of Western media reporting on 'Islam' find that the religion is often conflated with Islamist political ideology, particularly the propaganda and conduct of militant groups, reinforcing the narratives of groups such as ISIS as a "formidable foe" and of a "clash of civilisations" (Courty et al., 2019, p. 69).

The notion that 'Islam' promotes enmity and violence toward non-Muslims proliferates through social media posts that "stoke deep hatred of Islam across the western world" (Knaus et al., 2019). More concerning is that some investigative journalism, and even academic scholarship, also contributes to widespread fears of an Islamic threat. For example, journalist Graeme Wood (2015) asserts "the Islamic State [ISIS] is Islamic. *Very* Islamic ... the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam". Renowned political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927–2008) proposed a post-Cold War theory of international relations that

he termed a 'Clash of Civilisations'. He claimed the problem the West faces is not from "Islamic fundamentalism" but "Islam" itself as the religion is inextricably linked to militarism (Huntington, 1996, p. 217). Other academics claim militant jihad is "firmly rooted" within the Islamic tradition and dismiss arguments that Islam advocates peaceful coexistence as "apologetics" (van de Krogt, 2010, p. 127). A more recent study contends that "Islam" is "positively correlated" with suicide attacks (Choi and Brown, 2022, p. 1). Such notions are echoed by far-right terrorists Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, both of whose manifestos referred to a history of aggression from "Islam" toward non-Muslims and their "replacement" by Muslim immigrants today (as cited in Harwood, 2021). Harwood (2021) highlights that such views about Islam were significant in Breivik's and Tarrant's pathways to terrorism, noting that "while the personal journey of both terrorists' radicalisation differed, it is nevertheless evident in both manifestos that a mutual hatred of Islam preceded and drew both men to the digital political collective of Replacement Theory white supremacy" (p. 40).¹ This underscores the urgent need to address perceptions that Islam is inherently hostile toward non-Muslims, and for critical-analytical, evidence-based knowledge to counter such misconceptions.

Perceptions of Islam as inherently hostile toward non-Muslims contrast sharply with what Muslim Australians say about Islam. The "Islam in Australia" study, which surveyed 1034 Muslim Australians and conducted focus groups in seven cities around Australia, found the vast majority (89%) of respondents believe Islam aligns with human rights, civil liberties and democracy, while a large majority (75%) characterise themselves as committed Muslims who believe in the rational, cosmopolitan nature of the Islamic tradition based on principles of social justice, gender justice, and religious pluralism (Rane et al., 2020). Other findings of the study were that 90% of respondents agreed that, "Islam never permits armed conflict against civilians/non-combatants", while only 4% agreed that "Islam sometimes permits armed conflict against civilians/non-combatants", and less than 1% agreed that "Islam generally permits armed conflict against civilians/non-combatants" (Rane et al., 2020, p. 17). In regard to relations with non-Muslims, 92% responded that "engaging with non-Muslims as family, friends, colleagues and in general social interaction" is "normal and good", while less than 6% agreed that "engaging with non-Muslims should be primarily done for *da'wah* (proselytising)", and less than 1% agreed that engaging with non-Muslims "is discouraged in Islam" or "forbidden" (Rane

1 In particular, Harwood (2021, p. 40) cites Breivik's 2011 manifesto, 2083: *A European Declaration of Independence* (pp. 1377–80), and Tarrant's 2019 manifesto, *The Great Replacement* (pp. 5, 7, 13).

et al., 2020, p. 14). Furthermore, while the “Islam in Australia” survey reported a high degree of religiosity among its respondents, including that 77% pray daily, and a high degree of confidence among respondents that “what they have learnt about Islam is true and accurate”, 89% said they were “completely” or “very open to new knowledge about Islam” (Rane et al., 2020, p. 10). This latter point raises important prospects in relation to the study of covenants in Islam which, although they are central to the Qur’an and *Sunnah* (Rane, 2023; Zein and El-Wakil, 2022), were not integrated into a theory or theology of Islam by classical or modern Islamic scholars (Gwynne, 2014; Jaffer, 2017; Lombard, 2015). On this note, we now discuss perspectives on ‘normative’ versus ‘historical’ Islam.

3 Normative and Historical Perspectives

Any discussion about the ‘normative’ in relation to Islam must be grounded in the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*, the latter of which refers to the ‘conduct,’ ‘example,’ or ‘way’ of the Prophet Muhammad as lived experience and expression of the Qur’an. Muslims unanimously consider the Qur’an and *Sunnah* to be the primary sources of Islam that establish what ought to be considered ‘Islam.’² The Qur’an is the pre-eminent source of Islam that Muslims consider to be the verbatim word of Allah (God) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel between the years 610 and 632 (Sadeghi and Goudarzi, 2012). While the *Sunnah* tends to be recorded in a corpus of literary sources known as Hadith (‘narration’ or ‘report’), in the category of inter-religious relations there are several documents, including the *Constitution of Medina* as well as covenants ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad such as the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai* and *Covenant with the Christians of Najran* (Zein and El-Wakil, 2022). However, many Muslims – and non-Muslims – refer to Islam via later formulations developed by an array of scholars including Qur’an commentators, Hadith compilers, historians, jurists, and theologians. This scholarship was informed and influenced by historical circumstances and the cultural milieus of the times and places it was produced and does not necessarily reflect the original message of Islam conveyed through the Qur’an by the Prophet Muhammad. Also, over time, the Covenants of Prophet

2 It should be noted that the term *Sunnah* refers to the ‘conduct,’ ‘example,’ or ‘way’ of the Prophet Muhammad, and is not the same as Hadith, which refers to a corpus of narrations – each individually, a hadith – attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, there is a long history of scholarship that questions the authenticity and reliability of Hadith (Husayn, 2022).

Muhammad were neglected by Muslim rulers and jurists and replaced with new decrees and ordinances that addressed the evolving political and security interests (Zein and El-Wakil, 2022). On many issues, including gender justice and relations with non-Muslims, there is some incongruence between Islam's primary sources and later historical sources (El-Fadl, 2001).

The meaning of the term 'Islam' used in the Qur'an refers not to a new religion but to a renewal of the monotheistic religious tradition of Abraham (Cole, 2019). The Qur'an emerged in a religious milieu of several well-established religious communities, the most important of which, apart from Arabian pre-Qur'anic monotheism (*hanif/millat Ibrahim*), were Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, as well as a prevailing polytheism among the Arabs, including Muhammad's own tribe, Quraysh. The very fabric and nature of the message embodied in the Qur'an clearly depicts many of the events and experiences of the Muslim community *vis-à-vis* the religious other, and vice versa in relation to the religion of Abraham. Moreover, the Qur'anic attitude – and the Prophet of Islam's/Muhammad's praxis – toward the non-Muslim other is highly contextual in nature (Sirry, 2015). Recent analysis of covenants in the Qur'an shows they were used to regulate interreligious relations, facilitate peaceful coexistence – including with polytheists and disbelievers – and restrict the use of armed force to self-defence and in response to treaty violation (Rane, 2023). Furthermore, recent research on covenants and treaties established by the Prophet Muhammad with Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities points to a policy of peaceful interreligious relations that was maintained by Muslim rulers throughout the seventh century and continued to be influential thereafter (Zein and El-Wakil, 2022).

Confessional divisions between the followers of Muhammad and other monotheistic communities may not have been as apparent during his lifetime as they became after the seventh century (Donner, 2010). Donner (2010) describes the religious milieu around Muhammad as a "community of believers" that included Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. Discussing the role of interreligious dialogue in the Qur'an's polemics, Sirry (2015) argues that the Qur'an presents a dialogue with other religions as a means to understand and engage with them, rather than to convert them. It is well established in the scholarly literature that more exclusivist trends resulting in confessional divisions became pronounced around the beginning of the eighth century, and particularly in the Abbasid era when political elites and religious authorities reinforced Sassanian norms of social hierarchy, emphasis on religious uniformity, and interreligious rivalries (Donner, 2010; Hoyland, 2021; Levy-Rubin, 2011).

In the centuries after Muhammad's death, various factors including demographic changes, social and political divisions, and religious rivalries negatively

impacted on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims (Levy-Rubin, 2011; Tolan, 2002). Although an overriding Islamic principle of protecting non-Muslim religious minorities was generally maintained, discriminatory conditions and restrictions on religious freedom became integrated into Islamic thought and laws in some Muslim lands around the ninth century (Levy-Rubin, 2011). The Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (822–861), for instance, issued a number of ordinances placing restrictions on protected non-Muslim people – referred to as *ahl al-dhimma* – which were recorded by various classical Islamic scholars including the famous historian al-Ṭabarī (839–923). The so-called *dhimmi* code or system that some Muslim rulers applied to their non-Muslim subjects was also represented in an apocryphal ‘decree’ known as the Pact of Umar, falsely attributed to the second caliph, Umar bin al-Khattab (c.584–644) (Levy-Rubin, 2011). The conditions of the so-called Pact of Umar differ markedly from the Covenants of Umar, such as his *Covenant with the Christians of Jerusalem* which, like the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad, is a pledge of protection of life, property and places of worship without discriminatory clauses or restrictions on religious freedoms (Zein and El-Wakil, 2022).

While Islamic law has traditionally recognised the rights of non-Muslims to practise their religion, there have been instances throughout history when Muslims have used religious law to justify the persecution and oppression of religious minorities (Maghen, 2003). Restrictions on religious freedoms and discriminatory conditions of the kind found in al-Mutawakkil’s ordinances and the Pact of Umar found their way into certain later legal texts. For instance, the 14th-century scholar of Shafi’i jurisprudence Ahmad ibn Naqib Al-Misri (1302–1367) states in his manual of Islamic law in the section on “Non-Muslim Subjects of the Islamic State” that non-Muslims are to be distinguished from Muslims in dress by wearing a wide cloth belt (*zunnar*); are not greeted with *as-salamu alaykum*; must keep to the side of the street; may not build higher than or as high as the Muslims’ buildings; are forbidden to ring church bells or display crosses, recite the Torah or Evangel aloud, or make public display of their funerals and feast days; and are forbidden to build new churches (Al-Misri, 1997, p. 608). Some modern scholars came to see sources such as al-Mutawakkil’s ordinances, the Pact of Umar, and Al-Misri’s manual as the ‘normative’ position concerning the rights and status of non-Muslims in Islam (e.g. Ye’or, 1985). However, such restrictions on non-Muslim religious freedoms are not derived from the Qur’an and contradict the Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad, which advocate religious freedom without external interference, restrictions, or discrimination (El-Wakil, 2016; Morrow, 2013; Zein and El-Wakil, 2022).

Noth (2021) contends that discrimination against or the victimisation of non-Muslims was not the aim or intent of the Pact of Umar but that the underlying objective of the Pact was “long-term co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims” (p. 103). He points out that the Pact reflects particular security concerns and sensitivities of Muslims at a particular point in history when large non-Muslim populations began residing in towns and cities established by Muslims, or where security threats from foreign powers were ongoing. By addressing the concerns and interests of the Muslims at the time, the Pact ensured the coexistence of different faith communities in close proximity. In Noth’s (2021) view, the provisions of the Pact encompassed an Islamic religious obligation to protect non-Muslim communities and their places of worship, *as well as* Muslim administrative, political, and security considerations of the time.

Interreligious relations in Islam, based on the Qur’an and Covenants of Prophet Muhammad, establish peaceful coexistence as the normative basis of relations (Rane, 2024). However, it seems this standard was not replaced but overshadowed by certain political decrees and rulings within the corpus of Islamic law. Maghen (2003) highlights the importance of understanding the historical context and political factors that have shaped the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. He affirms the idea that religious tolerance is enshrined in Islamic law but emphasises that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims “has been shaped by a complex interplay of religious, social, and political factors” and that “[u]nderstanding the historical context of this relationship is crucial for understanding the current state of interfaith relations in the Muslim world” (Maghen, 2003, p. 66). Central to this understanding is to differentiate the religious from the political – specifically, the original message of Islam from the later administrative decrees. With this background, we may now provide more details about covenants in Islam, particularly the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad.

4 ‘New’ Religious Knowledge: Covenants in Islam

Covenants are solemn agreements governing human relations that have been used in ancient and modern times to promote peaceful coexistence, religious freedom, and interfaith harmony (Mehfooz, 2022). Over the past two decades, interest has grown in the study of covenants in the Qur’an (Jaffer, 2017; Lombard, 2015; Rane, 2023) and in relation to the diplomacy of the Prophet Muhammad (El-Wakil, 2016; Morrow, 2013; Zein and El-Wakil, 2022).

In addition to noting the culturally normative practice among the peoples of the Middle East of regulating relations through covenants and treaties, Rane (2023) highlights that through the revelation of the Qur'an from the earliest stages of the Prophet's mission, he and his companions were initiated into an Islamic covenantal paradigm and a worldview of human relations with Allah, coexistence on Earth, and the afterlife.

The norm of organising relations between peoples through covenants, treaties, or other such agreements is apparent in the Prophet's *Constitution of Medina*, which "established a multireligious and pluralist social order" that encompassed Muslims and non-Muslims, including Jews and polytheists (Safi, 2008, p. 170). Zein and El-Wakil (2022) contend that the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad, such as the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai* and *Covenant with the Christians of Najran*, are extensions of the *Constitution of Medina* and represent his '*Sunnah*' of establishing interrelations based on principles of peaceful coexistence. As pledges of peace and security to Christian, Jewish, and other religious communities, the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad had an initial – and generally enduring – positive influence on Islam's inter-religious relations (Levy-Rubin, 2011; Mehfooz, 2022; Noth, 2021; Penn, 2015; Zein and El-Wakil, 2022). Among the specific provisions of the Covenants of Muhammad are pledges to protect non-Muslim places of worship, forbidding forced conversion to Islam, and the exemption of monks and priests from taxation (Mehfooz 2022, Zein and El-Wakil, 2022).

Recent research on the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad gives confidence as to their historicity and authenticity. Zein and El-Wakil (2022) find that the copies we have today are *not* the same ones the Prophet and the First Caliphs of Islam issued, *but are*, rather, "faithful textual replicas of the original covenants that the Prophet and the First Caliphs of Islam issued to the non-Muslim communities of their time" (p. 2). They examined the textual anomalies in the extant copies of these covenants, concluding that they "do not entail forgery" but are "transmission nuances" to be expected and accepted in the recording and transmission of such historic documents (Zein and El-Wakil, 2022, p. 2). Awareness of these covenants has increased in recent years, including considerable attention from some Islamic studies scholars and institutions. Regarding the reception of the Prophet's covenants, in 2018 the Supreme Court of Pakistan cited the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai* in acquitting a Christian woman charged with blasphemy (Rane, 2022).

