

## INTRODUCTION

### **Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China (*Hadith*)<sup>1</sup>**

#### **General Introduction**

This thesis examines the development of Islamic schools in Australia since 1983 when the first two schools were established in Melbourne and Sydney. It investigates how the faith-teaching units are taught in the schools, who teaches them and whether or not an Islamic ethos pervades the ‘hidden curriculum’<sup>2</sup> as well as the faith units. It considers the allegation that Muslim values are incompatible with Australian values, following allegations by opponents of the schools that they promote intolerance and hatred of other faiths. Finally it examines whether the schools are successful in giving their students a confident identity as young Australian Muslims living in an overwhelmingly secular Western society or whether they are simply creating a ghetto that divides them from other Australians.

The first two Islamic schools were opened in Australia almost thirty years ago and today there are over thirty of them. They form a small minority of the growing number of faith schools as Federal Government policy since 1996 has enabled them to get adequate funding to start new ones, but since the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001<sup>3</sup>, they have faced growing community opposition and hostility. According to the 2006 census data, 20.7 per cent of Muslim students attended Islamic schools<sup>4</sup> although in New South Wales,

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<sup>1</sup> S. Haneef, *What everyone should know about Islam and Muslims*. Delhi, 1994, p. 162. The original hadith was narrated from Anas by al-Bayhaqi but its authenticity has been disputed.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘hidden curriculum’ refers to all the other aspects of the school, including the rest of the curriculum, where the question concerns how much of it is also pervaded by an Islamic ethos as opposed to just being the normal school curriculum followed by all other schools. This concept is further explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> The significance of the attacks on the United States cannot be over-emphasised for many Muslims in the West. As one of the schoolgirls interviewed by Scott Poynting in Sydney said to him, ‘9/11 changed everything... September 11 was the worst day for Muslims around the world,’ Scott Poynting, ‘The ‘Lost’ Girls: Muslim Young Women in Australia,’ *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol.30, no.4, 2009, p. 383

<sup>4</sup> Figure quoted by Jennifer Buckingham in *The Rise of Religious Schools*, Centre for Independent Studies Policy Monograph 111, St Leonard’s, NSW, 2010, p. 6.

where almost half of Australia's