Reception analysis is a research method that allows us to examine how covenantal knowledge is understood today. To assess contemporary responses to the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad, this chapter's authors conducted a study involving reception analysis with 36 members of interfaith groups and

organisations. Interfaith actors are important stakeholders concerning the reception of the Prophet's covenants as they play a key role in interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding (Iweze, 2021; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013; Neufeldt, 2011). Details of this study, including the methodology, are published elsewhere (Rane, 2022). The invitation to members of interfaith groups and organisations was answered by interfaith actors from the Abrahamic religions – Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Participants were asked a series of questions to establish a baseline for comparison before being asked to read the English translation of the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai* and then to either read the journal article or watch the video that detailed contemporary research on the Prophet's Covenants before responding to another series of questions about the covenants, Islam, and interreligious relations. Among the findings of this study was that religious authorities have a significant influence on wider views concerning the authenticity of the Prophet's Covenants and in relation to questions of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims as the normative position of Islam. It must be acknowledged that the small sample size included in this study does present a limitation regarding overall representativeness and generalisability. Nevertheless, these findings represent an important first step towards developing an understanding of how the Covenants of Muhammad are more broadly perceived, and their potential to contribute to improvements in interreligious relations. Before examining the findings of this study, we will first discuss the role of religious authorities regarding religious knowledge and interreligious relations.

5 Role of Religious Authorities

Defining the concept of religious authority is not a simple undertaking, as religious authority is multidimensional and can be conceptualised in various ways (Krämer and Schmidke, 2014). In general terms, religious authority revolves around the ability to influence and set parameters of what constitute correct beliefs and practices and, therefore, the ability to regulate the conduct of the faithful (Krämer and Schmidke, 2014, pp. 1–2). In terms of its locus, religious authority can be vested in (canonical) texts, individuals, groups, or institutions. In monotheistic Abrahamic religions such as Islam, religious authority is often ascribed to canonical texts, especially the Qur'an and to a lesser text the Hadith/*Sunnah* (Krämer and Schmidke, 2014, p. 2). The "Islam in Australia" survey, for instance, found that 83% of respondents identified the Qur'an and 66% identified the Hadith as their most influential source of information about Islam (Rane et al., 2020). However, contrary to the often-made claim

that Islam, unlike Christianity, does not place emphasis on the clerical class (*ulama*), for most of Islamic intellectual history – especially in the premodern period – for all purposes the *ulama* have been dominant religious authority actors, projecting themselves as the inheritors of prophets, and therefore as the rightful interpreters and transmitters of religious knowledge (Zaman, 2012).

The nature of religious authority, as Krämer and Schmidtke (2014) aptly note, should be viewed relationally because it is ultimately derived from and dependent upon the act of recognition or acquiescence by those who do not possess it to those who do. In Sunni Islam, upon the completion of the systematisation of religious thought in the 11th and 12th centuries (Khan, 2023), and following the consolidation of Islamic legal schools (*madhahib*), the clerical class, the *ulama*, were traditionally the ones who could largely claim and secure this authority (Zaman, 2012). The *ulama* ensured their continued safeguarding of this religious authority by means of developing a particular epistemological and hermeneutical framework whose cornerstones are the *isnad*- and *ijaza*-based knowledge system (Graham, 1993) and particular formulation of Islamic legal theory (*usul ul-fiqh/taqlid*) through which the canonical texts were interpreted and enunciated by four co-orthodox Sunni schools of thought (Hallaq, 2009) and whose guarantor was embodied in the (claimed) consensus (*ijma*) of the orthodox scholars (*ulama*).

While the *ulama*'s claim to religious authority in the pre-modern period has not been uncontested, it was not until the advent of modernity that accelerated “proliferation” of religious authority started to take place in earnest (Krämer and Schmidtke, 2014, p. 12). The rise of Islamic reformist and modernist thought in the 19th and 20th centuries problematised and questioned the continued reliance on and relevance of *isnad*- and *taqlid*-based approaches to religious authority, and contributed to the increased rise of anticlericalism (Brown, 2014). This period also saw the urgent need for religious authority's expansion in the context of emergence of Muslim-majority nation-states that were tasked with issues of law reform, education reform, and effective governance. With the exception of Muslim family laws, this led to significant changes in the official role and function of religious authority, which moved away from clerics. This has led some scholars to talk about crises of religious authority in postcolonial Muslim societies (Robinson, 2009).

Another important point regarding the nature of religious authority in Islam is that much like in other religious traditions, religious authority has traditionally been very much a male prerogative (Bano and Kalmbach, 2012). The very idea of religious authority has been exclusively linked to what Duderija et al. (2020, pp. 25–43) term “conceptual markers of masculinity” in the traditionalist approaches to the Islamic intellectual tradition. Some recent initiatives have taken place, especially in Western Muslim contexts, that have aimed

to change this situation by promoting the idea of female religious agency/authority (Duderija and Rane, 2019, pp. 121–142).

In the 21st century, cyberspace has become another important ground on which contestations over religious authority have been occurring. In this respect, 'Islam online' has further contributed to the erosion of *ulama*-based religious authority (Bunt, 2018). The rise of quietist Salafi groups in the second half of the 20th century and the emergence of jihadist Salafi groups such as al-Qaeda, and ISIS in the early 2010s, has also raised questions about the role, nature, and effectiveness of *ulama*-based religious authority in contemporary Islam (Hamdeh, 2021). Whyte (2022, p. 71) aptly summarises the modernity- and digital technology-induced shifts in religious authority in Muslim contexts:

towards the nineteenth century the onset of colonialism, authoritarianism, state-centric reforms, *ulama* – state alliances, increased literacy rates and technological advances in the Muslim world dramatically shifted the contours of Islamic religious authority, both epistemologically and politically. As the *ulama*'s moral authority and monopoly over religious knowledge diminished, a new wave of religious actors surfaced, including lay interpreters, Islamists, state officials, scholar-activists, *da'wa* (missionary) preachers, cyber imams, televangelists and online bloggers vying to speak for Islam. Within this hyper-pluralised context, the question of who speaks for Islam is no longer attributed to the *ulama*, but something shared by all Muslims who have access to the founding texts and other forms of knowledge through the increasing accessibility of mass media and information technology.

Despite over two centuries of the setbacks and challenges outlined above, as Zaman (2012) reminds us, the *ulama*-based religious authority is still very much alive and continues to exert significant influence on everyday Muslims, including in Australian Muslim communities (Rane et al., 2020, Whyte, 2022). The "Islam in Australia" survey of Muslim Australians found that almost one-third (30%) of respondents identified religious authorities such as imams, sheikhs, and *ulama* as being "very influential" to their current understanding of Islam, while a further 42% said that these religious authorities are "somewhat influential" to their understanding of Islam. Academic scholars were regarded by 22% respondents as "very influential" and by 40% as "somewhat influential" to their understanding of Islam (Rane et al., 2020).

Since the tragic events of 9/11, there has been an exponential interest in interfaith relations with many important initiatives, especially in Christian-Muslim dialogue (Pratt, 2021). High profile *ulama*, have often been at the forefront of these discussions. This is evident, for example, in several high-profile

meetings between the Grand Mufti of Al-Azhar and Pope Francis over the last decade or so aiming to spread peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians, especially in the Middle East. Moreover, given the continued concerns about the plight of mainly Christian religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries, especially with the rise of jihadist Salafism, high-profile *ulama* such as Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (b. 1935) have played an instrumental role in drafting the Marrakesh Declaration (2016) on the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim-majority communities, in the interest of promoting better interfaith relations.

The immediate context that saw the urgent need to establish this legal framework and call to action was the rise of violent extremist Muslim groups such as ISIS, but the timing of the Declaration itself was to mark the 1400th anniversary of the *Constitution of Medina*. The Declaration wishes to highlight the positive role the *Constitution of Medina* can play in contemporary Muslim non-Muslim relations, especially in terms of granting of religious liberty and religious minority rights to non-Muslims in Muslim majority contexts. The Declaration urges national religious groups to confront their shared tendency to forget centuries of peaceful coexistence on the same land. It encourages them to restore this tradition of harmony and trust that has been undermined by violent extremists. Additionally, the Declaration emphasises the importance of acknowledging that using religion to violate the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries is morally unacceptable (Marrakesh Declaration, 2016).

As religious authorities' endorsement of the *Constitution of Medina* has been instrumental in its contemporary application toward peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslim, so too is their endorsement of the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad for the same purpose. We now turn to the findings of our reception analysis and the important role of religious authorities in using the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad to promote peaceful coexistence as the normative position of Islam in regard to interreligious relations.

6 Reception of the Prophet's Covenants: Influence of Religious Authorities

The findings outlined here draw upon data collected from Muslim and non-Muslim interfaith actors through an online educative intervention instrument. Respondents were presented with academic research on the Covenants of the Prophet, as well as a translation of the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai*, and were asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their perspectives on the Prophet's Covenant, including its authenticity and potential

implications for interreligious relations. A total of 36 interfaith actors participated in the study. This included 24 respondents identifying as Muslim, and 12 non-Muslims: 10 identifying as Christian and two identifying as Jewish. The study sought to include both Muslim and non-Muslim interfaith actors to identify possible differences and commonalities between these groups concerning perspectives on the Covenants. While the authors acknowledge that the absence of members of other religious groups beyond the Abrahamic faiths – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – does represent a limitation for this study, the reception of the Prophet's covenants by members of these faith groups is an appropriate starting point, given the historical and contemporary interreligious tensions between these religious communities and the relevance of the Prophet's Covenants to these faith groups specifically.

Overall, most respondents (n = 26) reported that engagement with the covenantal information and research strengthened or improved their perception that Islam *does* promote positive interreligious relations. Regarding the perceived authenticity of the Prophet's Covenants, respondents were presented with the statement "Prophet Muhammad actually made covenants with Christians in the form of a written pledge with very similar wording to the translation of the *Covenant with the Monks of Mount Sinai*" and asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of 0–10. Among all respondents, an average score of 7.6 was received. Some differences were observed in relation to the variable of religious affiliation, with an average score of 7.8 among Muslim respondents, and 7.25 among non-Muslim respondents. These findings indicate a generally high level of acceptance of this covenant's authenticity among interfaith actors of different religious backgrounds. While the acceptance of the Covenants' authenticity among interfaith actors may not be considered entirely surprising, due to their existing knowledge of and work in the interreligious space, the perspectives of these agents are of particular interest with respect to the practical application of the Covenants to facilitate positive interreligious relations in a contemporary context. Future research concerning views on the Covenants among the wider population beyond interfaith actors may provide further insight into the potential of the Covenants in this regard.

In addition to questions concerning the perceived authenticity of the Prophet's Covenants, respondents were asked how important the acceptance of the Covenants' authenticity by various religious authorities would be for the Covenants to find broader acceptance within their respective religious communities (Table 12.1). Respondents were presented with a list of seven options and asked to rate the importance of each on a scale of 0–10, where 0 is "not at all important", and 10 is "essential". Muslim respondents rated leading Islamic institutions of higher learning, and academic scholars, as the most

TABLE 12.1 Importance of religious authorities for acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants (scale of 0–10)

Respondents/ group	Religious authori- ties of my religious community/ faith group (e.g. bishop, priest, father, rabbi, imam, sheikh)	Leading Islamic religious authorities (e.g. <i>ulama</i> / imams councils)	Leading Islamic institutions of higher learning (e.g. Al-Azhar University, University of Medina, International Islamic University)	Church authori- ties (e.g. Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches)	Leading theologians (Christian, Islamic, Jewish)	Academic scholars (e.g. pro- fessors of religious studies, Islamic studies, historians)
Muslim (n = 24)	5.9	6.4	6.8	4.7	6.0	6.7
Non-Muslim* (n = 12)	5.4	6.9	7	5	5.9	6.3
All (n = 36)	5.8	6.6	6.8	4.8	6.0	6.6

Question: "In regard to the religious authorities, leaders and groups listed how important is their acceptance of the authenticity of the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad for members of your religious community/faith group to also accept the authenticity of the Covenants? Please use the 0 to 10 scale with 0 meaning 'not at all important' and 10 meaning 'essential!'"

**Note.* Non-Muslim respondents (n = 12) included 10 individuals identifying as Christian and two individuals identifying as Jewish.

important, with average scores of 6.8 and 6.7 respectively. Leading Islamic religious authorities, such as *ulama*/imams councils, were rated slightly lower, with an average score of 6.4. Leading theologians received an average rating of 6.0, while community-based religious leaders (e.g. imams) received an average rating of 5.9. The option which received the lowest level of importance among Muslim respondents was Church authorities – such as the Catholic Church, or Orthodox churches – which received an average score of 4.7. Non-Muslim interfaith actors in this study also recognised the importance of Muslim religious authorities in promoting the wider acceptance of the authenticity of the Prophet's Covenants. Among non-Muslim respondents (n = 12), the average importance given to all categories of Islamic religious authorities was 6.9.

Overall, these findings suggest that respondents view Muslim religious authorities as having a key role in fostering the broader acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants.

Additionally, respondents were asked for their views on the potential of the Prophet's Covenants to improve interreligious relations, as well as on possible barriers which may hinder such potential. Overall, most (n = 26) believed that there was positive potential for the Prophet's Covenants in this regard, including 16 Muslim respondents and 10 non-Muslim respondents. Regarding the specific potential of these documents, respondents expressed that wider awareness and acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants could help to promote understanding, inclusivity, and peaceful interreligious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

When asked what possible factors or issues might pose a challenge or obstacle for wider acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants as a valid source of knowledge of interreligious relations in Islam, respondents offered several suggestions. While most suggestions related to questions of authenticity, some respondents suggested that acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants by Muslim religious authorities (*ulama*) would be critical. One Muslim respondent highlighted the need for "dialogue with *ulama*", while another conveyed that the support of traditional *ulama* from various schools of theology, rather than academics, would be crucial to advance broader acceptance of these historic documents and their contents. In the words of this respondent:

If academics push this topic, nobody will care and will be met with scepticism and doubt. It has to come from proper traditional *ulama*: *Ashari*, *Matureedi*, *Athari* ... people who come from core tradition.

This respondent also remarked that "dialogue with real *ulama*" is needed to confirm the authenticity of the Covenants. Another Muslim respondent opined that the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith by "radical imams" could be a barrier to acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants among Muslims and non-Muslims:

For Muslims, simply because it is not in Hadith and for those who put the Hadith above the Qur'an, they will not accept the Covenants. For radical non-Muslims, it would be hard for them to accept the Covenants and will instead counter [with] radical phrases from the Hadith. They have become experts in the ugly aspects of the Hadith, thanks to the radical imams.

The view that Muslim religious authorities wield influence in the acceptance of the Covenants was echoed by one non-Muslim (Christian) respondent: “I think the biggest challenge is to gain wider acceptance with the wider Muslim community as well as within Muslim scholarly and leadership circles”. Another non-Muslim (Christian) respondent made an apt comparison with the work of academics in discoveries of “early Church documents”. This respondent highlighted the importance of sharing scholarly research for the wider acceptance of the Prophet’s Covenants:

I know that in Christianity there is some suspicion and even outright hostility to what academics are discovering about very early church documents, beliefs and practices that appear to differ from current traditional Christian practice/belief so I expect this may be true for Islam too. As I see it, clear, well-presented programs like this one backed up by thorough research could be available to ordinary people via internet and in faith training centres would help.

Such views indicate that the acceptance of the Prophet’s Covenants – and what they imply for perceptions of Islam as a religion that normatively advocates for peaceful interreligious relations – relies on a partnership between religious authorities that includes academic scholars and *ulama*. Academic scholars have a critical role in research and analysis of the Covenants, while *ulama* are necessary to communicate the legitimacy and implications of the Prophet’s Covenants to religious communities.

7 Conclusion

Recent research on covenants in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* shed new light on interreligious relations in Islam. This research finds that covenants are central to the Qur’anic narrative of human existence and coexistence, advocating human security and peaceful relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Research on the Covenants of Prophet Muhammad point to their authenticity and historicity as an extension of the Prophet’s *Constitution of Medina* toward establishing peaceful interreligious relations with Christian, Jewish, and other communities of his time. In the decades and centuries following the death of the Prophet, changing social and political conditions, population demographics, and security concerns seemed to have influenced a shift away from the more conciliatory and respectful terms of the Prophet’s Covenants toward the introduction of more restrictive and discriminatory conditions

found, for instance, in the so-called Pact of Umar. This raises the question of what constitutes the normative position of Islam regarding interreligious relations. We contend that the normative position of Islam is found in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*; and although administrative and political considerations have made considerable changes to the provisions of the original Covenants of the Prophet, the central Islamic principle of protecting non-Muslim communities and places of worship was maintained over the centuries of Muslim rule.

The question this chapter sought to address concerns the contemporary reception and acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants. Our pilot study examined the responses of interfaith actors to information and scholarly research about these documents. Overall, most participants were convinced of the authenticity and historicity of the Prophet's Covenants and agree that the Covenants affirm the view that Islam advocates peaceful interreligious relations. This study highlighted the influential role of Muslim religious authorities regarding the acceptance of the Prophet's Covenants among both Muslims and non-Muslims more generally. The findings suggest that Muslim religious authorities are key stakeholders who are influential in disseminating Islamic covenantal knowledge and in shaping perceptions of Islam regarding interreligious relations. Academics need to engage *ulama* when communicating such 'new' religious knowledge. Muslims in Australia already understand Islam to be a religion of peace that advocates respectful coexistence with wider society, and they are also open to new knowledge about Islam. The Covenants of the Prophet provide added empirical evidence that such views are supported by Islam's primary sources, the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. To the extent that Islamic covenantal knowledge can shape Muslim and non-Muslim discourses about Islam, historic documents such as the Prophet's Covenants may help counter prevailing anti-Islam/anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia.

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Placing the Continued Hyper-securitisation of Islam and Muslims in Australia in Global Context

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Abstract

Following 9/11 the Howard government embarked on one of the most muscular legislative regimes in the West to combat terrorism. From late 2001 to 2007 no fewer than 48 pieces of anti-terror legislation were introduced that, despite being neutral in language, disproportionately target and securitise Muslims. In establishing this program, Howard likened the advent of terrorism as a “continuous threat” akin to that of the Cold War. As a result of this framing, combined with the fact that Australia had never experienced a major attack on home soil, terrorism became an abstract existential fear. Subsequently, we argue that successive governments have continued to introduce further legislation triggered by external terror events both near and far, despite the actual risk of a major terror event in Australia being low. Further, we contend that a second wave of securitisation across Europe sparked by the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in 2015 has developed into a global turn that has normalised the securitisation of Islam and Muslims.

1 Introduction

Recently, the Australian government quietly introduced into parliament a law to ban the Nazi swastika as an extremist symbol. The law also includes a ban on the Islamic State (IS) flag. The prohibition on the latter is problematic, as the flag contains the *Shahada* (profession of faith) – one of the five pillars of Islam. The result is that the law will encompass symbols that are “likely to be confused” with the IS flag (SBS News, 2023). As such, it potentially criminalises the display of a sacred tenet of Islam. This recent move to ban the IS flag in conjunction with the Nazi swastika thus begs the question: What is the current place of Islam in the Australian imaginary, given that it continues to be securitised more than 20 years after 9/11? Lending force to this question is the fact that the most pressing security concern is now seen to be the rise of right-wing

extremist groups (Barton, 2021): in 2021 the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) changed how it categorised terrorism threats, shelving “Islamic extremism” in favour of “ideologically motivated violent extremism” and “religiously motivated violent extremism” because it recognised that the threat from ideological extremists “were more widely dispersed across the country” (Hurst, 2021). Yet, as of 2021, 92 federal counter-terrorism laws had been introduced since 9/11, making Australia’s program more comprehensive than many of its Western counterparts (Ananian-Welsh and Hardy, 2021); and although these laws are purportedly race-neutral, they have clearly and disproportionately targeted Muslims.

Indeed, successive governments continue to respond to the perceived threat of Islamic extremism, even though Australia has never been confronted with a major act of Islamic terror on home soil (Misra, 2018). They are reacting to an imagined threat relayed through events that transpired in other jurisdictions. As we will show, due to this heightened threat perception from international events, both near and far, Australia instituted an extraordinary counter-terrorism regime engineered toward prevention and effectively armed with a hair trigger. This has led to a self-perpetuating cycle within the counter-terrorism industry. Either an event abroad or any slight prospect of a development at home was enough to set the machinery in motion and construct the wider Muslim community as a possible ‘fifth column’, or internal threat by a group within the nation (see Akbarzadeh and Roose, 2011). Thus, to begin, we go back to the era when John Howard was prime minister (1996–2007) as he was the chief architect of the hyper-securitized environment we live in today.

2 Howard and the 9/11 Effect

In 2001, the then Australian prime minister John Howard was visiting the United States to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the ANZUS treaty. He arrived on September 8 and would subsequently witness the 9/11 attacks from a Washington DC hotel that was only a short distance from the White House. This proximity to the audacious attacks on both the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, in which more than 3,000 people perished, deeply affected Howard. He penned a letter to then president George W. Bush expressing that not only did he “share the sense of horror” experienced by the US, but also that he felt “the tragedy more keenly being ... in Washington at the moment” of the attack (as cited in Bodey, 2021, p. 99). This sense of horror was further augmented the following year when the Bali bombings on October 12, 2002 killed 202 people, including 88 Australians.

These events, both near and far, would not only hasten Howard's decision to join the US in their 'war on terror', framing terrorism as a 'continuous threat' akin to that of the Cold War (Bodey, 2021, p. 101), but also prompted him to embark on rapidly building an unprecedented body of counter-terrorism laws in Australia. Between late 2001 and 2007 the Howard government introduced no fewer than 48 pieces of anti-terror related legislation. According to legal scholar George Williams (2011), this was a period of little oversight and broad bipartisan support: 7.7 pieces of counter-terrorism legislation were proposed per year, with one passed on average every 6.7 weeks (pp. 1144–1145).

Reflective of the lack of oversight is that laws were expedited despite statements from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) and the Defence Signals Directorate (now the Australian Signals Directorate) that some measures were the most controversial the committee had ever reviewed (Tyulkina, 2015). These laws were regarded as extraordinary, for not only did they introduce a 'pre-crime' intelligence mindset but they also outlined that people could be arrested for providing training, receiving training, possessing or collecting a 'thing,' or developing a document that could be connected with the preparation of a terrorist act (Tittensor et al., 2020). In other words, the wording was so vague and expansive it gave the authorities the power to arrest someone on the faintest notion or association with a possible act of terror, without the person ever engaging in any such activity. Alongside this, the laws gave ASIO the power to detain people suspected of having information relating to a terrorist offence, including minors between the ages of 16 and 18. Further, detainees could be interrogated for up to 24 hours – or 48 when an interpreter was required – while having no right to silence or to legal representation (Roach, 2011).

These pre-crime laws effectively gave the authorities the power to 'jump at shadows' – and it did not take long for things to go awry. Indeed, the case of Dr. Muhammad Haneef, an Indian national who had been working as a medical registrar in Australia on a skilled worker visa, highlighted the issues with such legislative overreach. Dr Haneef was arrested at Brisbane airport on July 2, 2007, in connection with an attempted bombing of Glasgow Airport. His alleged crime was the provision of a SIM card (a 'thing') to his second cousin Sabeel Ahmed, who was suspected of being involved in the attack. He was detained for 12 days and then charged on July 14, 2007 with having intentionally provided "resources to a terrorist organisation". By July 27, the Brisbane Magistrates Court dismissed his charges due to a lack of evidence. However, in the meantime, the then minister for immigration and citizenship had revoked Haneef's work visa and the Attorney General's Office issued a Criminal Justice

Stay Certificate to prevent his deportation so that justice could be served. As a result, he was detained for a total of 25 days (Debowski, 2009).

Subsequently, Haneef sued the government and in 2010 he was awarded an undisclosed sum of money (Pollard, 2010). It is important to note that this case represented the first time that these legislative provisions were applied in practice (Law Council of Australia, 2016), and occurred in a context where Prime Minister Howard had wound back multicultural policy (Joppke, 2004; Jupp, 2007), and engaged in a range of initiatives and rhetoric that promoted fear of the 'Muslim Other'. These included a terrorism awareness campaign based on the slogan "Be Alert, Not Alarmed" encouraging everyday surveillance; the introduction of a values-based citizenship test;¹ and the linking of Australianness with Christianity (Fozdar, 2011a; Fozdar, 2011b; Maddox, 2005) – key developments that, as will be shown, continued to reverberate across the political divide and keep counter-terrorism front and centre as a policy concern.

Despite the Haneef debacle, which appears to have been politically motivated² – and a somewhat similar miscarriage of justice experienced by Rizwaan Sabir in the UK in 2008, for which the authorities also paid compensation (Sabir, 2022) – successive Australian governments, even those purportedly to the left of centre, have continued to push through further legislation. For example, the Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard Labor governments passed six anti-terror laws between November 24, 2007 and September 11, 2011, an average of 1.6 per year (Williams, 2011, p. 1145), adding to the laws instituted during the Howard era. Also, this legislative regime remained intact: when an independent legislative review in 2012 called for ASIO powers to be repealed, it was

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- 1 The citizenship test was introduced in a context where such instruments were being instituted globally. Indeed, Wright (2008) introduced a special issue of the *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* devoted to analysing the sudden growth of values-based citizenship testing in European societies around this time by noting these tests appeared to be a knee-jerk reaction to terrorist threats and concerns about Muslim migration. Similar arguments have been made in the Australian context about the Australian citizenship test Howard introduced, which contrasted 'Australian values' with 'Muslim values' (Fozdar, 2011b; Fozdar and Spittles, 2009; Tate, 2009). Wright suggests these were tools for cultural and linguistic assimilation, and that they signalled a move away from multiculturalism and from recognising the value of diversity.
 - 2 The Clarke inquiry that followed the Haneef debacle in 2009 found that Queensland Police Service had advised the Australian Federal Police on five separate occasions that there were insufficient grounds to charge Dr. Haneef (Pickering and McCulloch, 2010).

ignored (Karp, 2018).³ Another change of government in 2013 saw Tony Abbott elected as prime minister, and security once again became a primary focus as another prospective threat unfolded overseas, wherein Muslims were positioned very much as a fifth column (Akbarzadeh and Roose, 2011).

3 Tony Abbott, Foreign Fighters and 'Team Australia'

Following the advent of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria and the phenomenon of approximately 150 Australian citizens having travelled overseas to fight for it, the government raised the terror threat alert level from medium to high on advice from ASIO. The rationale behind this shift was that these individuals who were fighting with terrorist groups posed an imminent risk of carrying out an attack upon their return to Australia. This clarion call from ASIO about another possible risk sometime in the future prompted the Abbott government to introduce further preventative counter-terrorism legislation (Abbott, 2014; Bourke, 2014).

The first of these bills was passed on September 26, 2014 and granted ASIO additional powers. The bill provides a streamlined process for warrants, gives ASIO officers some immunity for some covert actions, and allows the secret use of third-party computers during intelligence operations. The legislation also introduced harsh consequences for reporting on secret operations, introducing a penalty that could see journalists jailed for up to 10 years (Hurst, 2014; Woodley, 2014). Shortly afterwards, the government introduced the Foreign Fighters Bill, which has given the government the authority to cancel passports and declare certain regions that experience a conflict as no-go zones, to which individuals must justify their travel (Griffiths and Cullen, 2014).

Abbott sought to justify the addition of the new powers, putting all Australian Muslims on notice as a suspect internal threat by collapsing foreign fighters and Australian Muslims into a category of people who needed to join "Team Australia":

We've got a serious problem of radicalised people going to the Middle East to fight with terrorist groups. So we do have to be vigilant against it, and my position is that everyone has got to be on Team Australia ... Everyone has got to put this country, its interests, its values and its people

3 As Lynch et al. (2015) note, the impact of independent reviews of Australia anti-terrorism laws has routinely "been minimal, and at best selective" (p. 5).

first, and you don't migrate to this country unless you want to join our team and that's the point I'll be stressing.

As cited in RAJCA, 2014

Given that the laws explicitly target jihadists, Abbott's implication is that Muslims in general are a risk and might succumb to divided loyalties. This presumes Muslims are migrants, and not already part of 'our team', and requires them to constantly prove that they belong, subjecting them to what can be described as the 'double burden of citizenship'.⁴ Most telling in this regard is the call by Abbott for Muslims to adhere to Australian values. Such 'culture talk' is fundamentally xenophobic, placing Muslims as an outgroup that needs to change their ways, shed their ethnic baggage, and assimilate (Grossman, 2014). Interestingly, political cartoonists such as the late Ron Tandberg (Figure 13.1) pushed back on the notion of 'Team Australia', producing a range of humorous challenges to the assumption of a homogenous 'team' to which some Australians belong, and others do not (Austin and Fozdar, 2017).

However, such pushback notwithstanding, Abbott was not alone in his thinking. An analysis of 2422 speeches – both parliamentary and non-parliamentary – by 19 Liberal – National Coalition and 41 Labor federal politicians who held prominent cabinet and shadow cabinet positions from 2000 to 2006 has shown that this xenophobic outlook was very much a part of the wider political class, and both Coalition and Labor leaders invoked Christianity at much the same rate – 22.7% and 21.1% of the time, respectively (Crabb, 2009). Further, the same study found the speeches that mentioned Christianity most often were those that pertained to "foreign relations" and the "fabric of society" and often mentioned terrorism (Crabb, 2009). A classic example in relation to Australian society is Howard's statement just before the 2004 election:

I am of the Christian tradition myself, and respect it in a very traditional way, and regard the Judeo-Christian influence on Australia as the single greatest influence for good in the Australian community.

As cited in POSSAMAI and TITTENSOR, 2022, p. 185

4 The double burden refers to a situation where the individuals are citizens and see themselves as such, but continually have their status as citizens questioned by the very state that has conferred them citizenship. In other words, their citizenship is not a constant state of being and needs to be routinely reaffirmed. A key element of this endless cycle of temporary recognition and rejection is the demand that one condemn every instance of violence committed by a Muslim, whereby a failure to do so is deemed an endorsement of the violent act that renders one suspect (Abdel-Fattah, 2019; Tittensor et al., 2020).



FIGURE 13.1 Tandberg cartoon on Team Australia

NOTE. FROM C. AUSTIN AND F. FOZDAR, "TEAM AUSTRALIA':
 CARTOONISTS CHALLENGING EXCLUSIONARY NATIONALIST DISCOURSE",
JOURNAL OF AUSTRALIAN STUDIES, 41(1), 2017, P. 73

Here is a sitting prime minister promoting the view that Australia is a Judeo-Christian nation, and that other religious traditions, above all Islam, do not belong. Again, this elevation of Christian heritage and values came from both sides of the political divide. In an analysis of the rhetoric used by then prime minister Kevin Rudd and then opposition leader Tony Abbott, Fozdar (2011a) found such language reinforces a monocultural version of Australian identity and at best excludes non-Christians; at worst it targets Muslims explicitly as not belonging in Australia.

Compounding the sense of alienation caused by this Western civilisational discourse were the actions of both the police and the Australian Federal Police (AFP). In 2014, having raised the terror threat level from medium to high, ASIO released intelligence that there was a plot to randomly behead individuals in Australia and that it mentioned parliament. This news precipitated the biggest police raid in Australia's history, in which 800 police were deployed across Sydney and Brisbane and the AFP took over the security of parliament (ABC News, 2014). Fifteen people were detained in the raids, though only four were ultimately charged; and a similar scenario would play out again the following year. Following the fatal shooting of police civilian finance worker

Curtis Cheng by 15-year-old Farhad Jabar in Sydney on October 2, 2015, a dawn raid that involved 200 New South Wales police officers and the AFP resulted in five arrests, though only one person was held in custody in connection with the killing while the others were released without charge at that time (ABC News, 2015; Levy, 2015; Morri et al., 2015).

In between these two shows of force by the authorities there was a spate of 30 attacks against Muslims in Australia, recorded by the Muslim Legal Network and the Islamophobia Register, that predominantly targeted women wearing the hijab. In particular, one woman was threatened with having her hijab torn from her head and set alight, while another was spat on and her pram carrying her baby was kicked (Spooner and Aston, 2014); these actions demonstrate how both the anti-terror measures and the surrounding political discourse effectively licensed public abuse.

Subsequently, as Alyssa Moohin (2023) notes, the net result of this “hyper-legislation” (Roach, 2011), surveillance, and policing has been a build-up of generational trauma where Muslim women and men question small decisions such as whether to wear traditional clothing or grow a beard. Further, Moohin observes that the frequent stigmatisation of Muslim men as suspect has also produced a sense of “anger, injustice and disempowerment” which has the potential for the government to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, the community feels under siege and has begun to push back.

In the lead-up to the second large raid in 2015, a group called ‘Concerned Muslims Australia’ boycotted a Ramadan iftar dinner held by the AFP as its members felt they had been “stab[bed] in the back” by the authorities. In particular, the petition stated:

Where specific threats have been prevented, the raids have been dramatised beyond any reasonable measure to reinforce the notion of a Muslim threat via media and ministers/departments’ public commentary.

O’BRIEN, 2015

The Muslim community was fed up with being portrayed as a subversive faction through the performative counter terrorism activities of the police, the AFP, and the increasingly xenophobic discourse from successive governments. However, such calls would fall on deaf ears as Europe and other parts of the globe began a second wave of securitisation. In the next section we outline several examples from France, Spain, China, and India to demonstrate their similarities, and the ways in which these measures are manipulated to support nationalist (and other) agendas.

4 Europe's Second Wave and the Global Turn

In January 2015 France witnessed the horror of a terrorist attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in which 12 people were killed. Combined with the advent of IS and the refugee crisis that saw one million people arrive from what many see as the “Euro-Muslim terror zone, from Jordan to Tunisia” (Renton, 2018, pp. 2132–2133), this attack would see France follow the path taken by Australia to institute a pre-crime surveillance approach. In July 2015, the French government passed an intelligence law that allowed for preventative surveillance into people's homes or vehicles, and placed the authorisation to intercept private data, such as electronic communications, in the hands of the prime minister – something that was previously reserved for criminal investigations and required a warrant (Renton, 2018). This placed France at the vanguard of a wave that would sweep across Europe, and it has remained at the frontline. Following the murder and beheading of teacher Samuel Paty by a young Muslim radical on October 16, 2020, the French government passed the ‘Anti-Separatism Law’⁵ in July 2021, which further securitises Muslims (Dobbernack, 2022).

The new law granted the government powers to dissolve civil-society organisations and oversee non-state education, and – most alarmingly – has created a new offence of ‘separatism’ that is geared largely towards what is seen as the Islamist threat. Reflective of this orientation are the actions of the then interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, who dissolved the *Collective contre l'islamophobie en France* (Collective Against Islamophobia in France, CCIF) by decree shortly after the death of Samuel Paty using the already existing law in Article L212-1 of France's Internal Security Code. The internal security code provides a number of grounds that can be invoked to dissolve religious organisations: namely, points six, “incitement to hatred”, and seven, “incitement to terrorist acts” (Dobbernack, 2022, pp. 577–578). In line with these, the government alleged that the CCIF engaged in both incitement to hatred and terrorism, as its

activities provoke or propagate theories tending to encourage or justify discrimination, hate, or violence on the basis of a person or group's origin, ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion and that it has engaged in actions aimed at provoking acts of terrorism in France or abroad.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020

5 This is the law's popular title. The official title is ‘Strengthening Respect for the Principles of the Republic’ (de La Ferrière and Chelini-Pont, 2021).

This interpretation was based on the understanding that the branding of certain counter-terrorism measures as Islamophobic constituted incitement – an understanding that Human Rights Watch (2020) has labelled a “misguided and dangerous conflation” that undermines the capacity for Muslims in France to exercise their civil and political rights. Similarly, Dobbernack (2022) notes that the CCIF’s peaceful advocacy against Islamophobia does not meet either standard.

As part of the process, Darmanin granted the CCIF eight days to challenge the decision in France’s top administrative court, the Council of State. The CCIF duly contested its dissolution in the administrative court (Human Rights Watch, 2020). However, the court upheld the decision, noting that the organisation’s denunciation of France’s hostility towards Muslims, in the course of its fight against terrorism, constituted incitement to discrimination (Cossé, 2021). Thus, while the powers already existed under Article L212-1 of the Internal Security Code, France’s new ‘Anti-Separatism Law’ appears to be designed to streamline this process and further concentrate power in the executive, as – in a similar vein to the surveillance powers no longer requiring a warrant – the power to dissolve organisations is no longer solely the province of the courts, but is now extended to include administrative decisions (Yeung, 2021).

In other words, in France’s pursuit of a “thickened conception of *laïcité*” (Dobbernack, 2022, p. 576) that seeks to further protect republican values, from 2015 onwards it has continued to choose ever-increasing ‘hard’ counter terrorism measures⁶ that are subject to reduced judicial oversight, and that will also likely create a self-fulfilling feedback loop of alienation and radicalisation within its Muslim population (Joshi, 2024). Such far-reaching attempts to criminalise and securitise Muslims and their organisations are part of a particular polarising mindset that has spread throughout the West in the wake of 9/11 and the war on terror – to paraphrase George W. Bush, “you’re either with us or against us” (see Murphy, 2003).

Indeed, 2015 was a watershed year when Europe – from the Netherlands to Poland – introduced laws that greatly increased the capacity for surveillance and reduced judicial oversight (Renton, 2018). In particular, Spain introduced a range of policies, such as the Agreement for the Liberties and Against Terrorism, informally known as the Anti-Jihadist Pact, that have had a similar impact to

6 Here ‘hard’ refers to counter-terrorism measures such as surveillance, policing, and the implementation of legislation. In contrast, soft measures are forms of community engagement such as dialogue and involvement with Muslim community agencies and voluntary organisations, with a view to providing feedback to the government and building trust (Spalek and Imtoul, 2007).

the counter-terrorism legislation enacted in France, the UK, the US, and the Netherlands, as they have pre-emptively branded Muslims as “terror suspects” (Lems and Mijares, 2023). Of note in this regard were the modifications to Articles 575 and 578 of the Spanish Criminal Code (SCC) that relate to terrorism. Both of these represent pre-crime measures similar to those instituted in Australia. For example, Article 575 criminalises “accessing information via the internet that could be deemed to constitute an incitement to aid terrorism or the acquisition or possession of documents of this nature for the purpose of self-indoctrination to commit a terrorist offence” (Rimo, 2021, p. 3). Further, it is not necessary for the individual to have read the material, but rather possession alone is sufficient to level the claim of their aim to self-indoctrinate, and to attract a possible five-year sentence. Similarly, article 578 criminalises the “glorification of terrorism” and has been used to prosecute rappers for song lyrics, as well as journalists and scores of ordinary social media users in the name of national security (Amnesty International, 2018).

As many as 84 people have been prosecuted in line with Article 578 between 2015 and 2017, in contrast to only 23 between 2011 and 2013 prior to the modification of the SCC, raising questions of free speech (Council of Europe, 2018). Indicative of the heavy-handedness and the pre-emptive labelling of Muslims as terrorists are cases where individuals have been sentenced for simply making a comment on Facebook. For example, one individual, who posted that those killed in the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* were dangerous bigots who effectively got what they deserved, received a sentence of 18 months in prison, disqualification,⁷ and a fine for the glorification of terrorism (Rights International Spain, 2021, p. 11). Here, it is important to note that while such sentiment is not appropriate, it most likely falls into the category of what Rimo (2021) regards as “unlikely to generate risk of increasing future terrorist offences” (p. 4). In other words, as Amnesty International has argued, criminal responsibility should be limited to those instances where there is a reasonable expectation that a crime will be carried out due to a causal relationship between the incitement and the act, and offensive remarks about past attacks do not meet this requirement (Pastor, 2018).

Further, as a result of this push by the West, Renton (2018) notes that the “surveillance order” has expanded to a global preoccupation that also includes countries such as China and India. The former has been following the global

7 According to a Green Paper by the Commission of the European Communities (2004, p. 18) “disqualification means a penalty withdrawing or restricting rights or a preventive measure whereby a natural or legal person is prohibited, for a limited or unlimited period, from exercising certain rights, occupying a position, going to certain places or doing certain things.”

counter-terrorism agenda that has largely been set by liberal democracies and spearheaded by the US (Byman and Saber, 2019). For example, following the war on terror, China opportunistically shifted its language for those in Xinjiang, also known as East Turkestan, from branding them as separatists, “counter-revolutionaries”, and “Pan-Turkists” to calling them terrorists and extremists, suggesting that they were all jihadi militants as opposed to being motivated by ethno-nationalist sentiments (Millward, 2014). This was an ironic development as none of the Xinjiang incidents until that time, and indeed until late 2013, resembled the tactics that are globally recognised as terrorism. Rather, incidents such as the bloody riots of Ürümqi in 2009 that left around 190 dead – of whom two-thirds were Han Chinese – had more the tenor of race riots (Byler, 2022; Millward, 2014).

However, beginning in late 2013 there were a spate of decidedly different incidents. On October 28, a Uyghur man drove a four-wheel-drive into pedestrians in Tiananmen Square, killing five people and injuring dozens more (Kaiman, 2013). Then there was a knife attack in Kunming station on March 3, 2014, where eight attackers killed 29 and left more than 130 wounded. It was reported that the attackers had insignia and flags that relate to East Turkestan (BBC News, 2014). This was followed by two more attacks in April and May that year. The first was a suicide bombing in Ürümqi that killed the three Uyghur perpetrators and injured another 79 civilians. The second involved two Uyghur attackers driving SUVs laden with improvised explosives that ploughed into a market and killed 31 people, while wounding more than 90 (Denyer, 2014). The latter attack, which took place on May 22, constituted a defining moment. Until that point, the US government had condemned the violence perpetrated by the Uyghurs but had not described the acts as terrorism. This all changed when then White House Press Secretary Jay Carney condemned the market attack and officially, as Millward (2014) notes, used the “t-word”.

After this formal international recognition of the terrorist threat, China was quick to kick its counter-terrorism program into high gear. Just one day later, Beijing announced that there would be a one-year “crackdown campaign on terrorism” (Yiqian et al., 2014). In conjunction with the crackdown, Beijing also began work on new legal measures that culminated in the National Counter-Terrorism Law that was passed on December 27, 2015. The new national laws introduced requirements for technology firms to help decrypt information (Clarke, 2023), which is a similar provision to those put in place by France five months earlier. Further, individuals were subject to what is described as “physicals for all” where the police scanned faces and irises, recorded voice signatures, and collected blood samples, fingerprints, and DNA, all of which were added to an immense database that is used to map the behaviour of the

population. Alongside this, those who are considered suspicious have their phones taken away and scanned for “Islamic imagery, connections to foreigners and other signs of extremism”, and scrubbed of any foreign-made apps such as Instagram (Byler, 2021, p. 37).

In conjunction with the database, China operates a dense network of face-recognition cameras that provide an individual danger rating by showing yellow, orange or red squares on people’s faces, as opposed to green for non-dangerous, law-abiding citizens (Grauer, 2021). This high-level cyber surveillance of public space, together with the internet, is designed to track ‘pre-crime’ offences. One such offence is downloading and using a virtual private network (VPN), as was the charge for Vera Zhou, a Hui Muslim, in 2017. Zhou was trying to access her University of Washington Gmail account while on a visit back to her hometown of Kuitun, Xinjiang; this action led to her arrest on suspicion of accessing illegal websites, which she was told is a sign of extremism, and she was sent to a re-education camp (Byler, 2021) that the Chinese government had begun to build in earnest in 2017 (Graham-Harrison, 2020).

As of 2020, it is believed China has commissioned as many as 380 detention facilities (Niewenhuis, 2020) that have since held between 800,000 and two million Muslims, the majority of whom are Uyghur, alongside other Muslim minorities such as the Hui, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. In the compounds, which Beijing calls “vocational education and training centres”, detainees are forced to pledge loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, renounce Islam, learn Mandarin, and praise communism (Maizland, 2022), and only those who show sufficient progress are released. The drive of these indoctrination programs is to create a preventative barrier to extremist ideas that effectively reverses what Han officials saw as a rise of religious piety, ethnic pride, and what they described as the “Talibanization” of the Uyghur population (Byler, 2022, p. 40).

In a similar vein, beginning with the successful election campaign of Narendra Modi⁸ and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, India has sought to foreground the need to protect itself against a possible terrorist threat from within, and has tied this to ideas about “true and authentic citizens” (Sethi, 2019, p. 91). Reflective of this agenda was the BJP’s use of election posters at the Indo-Pak border which used the tagline “*Dehshat ko denge jad se ujaad, ab ki baar Modi sarkaar* (We will root out terrorism; this time Modi government)”, accompanied by a picture of Modi with his finger

8 A BBC documentary implicates Prime Minister Modi, during his time as chief minister, in the 2002 Gujarat riots where 1000 predominantly Muslim people were murdered, following a fire that erupted on a train carrying Hindu pilgrims; subsequently, the documentary has been banned in India (Al Jazeera, 2023). Alongside this, Modi has stated that he regards the period of Muslim rule in India as a period of slavery (*ghulami*) for Hindus (Ghose, 2014).

raised in warning. Alongside such messaging, during the course of a rally in Silchar he exclaimed that Assam effectively had a Muslim problem by singling out ‘alien’ Bangladeshis: “The whole of Assam is disturbed because of the Bangladeshis” (as cited in Sethi, 2019, p. 107). Subsequently, once in power the BJP embarked on a program of cataloguing and effectively excluding Muslims from the national imaginary via a two-step process. In 2016, Modi proposed the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), which at first glance appears laudable. The bill provides religious minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan the opportunity to gain Indian citizenship. Those included in the CAB are six communities – Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsee, and Christian – with the notable exception being Muslim asylum seekers. This affects persecuted Muslim communities such as the Ahmadiyya in Pakistan and Hazaras in Afghanistan, and ignores a growing number of Rohingya refugees seeking protection in India (Sharma, 2024). In order to gain citizenship, eligible individuals only have to live and work in India for six years. This provision overrides the old citizenship law which prohibited undocumented migrants from becoming citizens, and was passed into law on December 11, 2019 (BBC News, 2019).

The resultant Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) is not inherently problematic on its own. However, when coupled with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) it becomes weaponised. The NRC was established in 1951 for the Census, and pursuant to the Citizenship Act, 1955, every person born in India: (a) after January 26, 1950, but before July 1, 1987 or; (b) after July 1, 1987, but before the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, with either of the parents being a citizen at time of birth; or (c) on or after the commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, where (i) both parents are citizens of India; or (ii) one parent is a citizen of India and the other is not an illegal immigrant at the time of birth, shall be a citizen of India by birth (India Today, 2019).

Illustrative of how these two combine to become weaponised is the case of the state of Assam, which is the only region where the NRC has been applied as of the time of writing. Here, it is important to note that Assam has been subject to multiple waves of migration – most relevantly, in this regard, the large-scale migration from East Pakistan when it seceded from Pakistan in 1971 and became the independent country of Bangladesh. These waves of migration have meant Muslims constitute 34% of Assam’s 33 million residents, giving Assam the second largest Muslim population in India behind the union territory⁹ of Jammu and Kashmir. As a result of these developments, the Assam Accord was established in 1985 that introduced a second cut-off date of

9 Jammu and Kashmir had a special status as an autonomous region under article 370 of the Constitution. However, the Modi government removed this status in 2019, and removed the Buddhist district of Ladakh from the region, making it a separate, federally administered

March 24, 1971 to determine citizenship, which applied exclusively for Assam (Sharma, 2019).

On account of this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sees many of those who have come to Assam from Bangladesh as infiltrators, while his Home Minister Amit Shah has gone further, stating that the “[i]nfiltrators [Bangladeshi Muslims] are like termites in the soil of Bengal” (as cited in Ghoshal, 2019). Thus, when India’s Supreme Court directed in 2013 that the NRC in Assam should be updated following a petition by the anti-immigrant NGO Assam Public Works, the Modi government began this in earnest in 2015 and concluded the process in 2019. When the list was released the majority of the 1.9 million people excluded from the NRC were Muslim, though many Hindus have also reportedly been targeted. However, Hindus have been provided a safety net via the CAA, which provides a pathway for citizenship despite their failure to provide papers proving their heritage (Sharma, 2023).

Some regard this dual citizenship stream for Muslims and non-Muslims, created by the CAA, as statelessness by design (Ahmed, 2019). Perhaps even more chilling is the prospect that Assam functions as a test case for the rest of the nation. While a date is yet to be set for a nationwide application of the NRC, the government has signalled its intent to pursue a rollout (Pasha, 2019; Perrigo, 2019). In the event that this were to occur, it is speculated that if the same rate of exclusion from Assam – 1.9 million, representing around 6% of the state’s 33 million – were applied to India’s population of 1.3 billion, the country, and indeed the world, would be facing a disaster of around 81 million people being rendered stateless (Bhagat, 2022, p. 163). In short, the NRC and the CAA collectively pose a threat to many among India’s substantial Muslim minority of over 180 million.

Lending further support to this global preoccupation with the Muslim subject are a number of case studies from South-East Asia. Two that look at Indonesia highlight how the government is still struggling to find the right formula to combat terrorism and protect the national ideology of Pancasila since the Bali bombings in 2002. Christian Harijanto and Farida Fozdar (2023) explore the procedurally problematic decision taken by then Indonesian president Widodo to unilaterally ban Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in 2017 through presidential decree, on account of its Islamism being seen as an existential threat to the foundations of the nation-state; while, Imam Malik Riduan (2023) analyses the government’s attempts to leverage civil society organisations (CSOs) to counter radicalisation through inculcating the values of Pancasila. In doing

territory. The Supreme Court upheld this decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir on September 11, 2023 (Chaturvedi and Rajesh, 2023).

so, Riduan acknowledges the very real risk that CSOs will simply become seen as extensions of government surveillance and will undermine community trust – a development that has taken place in other jurisdictions such as the UK (Qurashi, 2018). Similarly, Julius Mok (2023) and Gerhard Hoffstaedter and Aslam Adb Jalil (2023) respectively describe how both Singapore and Malaysia rigidly control what constitutes Islam for Malay Muslims, to manage religious and cultural pluralism in what Mok aptly describes as “hard multi-racialism”.

Given this global turn and fear of Islam and Muslims in countries both near and far to Australia, it is perhaps not surprising that there have routinely been echoes of earlier practice here. For example, Howard’s 2003 “Be Alert, Not Alarmed” anti-terrorism election campaign ad – which, ironically, dropped the slogan in its second phase the following year (*The Age*, 2004) – was rehashed in Malcolm Turnbull’s 2016 “If it doesn’t add up, speak up” campaign (Figures 13.2 and 13.3), with an even more overt jihadist visual (Gartrell, 2016).

It is important to note that the securitisation agenda of successive governments has largely continued despite the fact that intelligence experts have



FIGURE 13.2
Howard’s counter-terrorism
ad campaign poster, 2004
NOTE. FROM J. CHAN,
“DANGEROUS ART AND
SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES”,
LAW TEXT CULTURE, 11(1),
2007



FIGURE 13.3
Turnbull's counter-terrorism ad campaign poster, 2016
NOTE. FROM A. GARTRELL, "ELECTION 2016: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO RUN \$8M NATIONAL SECURITY ADVERTISING BLITZ DURING CAMPAIGN", *THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD*, APRIL 30, 2016

begun to acknowledge that the threat of Islamic extremism in Australia is small (Harris-Hogan, 2017). Giving further insight into government thinking both leading up to and at the time are the revelations that Scott Morrison, who was prime minister from 2018 to 2022, allegedly urged the Coalition to exploit anti-Muslim sentiment (Maiden, 2022), while Peter Dutton – then the immigration minister, and Leader of the Opposition – expressed the view that the biggest mistake of former prime minister Malcolm Fraser was to allow Lebanese Muslims to settle in Australia in the 1970s (Anderson, 2016). It is therefore not surprising, perhaps, that the ascension of Morrison to the prime ministership produced another spike in counter-terrorism laws between 2018 and 2019 – a spike that belied, as scholars Kieran Hardy and George Williams (2022) observe, the reduced threat posed by IS due to its collapse.

5 Conclusion

We have argued that Australia has become conditioned to respond to external events through greater security measures and surveillance, ever since Howard

put the nation into a state of perpetual existential threat following 9/11 and the Bali bombings. This has occurred within a wider context that encouraged the population to fear breaches of its borders – most notably by asylum seekers (Jupp, 2007) – to see culturally diverse migrants as a potential threat to social cohesion, and to associate Australian identity with Christianity, in direct contrast to Islam. The subsequent system of hyper-legislation and surveillance that Howard initiated requires only limited stimuli, and there are reminders everywhere. Indeed, listed under global and regional issues in the recent Quad Leaders¹⁰ joint statement (Albanese et al., 2023) is the need to tackle the matter of “terrorism and violent extremism”, with specific reference to historical attacks in India, and counter-terrorism policy hawks from India are keen to push the need for such cooperation (Thomas, 2023). It is likely that reminders such as these are behind the current Australian government’s banning of the IS flag.

Further, although Australian Prime Minister Howard’s proximity to the tragedy of 9/11 initiated this muscular strategy of hyper-legislation and surveillance to counter Islamic extremism, based on a sense of perpetual existential threat driven by external events, we have also demonstrated that this program has continued, albeit at a slower rate, with bipartisan support from successive governments. Additionally, we have illustrated how this development is part of a global phenomenon that normalises the securitisation of Muslim populations. Consequently, due to Australia’s heightened sense of threat from events both near and far, the Muslim subject has remained a recurrent object of fear in the Australian political imaginary. The resultant surveillance and mistrust has caused a significant degree of stress and anxiety within Muslim communities (Tittensor et al., 2020); and at a personal, interpersonal, community, national, and international level, the long-term effects remain to be seen.

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10 A diplomatic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the US.

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Australian Muslim Men after the War on Terror

Securitisation, Generational Trauma and Superficial Masculinities

Alyssa Moohin

Abstract

The far-reaching impacts of the securitisation of Australian Muslims and Islam have been the subject of a growing body of literature. Within this, significant space has been dedicated to exploring securitisation's negative effects on Muslims' sense of belonging and their social interactions with non-Muslims; however, what remains less well understood is its impacts on expressions of Muslim masculinity. This chapter partially fills this gap by drawing on interviews conducted with 32 Muslim community leaders. Several leaders expressed concern about some groups of young Muslim men engaging with socially harmful ideologies pertaining to gender roles. These masculinities have gained increased scholarly and public attention following the rise of anti-women movements in many Western societies. However, several leaders attributed such masculinities' appeal among some young Muslim men to an unexpected source: their traumatising experiences of securitisation. This is noteworthy because many young men in Western societies are non-Muslims and not securitised but are nonetheless attracted to the understandings of masculinity in contemporary anti-women movements. While experiences of securitisation damaged some young men's sense of self, changing socio-economic realities in Australian Muslim communities further exacerbated issues of identity. One way some of these young men sought to reconstitute themselves was through the adoption of alternate masculine ideologies that not only spoke to feelings of inferiority but also, crucially, offered a path to empowerment. Amid homogenising and culturally essentialist narratives about 'toxic masculinity,' these findings highlight the importance of analysing the specific social and historical contexts that allow different gender expressions to emerge.

1 Introduction

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the USA and the subsequent commencement of the global 'war on terror', Australian Muslim communities have been subject to heightened surveillance and policing. Discourses of suspicion

and the ‘enemy within’ have called into question the identity and citizenship of diverse communities that have been homogenised and essentialised under the religious category of ‘Muslim’ (Husain and Mansouri, 2023). Not only have these discourses perpetuated the image of Islam as an ideology that threatens Australian liberal democracy (Ali, 2020; Tittensor, 2023), but they have also sustained the casual association of Muslims, particularly young men, with terrorism and thuggery (Husain and Mansouri, 2023; Roose, 2016). This association has been used, in part, as a justification for Australian governments to implement an unprecedented number of counter-terrorism measures and surveillance programs targeted towards these communities – the effects of which are ongoing even as these programs are shifting away from primarily targeting Muslims (Husain and Mansouri, 2023; Tittensor et al., 2020).

The far-reaching societal impacts of the securitisation of Australian Muslims and Islam have been the subject of a growing body of literature. Within this, significant space has been dedicated to exploring securitisation’s negative effects on Muslims’ sense of belonging and their social interactions with non-Muslims (Abdel-Fattah, 2020; Amath, 2013; Hussein, 2019). For example, Ali (2021) argues that Australian policies related to immigration, citizenship, and counter-terrorism are near-exclusively targeted to Muslim communities and have made some Muslims feel relegated to a second-class citizenry. Feelings of rejection and injustice have also been linked to a weak sense of ‘Australianness’ and retreat into one’s ethnoreligious identity, particularly among second- and third-generation migrants (Cherney and Murphy, 2016; Hage, 2011; Sharples and Colic-Peisker, 2022; Tittensor et al., 2020). Regarding interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, Harris and Hussein (2020) posit that Muslims are being called upon to act as informal “everyday explainers” in educational, work and social settings, whereby they are expected to answer any and all questions related to Islam, theology, geopolitics, and multiculturalism. While “explaining” can be “an agentic effort for inclusion and participation”, Harris and Hussein (2020, p. 3976) argue that it simultaneously situates Muslims in a position of strangerhood where they are expected to carry out an unequal share of intercultural labour. Research also suggests that some Muslims have internalised external societal expectations and pressures along with surveillance discourses: in their sociological studies of young Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne respectively, Abdel-Fattah (2021) and Tittensor et al. (2020) argue that some youth self-moderate their speech, actions, and physical appearances in public to assure non-Muslims of their safeness. Tittensor et al. (2020) caution that some young Muslims who do not feel a sense of belonging in Australian society are withdrawing into their own splinter groups, particularly online communities.

Current scholarship on the effects of securitisation on Australian Muslims has notable breadth, revealing securitisation's varied effects on identity formation, civic participation, and social interactions with non-Muslims; however, what remain less well understood are its impacts on gender expressions. This chapter partially fills this gap by focusing on Muslim masculinities, drawing on interviews with 32 Muslims in positions of community leadership, conducted between May 2022 and December 2023. Participants included the executives of community organisations, in addition to well-respected informal authorities. To better capture the diversity of experiences and opinions within Muslim communities, participants vary widely in their ethnic and migrant backgrounds; their ages range between early twenties and mid-seventies. Many of these individuals belong to a privileged economic class and can largely be classified as white-collar professionals. All but a couple of participants are tertiary-educated. Of those who did not attend university, one individual completed extensive training in religious scholarship overseas; another completed relevant white-collar workforce training courses. Each participated in a single semi-structured interview that lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours, conducted by the author. To protect their privacy, each participant has been given a pseudonym and only generalised descriptions of their affiliated organisations are provided.

It is important to note that there is a heavy bias towards female perspectives in this research, given that only four participants are male. This is because this interview data is derived from an ongoing doctoral research project on how Australian Muslim women leaders navigate through the social and political terrains they have inherited when pursuing reform initiatives. However, these interviews also provided interesting insights into dynamics between some men and women in Muslim communities, as well as members of different generations. This includes sources of tension within these relationships, some of which are understood to be connected to the impacts of securitisation on Muslims. So as not to exclude men's perspectives on these issues, the views of four male Muslim community leaders were sought when writing this chapter. While their perspectives were largely complementary to those of the women interviewed, at times they challenged some of the female interviewees' assertions or provided different explanations of social phenomena.

Several leaders expressed concern that some groups of young Muslim men are engaging with socially harmful expressions of masculinity. Within the popular lexicon, these are often labelled 'toxic masculinity' – a term used to describe "the worst aspects of stereotypical masculine attributes ... such as violence, dominance, emotional illiteracy, sexual entitlement, and hostility to femininity" (Flood, 2022). While use of this term has become prevalent in

contemporary discourses on masculinity since the mid-2010s (Flood, 2022), this chapter instead uses *superficial masculinities* to refer to these gender expressions. The term was introduced to the author by a female interview participant with academic expertise in family violence and is used in this research for the following reasons. First, the phrase ‘toxic masculinity’ encourages one to see these forms of masculinity as a problem unto itself, rather than as symptoms of, and responses to, their broader contexts. Second, ‘superficial’ perhaps better describes the nature of these gender expressions, which often reduce ‘being a man’ to one’s physical appearance, financial status, and domination of women and other men; such masculinities often replace meaningful considerations of men’s responsibilities with surface-level discussions of men’s rights (Artsy, 2023).

Superficial masculinities have gained increased scholarly attention following the rise of anti-women movements in many Western societies. These movements are primarily led by young tech-savvy men, in online communities that are collectively referred to as the ‘manosphere’ (Boyd and Sheehy, 2016; Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Ging, 2019). Despite differences among online groups, they all participate in networked misogyny and share the belief that heterosexual men have come to occupy a subordinate position to women in Western societies, hyperbolically describing this as a “crisis of masculinity” (Ferree, 2020; Ghumkhor and Mir, 2022; Halpin, 2022; Tye, 2022). Such a claim challenges the understanding of gendered hierarchies normative to feminism, many strands of which conceptualise power in relation to a heteronormative and racialised global patriarchy (Collins, 2000; Spivak, 1988; Vergès, 2019/2021). These anti-women movements can be understood as backlash against men’s changing socioeconomic positions within Western societies and the threat this constitutes to their many masculine identities. There are vocal sections who believe that men have been disempowered in the West, accusing modern women and liberal gender norms of undermining their traditional roles as protectors and providers (Kahloon, 2023; Mishra, 2018; Roose, 2021). Some young men in Australia are currently grappling with the question of what it means to be a man in a modern Western society where young women outpace them in tertiary education levels (Coelli, 2022) and men of prime age are working part-time, or leaving the workforce entirely, at growing rates (Gustafsson, 2021).

While contemporary anti-women movements are primarily understood as driven by white men and underpinned by white supremacist ideologies (Carian, 2022; Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Futrelle, 2017; Kimmel, 2013), in recent years they have found traction among men from different cultural and

ethnic backgrounds who are united in the defence of traditional masculinity (Ayad, 2021; Ghumkhor and Mir, 2022). One subcategory is groups of young Muslim men in Western societies such as Australia. Ghumkhor and Mir (2022, p.139) argue that, in a similar vein to the alt-right 'red pill' movements that proclaim a crisis of masculinity, these Muslim men espouse a "crisis of Islam" brought about by the influence of Western ideologies – chief among them feminism – on Muslim communities and Muslim women. Within this movement, Muslim women are commonly held responsible for the ailments of Muslim men in Western societies.

Given this broader context, it was not necessarily surprising to learn that Muslim leaders were troubled by some contemporary expressions of masculinity within their communities. However, several attributed this issue to an unexpected source: young Muslim men's traumatising experiences of securitisation. This is noteworthy because many young men in Western societies are non-Muslims and were therefore not securitised but are nonetheless attracted to anti-women movements and the expressions of masculinity therein.

This chapter explores the perceived connection between experiences of securitisation and the uptake of superficial masculinities. Growing up in a climate of heightened surveillance and policing affected many young Muslim's identities and senses of belonging. One of the ways that men have sought to reconstitute themselves after painful experiences of social rejection is through engaging with superficial masculinities that not only speak to feelings of inferiority but also, crucially, offer a path to empowerment. It was found that while securitisation does not have a direct causal relationship with participation in anti-women movements, it has contributed to a broader social environment that has challenged the identities of some young Muslim men and left them looking to alternate ideologies when trying to reconstruct a viable sense of self. This research draws upon Ghassan Hage's (2010, 2011) concept of *mis-interpellation* as the theoretical basis for analysing interview data. Mis-interpellation provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between rejection and engagement with alternate ideologies which, importantly, considers generational differences within Muslim communities.

2 Mis-interpellation

The securitisation of Australian Muslims and Islam may have significant implications for contemporary expressions of Muslim masculinity. This is particularly relevant to the generation of young men who were constructing their

self-conception amid a climate of heightened Islamophobia and policing of Muslim communities – many of whom were subject to *mis-interpellation*.

In conceptualising mis-interpellation, Hage reimagines Althusser's (1968/1971) theory of subject formation, which asserts that society has pre-allocated symbolic structural locations that it interpellates or hails a person to fill. By answering the hail to an existing social place, a citizen voluntarily submits themselves to the state's dominant ideology and finds meaning in their life. Applying this understanding of subject formation to contemporary race relations in multicultural Western societies, Hage (2011) argues that racism can be understood as failure of the interpellation system to allocate racialised groups a meaningful place in society. Hage (2010) differentiates between three forms of racialisation: non-interpellation, negative interpellation, and mis-interpellation. Whereas non-interpellation is a mode of racism where the racialised group is ignored and not recognised to exist within a symbolic order of a social realm, negative interpellation refers to when the group is recognised within the symbolic structure, but its position is defined by negative traits. Conversely, mis-interpellation is a more complex form of racialisation that requires a two-step process and an affective dimension on the part of the racialised subject. In the first stage, the yet-to-be racialised subject sees themselves as no different to any other citizen and answers the metaphorical hail to claim their place in the symbolic order. However, the moment they do so, they are rejected and told that it was never them that was being called (Hage, 2011). Crucially, mis-interpellation involves both feelings of hope and belonging, and the brutal shattering of these feelings. For this reason, Hage (2010) argues that the impact of mis-interpellation is far more traumatic than other forms of racialisation because it causes the disintegration of the subject's self-constitution.

The necessary affective dimension of mis-interpellation means that this form of racialisation is primarily experienced by second- and third generation migrants. Hage (2011) argues that these individuals experience the negative effects of racism more acutely than their parents for several reasons. First, they experience racism and Islamophobia from an earlier age, which is directed at them in their own culture and language. As insiders to Australian culture and vernacular, they are hyper-aware of the subtleties and nuances of everyday exclusion. Furthermore, Hage (2011) posits that as Australian-born citizens, these Muslims feel an idealised sense of entitlement to non-discriminatory treatment that no subject – racialised or otherwise – can access in reality. Hage (2011) observed this in the mid-2000s in ethnographic research of Lebanese youth, many of whom among the second generation were completely

comfortable in their Australian identities, including those who were marginalised or had hybrid identities such as Muslim Australian, or Lebanese-Australian. He refers to this feeling of comfort as *over-assimilation*, whereby a Muslim subject feels fully Australian in their identity before being mis-interpellated. However, in a more recent study of Muslim youth in Melbourne, Tittensor et al. (2020) challenge Hage's assertion that these hyphenated and marginal identities are comfortable subjectivities, arguing instead that the situation represented for individuals "a sense of in-betweenness, or more fundamentally, a lack of belonging" (p. 485).

For Hage (2011), the combination of over-assimilation and hypersensitivity to petty and not so petty racisms "can swell up into a sometimes formidable state of resentment that is very different in intensity from the sentiment felt by first-generation immigrants when faced with racism" (p. 168) because second-generation Muslims initially believe that there is a place for them in the Australian society into which they are born, only to feel cruelly deceived when they are rejected. Consequently, these individuals

start looking outside official ideologies, to each other (gangs), to music (rap) or as is the case among many Muslim youth, to religion, to find a space where they can develop a viable sense of themselves and to immunize themselves against the constant threat of psychological disintegration that racism constitutes for them.

HAGE, 2011, pp. 151–152

As Hage argues, second- and third-generation Muslims may look to alternative ideologies when disillusioned by their betrayal by mainstream multicultural rhetoric of inclusion and equality.

It is important to note that mis-interpellation is not a distinctly male phenomenon. There is currently no evidence to suggest that men are more likely than women to undergo this psychological process. Yet, in the Australian context, the securitisation of Muslim men has resulted in greater attention being paid to men's responses to social rejection. What does appear to be gendered, however, are the different unofficial ideologies that individuals turn to. This suggests that certain discourses are more readily accessible to specific genders, as evidenced in Hage's example of male-dominated subcultures, such as gangs and hip-hop. With this in mind, the chapter turns its focus to the different ways that young Muslim men who grew up during the war on terror responded to identity challenges arising from experiences of securitisation.

3 Australia's Securitisation of Muslim Men

The securitisation of Australian Muslims and Islam during the war on terror has perpetuated the image of young Muslim men as terrorists, street thugs, and misogynists (Roose, 2016). These portrayals draw on pre-existing prejudices about Islam and gender that have been inflamed by domestic and international terrorist attacks and subsequent increased surveillance and policing of Australian Muslim communities (Akbarzadeh, 2020).

This is not a bygone aspect of the war on terror. Rather, the casual association of young Muslim men with violence continues, sustaining a “taken-for-granted, uncontroversial ‘truth’ in public imagination” that these individuals have a greater susceptibility to violent-extremist ideologies than other groups (Abdel-Fattah, 2020, p. 373). For example, Ata’s (2021, p. 196) study of Australian high school students reveals that when non-Muslims were asked, “What do you like least about Muslim Australians?”, of the approximately two-thirds of students who responded, 27% mentioned terrorism and 32% mentioned extremism and sexism. In a similar vein, when speaking of the representation in popular media of young Muslim men from her Western Sydney neighbourhood, interview participant and youth leader Huda said that they are often depicted as “drug dealers and killers; they go to prison; they date white women because they’re ‘easier.’” Huda noted that some in the area fit these stereotypes, stating, “I go down to Bankstown [a suburb of Western Sydney] and those boys do exist. I’m not going to lie and say that attitude, that rebellion doesn’t exist.” However, by and large these depictions remain an offensive caricature of the young men in her community.

The connection of Muslims with criminality extends beyond public and media imaginations. It also persists in legislation, even as Australia is experiencing a slow move away from the war on terror and State and Commonwealth government security agencies pay increased attention to the threat posed by far-right extremism (Grant, 2022). Indeed, when asked if this broadened security focus went some way to making young Muslim men feel less problematised, male leader Ali claimed that “it hasn’t had the slightest impact yet, because there is a lot of work to be done there. You’re talking about 20 years of trauma. Just a few appeasing remarks or statements from government is not going to do it.” When responding to the same question, Bilal said, “I question the correlation between an increased focus on the far right and a decreased focus on Muslim men.” The community leader cited a recent example of this: the introduction in federal parliament of a proposal to ban Nazi hate symbols. This proposal was quietly extended to the Islamic State flag and symbols “likely to be confused” with those of the jihadist group (McHugh and Tariq, 2023).

Problematically, the Islamic State flag contains the Shahada – the profession of faith and one of the five pillars of Islam – meaning that “the law potentially criminalises the display of a sacred tenet in Islam” (Tittensor, 2023). Bilal criticised the perceived need of politicians and policymakers to include Muslims in any and all discussions of terrorism and violent extremism, saying, “It’s almost like, no, we can’t have anybody thinking that extremism is something that’s not related to Muslims in some way.”

Stigma surrounding Muslim men has consequences for their inclusion in public discourse. During interviews, several women stated that the increased platforming of Muslim women’s voices during the war on terror was largely due to prevailing narratives in Western societies that they were oppressed and in need of saving from both their faith and Muslim men (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Ahmed, 1992; Carland and Krayem, 2021; Hussein, 2019). Therefore, several participants saw the increased involvement of Muslim women in community representation and decision-making processes as aligning with Western governments’ (problematic) objective to liberate Muslim women.

For several women, it also reflected an unwillingness on behalf of the Australian public to hear the voices and views of Muslim men. When Fatima, the founder of a Muslim community organisation, was organising a guest speaker for an interfaith engagement event, she was told that a Muslim woman would be preferable, even though the Muslim man she originally suggested to speak was more qualified to discuss the topic in question. Equally, Noor, the former president of a grassroots Muslim organisation, reflected on what she saw as the continued lack of representation of Muslim men in Australian media and public life. While there are examples of high-achieving Muslim men in these spaces, Noor felt that Muslim men, generally, “are being left out of the conversation.” While political television programs such as *Q+A* often have articulate and highly educated Muslim women on their panels, several female participants, including Noor, expressed the view that Muslim men are included less frequently. “Having a coherent, very impressive Muslim man is not something they [the Australian public] can handle. Well, they can handle one. Waleed Aly has taken that space,” Noor said, referencing the high-profile media personality who hosted *The Project* from 2015 until its cancellation in 2025. Amina expressed a similar view, positing that she is hard pressed to find Muslim men on Australian television aside from Aly and Nazeem Hussain, a comedian who also appeared on *The Project*. However, she remarked that “people will think that this is the same person.” This ongoing issue was documented in a 2021 *Daily Mail* article which reported that, at the time of publication, Australian media publications had mistaken Hussain for Aly on at least three instances (Jary, 2021).

The perceived desire of some Australian institutions to see Muslim communities represented by women potentially feeds into a gendered competition between Muslim men and women in some communities. Iqra, a policy advisor, said that it had been a significant source of tension within her community at different points in time because some male leaders expressed resentment towards women who were approached by the media to speak on behalf of the community. However, this characterisation of Muslim men as sidelined is not representative of all male experiences. For example, rather than being excluded, Ali “experienced the opposite” in that for more than two decades he and other prominent Muslim men were constantly called upon to engage with the media and different levels of government. This claim is supported by Sohrabi (2016), whose research into Australian Muslim leadership found that women were underrepresented in consultative roles, where men were more frequently chosen to be the key interlocutors with governments and media.

It is worth noting that Sohrabi’s interviews with Muslim leaders were conducted between 2010 and 2011, and there have been significant developments in these community spaces in the decade since. This includes a strong effort led by Muslim women to increase their representation in positions of community leadership following the #MosqueMeToo movement – a Muslim iteration of the online #MeToo movement which gained traction in 2017 (Chopra, 2022). These grassroots challenges to men’s traditional domination of leadership roles were further supported by top-down investments into developing female leaders. Hamza, who occupied an executive position within a Muslim peak body throughout the 2010s, said that this organisation “offered positive discrimination to Muslim sisters for leadership opportunities. During my time a lot of the grants offered by federal and state governments were for leadership training and we, in particular, focused on women’s leadership training.” In his view, this investment has yielded tremendous results: while many Islamic institutions continue to be led by ‘uncles’ (senior men) who hold their positions “for life”, there are growing numbers of highly competent and driven women stepping into leadership roles. Reflecting on the changes within her mosque, Mehreen said that in recent years it has become “taboo” to have separate women’s committees: the focus now is on including women on the main board. In addition to increasing female representation, this change had also made leadership positions more competitive. When speaking of the young men in his own mosque community who were eyeing future leadership roles, Hamza said that they had “some tough competition which, during my era, we [men] never had. There was no competition. Now, it’s a different ball game.”

Insights from men and women suggest that opportunities for Muslim men to represent their communities have diminished since the start of the war on terror. While this has been linked to highly skilled and capable women

challenging the status quo within communities, this change has also been associated with public and media stigmatisation of Muslim men. However, rather than representing men's experiences or interpretations of their presence in Australia's public life, these latter views are illustrative of how some women understand government and public interest in their communities – chiefly what some see as an attack on Muslim men at the same time that Australian institutions are trying to “save” (Khadija) or “empower” (Iqra) Muslim women.

4 Understanding Securitisation as Generational Trauma

As the generation of young Muslims raised during the war on terror come of age, there is increasing recognition and discussion of the trauma they experienced growing up in a climate of surveillance and suspicion. It has impacted men in myriad ways, from their self-worth and understanding of their faith, down “to the smallest details” relating to their appearance, said Fatima. Do they grow a beard? Do they anglicise their names and forgo traditional clothing? Men are making these decisions in an environment “riddled with Islamophobia and [where] everything we [men] do and say publicly is automatically looked at through this lens of ‘these barbarian Muslims who behead people over in the Middle East’” (Muslim Women Australia, 2022).

As two women saw it, the trauma of being cast as a suspect in Australian society is further intensified by young men's often privileged positions within their own communities. Although Iqra was generalising across different local contexts and cultures, she posited that some young Muslim men grow up “pampered”, while Amina noted that they are “culturally enabled to remain mummy's boys or coddled by their fathers.” This is not to diminish the deeply challenging experiences of many young Muslim men in Australia, but to highlight the stark discrepancy between the social positions of some within their own communities and in broader society. Iqra further explained:

Being a boy in our [African Muslim] communities is a luxurious space to be in when you're young. You're looked after; you can do what you want, like engage in sport or travel. You are given privileges that not all girls are given ... You grow up with this privilege in your family, in your community, and then when you go out into the real world all that is stripped from you. You are seen as a lesser person. You are seen as a terrorist.

This can be a shocking experience for young men who feel humiliated, emasculated, and stripped of dignity.

A personal story shared by Yasmin draws parallels with the process outlined by Iqra, although it takes place in an Arab migrant community rather than African. Yasmin recalled a painful moment when her son was mis-interpellated at his public high school in the 2010s. Without first seeking parental consent, the high school placed Yasmin's son in a police program for "Middle Eastern boys". When she learned of this, Yasmin "didn't want to make a big deal out of it" and told her son to "see how you go". Her son attended the program, much of which focused on humanising police officers and reducing animosity between law enforcement and parts of some Middle Eastern communities. For example, there were discussions of how "the police are just regular guys; they have families just like you, and they go home to their families." While Yasmin did not have qualms with these messages, per se, she said, "[H]ow he felt singled out from his friends was very, very awful. There are some bad boys too. You know, there's a range of different types of Muslim boys, and he was placed with them because he was Muslim." Up to that moment, Yasmin's son had thought of himself as no different to his non-Muslim and non-Middle Eastern school friends. However, his inclusion in the racialised police program challenged his self-conception, as members of the school leadership and law enforcement mis-recognised him as one of those "bad" Muslim boys whom members of his community spoke of, who had violent run-ins with the police and posed a threat to public order.

Experiences of misrecognition can have devastating psychological impacts. Ali has worked with countless Muslim youth over the years and has observed firsthand the negative effects of securitisation on some parts of these younger generations:

It has made them lose their sense of Australianness, so their identity is damaged, and that's very dangerous. By that, I mean that they can no longer identify, despite the fact that most of these people I engage with are born in Australia or have been here for most of their life ... [it] made them feel not only they don't belong, but they're worthless. And that has created an inferiority complex, which has made them vulnerable. That vulnerability can be expressed in different ways.

The impacts of securitisation on young men's identities and sense of worth are potentially further informed by their economic and educational backgrounds. An observation from Hamza is worth sharing at some length:

There has been a focus on young Muslim men being what you'd call a rebel without a cause: they're looking for a reason in society, to have a purpose in life, and one is to be a champion for their people. You see, the

Liberal Party contributed to this policy failing ... [They] kept on referring to the Muslim community through the lens of securitisation: “Your community is at risk. Therefore, we are here to talk to you, to work together to try and save you from these little rotten apple elements.” But the agenda within the agenda of being *at risk* is: *you* are actually a risk. So, the whole inference is that your community is a risk for Australian society ... Some young men withdrew from society ... They didn’t have a job. They didn’t have the intellectual ability to compete with their sisters in their family. Certain young men have sisters who are outperforming them in their own family: their sisters have finished school, got a job, got married, and they [young men] are still unemployed and they want to try and be pious. There’s a lack of role models and proper mentors – and all this in a particular era with a lot of focus and attention on “be careful with young Muslim men”. It would definitely have a knock-on effect. Has anybody investigated the trauma? And the secondary trauma for their mothers, for their wives? If there’s a young girl, who wants to marry a young man who’s somehow still struggling with his identity after being labelled as ‘radicalised’?

Captured in Hamza’s words is the desire of many young men to be of service and value to their families and communities, as well as recognition that discourses of policing have presented them as a threat to these very groups. Of the young men who withdrew from broader society in response to this stigmatisation, Hamza is particularly concerned for those who are struggling in their education and finances. Deficits in these areas limit one’s ability to be a ‘champion’ for their family and community, and potentially contribute to feelings of inadequacy, shame and resentment. These unfulfilled desires affect not only young men, but also those closest to them; Hamza alludes to some who take their emotions out on the women in their lives.

5 Self-Constitution after Securitisation

Several participants held serious concerns that the generational trauma of securitisation was expressing itself through some men’s adoption of superficial masculinities. For Iqra, this included men creating “a gendered competition” with women out of attempts to reaffirm their masculinity and social status. Interviewees saw this as a particular issue among some young men, whom Amina fears are becoming absorbed in the so-called manosphere and its anti-women ideologies. Amina stated:

There is a vibe amongst young women that our men are not stepping up in any capacity, whether it's educating themselves, whether it's pushing themselves to attend courses and workshops that open their horizons, whether it's supporting us and protecting us from Islamophobia. There is a huge perception that as Muslim women find their voice and agency, Muslim men are unfortunately going in the opposite direction and being influenced, for example, by a name that you may have heard of a lot, which is Andrew Tate.

Tate rose to online infamy in 2022 due to controversial videos on social media that espoused a mix of misogynistic vitriol and self-help style advice for young men seeking to transform themselves into "alpha-males" (Das, 2022). Viral videos show the influencer training in martial arts, showing off his firearms and luxury sports cars, and telling young men that they would only be of value if they were rich and had a physique that men envy and women desire (Das, 2022). While his fan base includes young men of myriad backgrounds, his popularity in Muslim circles only increased following his conversion to Islam in October 2022 (Haq, 2023). According to Amina, some Australian male religious leaders have promoted Tate to young Muslim men: certain Islamic community centres have shared videos and memes of him with their Facebook audiences. Amina said, "They [young men] want assertive role models. They want role models that recognise their generational trauma and their cultural issues and speak to them." She feared that, at times, these role models were being found in the tough-talking figures of the manosphere who not only spoke to men's feelings of emasculation but also offered a path to reclaiming their power, often through the defence of traditional gender roles.

A male community leader also shared these concerns. Bilal, the former president of a Muslim peak body, spoke of securitisation's profound impact on the psyches of some young Muslim men, particularly with regard to their expressions of masculinity. He argued that since the September 11 attacks, there has been an increase in religiosity within Australian Muslim communities that is directly related to experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia:

I think it [the increase in religiosity] was a reaction, like, "I'm hearing all this stuff being said about my religion, so I better go find out" ... I think, generally, everybody has tried to go back and arm themselves with more information, to be able to respond to all those external factors.

In a climate where young men face continual challenges to their religion, he argued that they had to remain strong in their commitment to their faith

and identities as Muslims. However, Bilal posits that these ideas of displaying strength have also been applied to other aspects of their lives – including their relationships with women. Consequently, patriarchal cultural practices within some communities have meant that ideas of strength and masculinity are commonly associated with control and power. When working with a diverse range of Muslim men, Bilal has found interesting generational differences, one being that older men who are first-generation migrants had more progressive views on some issues than young men who were either born or raised in Australia. Per Bilal, “[t]he only logical part is the absence of the environment that these young men have grown up in. They feel their masculinity is threatened and so they revert to the patriarchal influences that have come into the religion over the last thousand years.” The result is some young men practising forms of masculinity that seek to establish dominance over women, and drawing upon interpretations of Islam that support these practices.

When describing the perceived impact of securitisation on contemporary expressions of Muslim masculinity, the above quotes point to a central issue: young men’s attempts to reconstruct socially relevant identities. However, securitisation is not the only development that has challenged some young men’s identities in recent years; changing socioeconomic realities in Muslim communities are also a contributing factor.

6 Changing Socioeconomic Realities in Australian Muslim Communities

For Eman, an expert in family and domestic violence, understanding broader socioeconomic developments and how they play out in different ways in Muslim families and communities in Australia is crucial to understanding the appeal of superficial masculinities to varied groups of men. However, she said these efforts have been obscured by loud voices that are quick to reduce complex issues of identity down “to just toxic masculinity”. One must not overlook that young Muslim men are members of Australian society, and so they are influenced by, and involved in, broader societal developments. They sit at the intersection of several complex socioeconomic issues affecting men in Western societies. This includes the mainstreaming of the view that masculinity – and men’s traditional position in society – is under attack (Kahloon, 2023; Roose, 2021). This broader anti-women development is a pressing concern for Fatima, the founder of a Muslim grassroots organisation. As she described, over the last several decades, “we’ve gone from knowing women’s rights to feminism; we’ve gone from feminism to the emasculation of men; and now we’re going

anti-woman. We're going back to where we were, but with a vengeance. That is petrifying." Furthermore, although a class of "Muslim elites" has emerged in Australia, often constituted by "overseas born, highly educated" individuals, there are persistent and entrenched issues of economic disadvantage within some communities, particularly those born in Australia (Roose et al., 2023, p. 217). This locally born segment reports lower levels of educational attainment than overseas-born Muslims and the general Australian population. Upward social mobility is further hindered by Muslims disproportionately working "jobs typically characterised by hard physical labour, unfavourable working hours and/or low wages" (Peucker et al., p. 10).

Muslims' disparate economic outcomes can be explained, in part, through migration histories. Following World War II, Muslim migration to Australia was primarily driven by economic factors. In 1967, the Australian Government signed a bilateral labour migrant agreement with Turkey. During this period, the Turkish government was promoting emigration as a solution to issues of unemployment and overcrowding; conversely, the Australian Government needed to respond to a decline in emigration from Western Europe and a growing need for workers in Melbourne and Sydney's expanding manufacturing industries (Deen, 2012; Museums Victoria, 2017). According to then-Liberal parliamentarian Richard Cleaver (Commonwealth, 1967), Turks were ideal candidates for several reasons: they were from Europe – a strongly desired trait in this era – and they had a proven track record as good labour migrants and guest workers in Germanic countries. During this period, most Turkish labour migrants were unskilled workers, despite the bilateral labour agreement aiming for 30 percent of migrants to be skilled workers (Deen, 2012). The wives and children of Turkish migrants were urged to permanently settle in Australia, the assumption being that workers who migrated with their families were more incentivised to integrate into Australian society. Wives were also encouraged to take up work in local factories. In subsequent years, the abolition of the White Australia Policy also led professionals from Egypt, Pakistan, and India to arrive in Australia. However, the largest cohort of Muslim migrants was constituted by the Lebanese. While a small number of Lebanese had settled in the early 20th century, these were almost all Christian and had arrived in Australia as traders and businessmen. The outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 saw marked changes, in that migrants were regarded as "quasi-refugees", were typically from less well-off backgrounds, and over half were Muslim (Deen, 2012, p. 76). While many of the usual requirements for entry into Australia were waived for this group, those who came were required to have relatives already living here. Subsequently, a large community of Lebanese Muslims settled in the western suburbs of Sydney, many of whom worked in the manufacturing

industry alongside Turkish migrants (Deen, 2012). In the following years, a decline in manufacturing resulted in poor job prospects for some migrants, which in turn created intergenerational poverty and rendered upward social mobility less attainable (Betts and Healy, 2006). At the same time, economically marginalised suburbs with large Muslim populations have been found to have high levels of internal community connectedness and belonging (Sharples and Colic-Peisker, 2022).

Regarding African Muslim communities, since the 1980s there has been a notable increase in migrants from the Horn of Africa, such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia – many of whom came as humanitarian entrants. By comparison, West African migrant communities are relatively small, and a greater percentage arrived through the skilled- and family migration streams. (Hugo, 2009). Unlike other categories of migrants, no English language requirements are placed on humanitarian entrants. Language proficiency has significant implications for one's inclusion in the labour market. For example, in 2017, only 17% of humanitarian entrants were in paid work after being in Australia for 18 months (Centre for Policy Development, 2017). For some, educational and economic success are made more difficult by their years of schooling lost while in refugee camps (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2019). Consequently, Peucker et al. (2014) argue that it is easier for professional and middle-class Muslims to surmount certain barriers to inclusion in Australian society.

Economic marginalisation and feelings of relative deprivation have been identified as potential contributing factors in the uptake of alternate religious and political ideologies (Hassan, 2010). With specific regard to the young Muslim men who came of age during the war on terror, Roose et al. (2023) argue that material marginalisation is feeding into feelings of being “left behind” and “excluded”, creating “a sense of collective injustice, anger, and disempowerment” (p. 243). However, as Roose (2021) explains in *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity and the Populist Epoch*, it is misleading to frame this expression of male anger as a purely working-class problem. As he elucidates, greater protections regarding childbirth and childcare, as well as delayed fertility, have enabled women to hold down positions in the workforce that were not previously possible. While the glass ceiling remains an issue in many workplaces, “men are forced to compete for jobs previously regarded as their inherited birthright, and mediocrity is no longer tolerated” (Roose, 2021, p. 84). Furthermore, the neoliberal turn has seen sharp increases in short-term working contracts; insecure employment is all many young men have ever known (Harvey, 2007). This has created a sense of nostalgia for an “imagined lost past” and a traditional economic system based on male breadwinners (Roose, 2024). Social and legislative changes, which have been to the detriment

of some men's economic opportunities, may therefore be feeding into a collective sense of disenfranchisement that is not bound by class delineations.

Some in Australian Muslim communities have voiced concerns about the economic position of men, given that in interpretations of verse 4:34 of the Qur'an, women are under no obligation to provide financially, while this responsibility is placed on men. Consequently, a young man's economic status in Australia can have significant implications for his perceived value during matchmaking and courtship. Economic insecurity can disqualify some men from the marriage market or diminish their prospects. As youth leader Zehra described, men seeking marriage before being financially ready is "a big no-no [for Muslims]. It's like, absolutely not! You better be ready before you come for a woman."

Interview data further suggests that traditional matchmaking dynamics are currently being challenged by a class of young Muslim women who are financially self-sufficient working professionals. Bilal said that while Islam provides a "starting position" for discussions of gender roles, the importance of men's fulfilment of their traditionally assigned role as financial providers has diminished in contemporary society. Nonetheless, this remains "the main hook that men have latched onto." Many young men also see these traditional marital relationships modelled by their parents and grandparents, and may have been told when growing up that they would one day provide for a family of their own. However, Bilal notes that a generational shift is underway: some young women are saying to young men, "I'm capable of providing for myself, so the fact that you are my 'provider' – actually, I'm looking for other qualities." Consequently, some men are left questioning what value they could bring to a marriage if not economic. A concern of Bilal's is that many young men have tied their self-worth to being a financial provider. He said, "Your worth [as a man] is based on other things. That's a hard conversation to have internally, particularly with young men who feel that every part of their identity has been challenged." Hamza has found it equally difficult to have these types of conversation with young men, saying, "The women feel very comfortable talking about it ... But the men, the young boys, you can't have a conversation. It's part of the coping mechanism where you just put your blinkers on and pretend there isn't a problem because there's [feelings of] inferiority here."

Amina, a tertiary-educated professional who migrated to Australia as an international student, provided a female perspective on contemporary match-making issues among women of her economic class. A major social issue she is seeing play out across Muslim communities in Australia is that "a lot of Muslim women are choosing to be single". She argues that a significant number of young men are being passed up because "we [women] see them as complacent in their education. They're not pushing themselves ... A lot of men sadly will not

show up to workshops that they need to attend." This includes community-run sessions on masculinity, mental health, and Islamophobia. Amina's statement suggests that when some university-educated women, including herself, are scouting potential spouses, they are looking for men who are on similar career trajectories and are active members of their local Muslim communities.

Fiza, the CEO of a Muslim women's organisation, offered a more sympathetic interpretation of why some young men are not engaging with community initiatives. She linked this to the securitisation of Muslims, part of which involved an extensive array of grassroots programs that were either explicitly or implicitly linked to governments' efforts to counter violent extremism. She said, "You can't just wake up from the post-9/11 era of demonising and dehumanising our men and expect them to then turn around and want to engage with those very same services that were criminalising our existence." However, Ali cautioned against Amina and Fiza's generalisations that young Muslim men are disengaged from grassroots activities and initiatives; instead he suggested it is necessary to analyse this on a community-by-community basis that also considers the types of activities that may or may not appeal to some groups. Omar, a male leader who facilitates leadership retreats and workshops for young Muslims, added further nuance by citing the different speeds at which men and women typically reach maturity. In his experience, women tended to be more engaged from an earlier age. Conversely, the majority of men he works with did not start asking for workshops and mentorship until they were in their late twenties: "They're not asking for it when they're young because they're thinking about having fun with the boys, and soccer, and girls, and all these little things." Nevertheless, some women expressed concern at what they interpreted as young men's reluctance to engage in their broader communities. Within some contexts, this is to the detriment of men's matchmaking prospects, which potentially contributes to their existing feelings of exclusion and increases the appeal of alternate masculine ideologies.

7 Conclusion

The securitisation of Australian Muslims and Islam has had profound and lasting impacts on these communities, which has become the subject of a growing body of literature. Insights from interviews with Muslim community leaders revealed an avenue for research that was both unexplored and pressing in its contemporary relevance: the perceived connection between the securitisation of young Muslim men and the uptake of superficial masculinities, as embodied by those of the anti-women movements currently observed across Western societies. In line with Hage's (2010, 2011) application of mis-interpellation,

participants spoke of how young men's painful experiences of social rejection occur amid a climate of heightened surveillance and policing of Muslim communities, fracturing their identities. These effects of securitisation coincided with other socioeconomic developments that threatened some men's traditional positions within their communities and broader Australian society, including: entrenched issues of economic disadvantage in parts of Muslim communities; legislative changes that have enhanced women's workforce participation; and challenges to traditional matchmaking dynamics coming from a class of highly educated and financially independent Muslim women. In the face of these threats to their understandings of themselves as Muslim men, some turned to superficial masculinities that spoke to their vulnerabilities and laid out a path to empowerment. Therefore, while securitisation does not directly cause engagement with anti-women movements, it nonetheless contributed to issues of identity among the generation of young men who came of age during the war on terror. When exploring contemporary expressions of masculinity, these findings highlight the need to interrogate the use of 'toxic masculinity' as a totalising explanation for behaviour, and take into account how men use gender identities to respond to changing social and historical contexts.

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Conclusion

David Tittensor and Adam Possamai

The purpose of this volume has been to provide a much-needed update on the field of Islamic studies in Australia, which has come a long way since the pioneering work of both Riaz Hassan (see Chapter 2) and Gary Bouma (see Chapter 3), to whom we are indebted. In doing so, we seek to show that there is much more to Australian Muslim communities than the narrative that Muslims are predominantly terrorists in waiting, which has dominated both the political and media discourse in this country since the advent of 9/11 (see Abdel-Fattah, 2020; Akbarzadeh and Smith, 2005). This is not to say that the threat of terrorism is not real or that Islamophobia is not an ongoing challenge. As many chapters in this volume show, these issues persist, and the matter of Islamophobia remains a serious problem. Indeed, the Albanese Labor government recently appointed Aftab Malik to the role of Islamophobia Envoy¹ (Evans, 2024b) on account of a sharp increase in animosity following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent muscular Israeli response (BBC News, 2025; *The Guardian*, 2025); the Islamophobia Register Australia (2024) found a 13-fold increase of Islamophobic incidents one month later, and a 39-fold increase in incidents reported on university campuses.

Nevertheless, discourses about terrorism and Islamophobia obfuscate the rich and diverse contributions that Muslim diaspora communities are making that seek to break out of this holding pattern. Indeed, Muslim creatives are actively telling their stories to render themselves and their communities more relatable to their Western counterparts and show that they too have normal, everyday struggles of trying to meet familial and social expectations. In a similar vein to the Lebanese *Bildungsromane* of Omar Sakr and Michael Mohammed Ahmad that Abraham discusses in Chapter 6, a striking example of Muslim storytelling is the film *Ali's Wedding* (Walker, 2017). The film is based on the memoir *Good Muslim Boy* by Osamah Sami (2015), in which he tells his story of growing up as an Iraqi in Iran, escaping the Iran/Iraq war, and migrating to Australia in the mid-1990s. The film – where Sami plays the titular character Ali – foregrounds his struggles to meet his parents' desire that he become a doctor, in spite of his passion for acting, and his pursuit of the love of his

1 The government also appointed a corresponding Anti-Semitism Envoy, Jillian Segal, due to a rise in antisemitic attacks. Notably, there have been a series of attacks on synagogues in Melbourne and Sydney (ABC News, 2025; Evans, 2024a, 2025).

life while caught in an arranged marriage. In a bid to manage the disjuncture between the life his parents want for him and the one of his own choosing, he resorts to what is regarded as the film's unifying theme – lying (Tayyara, 2019). Ali lies to his parents that he got into Melbourne University to study medicine. He then pretends to go to class where he is tutored by his love interest Dianne, who obtained the highest score on the medical entrance exam; Dianne agrees to this arrangement as Ali convinced her conservative father to allow her to enrol by promising to keep an eye on her. During this time Ali and Dianne fall in love and secretly elope through *zawaj al-mut'a* (temporary marriage).² However, all the lies eventually fall apart, and Ali is forced to make a choice between what is expected of him and his own path. Ultimately, he chooses to flee his arranged marriage on his way to the wedding and steals a tractor in a bid to intercept Dianne at the airport before she returns to Lebanon at the behest of her father, who had discovered her illicit relationship. Then after being arrested and released from jail, Ali chooses to wait for his love to return; ultimately, they are reunited.

The film was a hit, winning *The Age* Critics Award for the best Australian feature film at the Melbourne International Film Festival; the Sydney Film Festival Audience Award; and Western Australia's CinefestOZ Film Prize. Alongside this, Sami and his co-writer Andrew Knight received an AWGIE Award for best screenplay from the Australian Writers' Guild; and the recipe for this success was summed up well by *Age* critic Karl Quinn (2017), who noted that the film not only functions as an “appealing romantic comedy” but also “doubles as a warm closely observed portrait of an Australian Muslim community” where the “conflict in the story isn't about how at odds everything is, as it might be in a fish-out-of-water story ... Rather it's about the similarities between our cultures”. Effectively, the film brings the viewer into the lived reality of Muslims in Australia and renders them not as the Muslim monsters of old (cf. Arjana, 2015; Shaheen, 2003), but as lovable, affable people with the same foibles as everyone else. Indeed, while fellow critic Luke Buckmaster (2017) was less enamoured with the plot, he acknowledged that the “depiction of the mosque congregation [w]ith its politics and divided factions ... [was] utterly authentic and ... dramatically interesting.” In other words, it is this authenticity that makes the film resonate, combined with the fact that the community is not presented as being in conflict with Australian society, but as a constituent part of the nation's multicultural mosaic.

2 Temporary marriage, also known as *nikah al-mut'a* (pleasure marriage), is a Shi'a practice (Heffening, 2012; Tayyara, 2019).

Another more recent exponent of bringing the Muslim experience into the Australian zeitgeist is *The Scope of Permissibility*, the debut novel by Zeynab Gamieldien (2023), which won the inaugural WestWords/Ultimo Prize for an emerging Western Sydney author (WestWords/Ultimo Prize, 2022). Like *Ali's Wedding*, the novel traverses themes of parental expectation, desire, and forbidden love. The story centres on Sara Andrews, her best friend Abida, and her love interest Naeem as they navigate various pressures inherent within university life in Sydney as practising Muslims. They are all members of the Muslim Student Association (MSA); and in telling their stories, Gamieldien weaves together differences with regard to ethnic diversity within the wider Muslim community, socioeconomic status, and gender as points of conflict (Bahar, 2023).

Sara the protagonist is, at once, an insider and an outsider. She is of South African heritage, but her Muslimness is ambiguous as she is white-passing with a Western name, and her narration explains that this is due to her mixed-race heritage on account of her ancestors' colonial past:

Yep, my parents were born in South Africa, which I guess makes me South African too ... It's one of those nasty little colonial legacies. We have IndoMalay slave ancestors who were brought to the Cape, which is where the Muslim bit comes from, but, as always the white masters couldn't keep their hands off their servant women.

GAMIELDIEN, 2023, pp. 133–134

Compounding her ambiguity is the fact that both her parents are not religious themselves. Indeed, her mother, Soraya, notes that Sara's adherence to Islamic practice makes both her and Sara's father Amin "look like such infidels" (Gamieldien, 2023, p. 168); and all of this causes Sara to be routinely questioned about when her parents had converted to Islam and from where they migrated to South Africa (Gamieldien, 2023, p. 44).

Through this familial dynamic Gamieldien brings into stark relief two important realities for the reader. Firstly, she destabilises the notion that 'Muslim' denotes a homogenous category of people; rather, it is a label that houses a broad, diverse spectrum of individuals. That is, being a Muslim is not a marker of religiosity in and of itself. Rather, it is simply one aspect of one's identity, wherein one can be a 'cultural Muslim' or even a 'secular Muslim' (Brubaker, 2013). Secondly, in an understated feminist vein, Gamieldien highlights that one's adherence to faith and the wearing of the hijab is not something that is necessarily imposed, but is, in the case of Sara, a personal agentic choice.

This diversity within Islam is emphasised further in the novel's central but ultimately doomed love story. Sara falls in love with Naeem, an aloof medical student from a notable family of Bangladeshi heritage, and they secretly begin dating and plan to get married. But it is precisely Sara's ambiguousness and difference that are the undoing of their relationship. For example, Naeem confides to his cousin Sadia that he has met someone, and her immediate response is to question, "Is she Bangladeshi?" Then he explains that Sara is Cape Malay and not Bangladeshi, but sees in Sadia's response a portent of what is to come:

He saw Sadia's smile falter. She was considering the information he had presented and in her hesitancy he knew he had not been wrong, that his parents and his family and his social circle would deem his relationship incomprehensible. A girl nobody knew from an obscure ethnicity who he had wholly met of his own accord.

GAMIELDIEN, 2023, pp. 165–166

Here it is clear that although this relationship has a shared register in Islam, differentiated understandings are still ultimately separated by hard cultural boundaries. The implication here, for Naeem, is that he will eventually marry a Muslim woman from the local Bangladeshi community who is known to his family, and that this will be an arrangement brokered by his parents. To put it another way, while Islam is often conceived of in universal terms, it is very much influenced by locality and, when coupled with travel, it forms *translocal* Islams (Bowen, 1998; Mandaville, 2003). Thus, what Gamiel dien has rendered legible for the reader is a multitude of culturally bounded Islams in Australia that are not one and the same. Indeed, this is exemplified at the end of the book where everyone attends the wedding of Ahlam and Ziad from the MSA, who were, from the start, matched by "their shared Lebanese heritage" (Gamiel dien, 2023, p. 16).

In conjunction with detailing the many *translocal* Islams within Australia in this way, Gamiel dien also seeks to dispel the notion that Muslim women are confined to the home as wives and mothers. Through the narrative arc of Abida, she portrays a strong Bangladeshi Muslim woman who is full of ambition and not consumed by the need to find a match:

Abida did not ask Ahlam to elaborate. They both understood that there were those for whom marriage and parenthood were aspirations, and then there were those that would get married and have children because that was just what you did when you reached a certain age. Abida would probably get married and have a child or two, but she would not be

defined by the enterprise. She had observed the alternative and thought it distasteful; having six children has subsumed the entirety of her parents' lives.

GAMIELDIEN, 2023, p. 14

Rather, Abida is the epitome of success and shows that there is an alternative pathway for Muslim women. Illustrative of this is her desire against the odds to run as a candidate for the presidency of the MSA and win the election, even though she does so without a running mate, as Sara is too distracted by her relationship with Naeem. Further, she also lands a clerkship at a top-tier law firm, overcoming the disappointment of subtle racial profiling along the way (Gamiel dien, 2023, pp. 123–126, 31).

Moreover, depictions such as these speak to the reality of the wider Muslim community in Australia, as Jones et al. outlined in Chapter 8 where they profiled Muslim Women Australia (MWA), an organisation that provides culturally and religiously sensitive domestic violence support. Such services are a far cry from the often-sensationalised notion that violence against women is religiously sanctioned and tolerated in Islam, as was the case when Keysar Trad, then the president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), told Andrew Bolt on Sky News Australia that beating women was step three in the process to deal with relationships (Dabbagh, 2017).³ Indeed, MWA is part of a vibrant Muslim not-for-profit sector in Australia that comprised 486 organisations in 2017, 21 of which – or 4% – are dedicated to women's affairs (Tittensor, 2023).

Another part of the ever-growing Muslim not-for-profit sector that is going from strength to strength is the Islamic Museum of Australia (IMA) in Thornbury, Melbourne. Founded in 2014, it hosted its 10th annual gala on October 19, 2024, where the museum announced that it had purchased the adjacent property and is expanding.⁴ The success of the IMA is not just that it provides a safe space for Muslims to engage in self-expression, but also that it acts as a bridge to the wider community, as Cufurovic and Ansari outlined in Chapter 5. For example, the IMA has developed innovative curriculum-aligned resources in a collaboration with SBS Learn to help primary and secondary

3 This approach is based on verse 4:34 of the Qur'an, which states: "But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance – [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them" (Qur'anic Arabic Corpus, 2017). However, a counter to this is the practice of the Prophet Muhammad via the hadith narrated by his wife Aisha, which states: "The Messenger of Allah never beat any of his servants, or wives, and his hand never hit anything" (Sunan Ibn Majah, 2007, hadith 1984).

4 The first author attended the gala.

school students grasp the importance of Ramadan and Eid for Muslims. The aim of the material is to “promote empathy and cultivate deeper cross-cultural understanding” as well as to prompt “independent research” and an appreciation of the Muslim faith (SBS, 2024). In a similar vein, this is our desire for this volume. By highlighting the richness of the contributions of Muslim Australians in diverse areas such as art, literature, architecture, and popular culture – alongside the more standard sociological contributions on the ongoing challenges they face – we hope this collection will inspire researchers to look beyond the hackneyed notions of conflict, difference, and fear, and seek to tell stories that glimpse behind the curtain and give insight into the Australian Muslim ‘backstage’ experience.

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This edited book provides a much-needed update on the field of Islamic Studies in Australia, which has come a long way since the pioneering work of both Riaz Hassan and Gary Bouma to whom this volume is indebted. By highlighting the richness of the contributions of Muslim Australians in diverse areas such as art, literature, architecture and popular culture, alongside the more standard sociological contributions on the ongoing challenges, this book will inspire researchers to look beyond the hackneyed notions of conflict, difference and fear, and seek to tell stories that glimpse behind the curtain and give insight into the Australian Muslim ‘backstage’ experience.

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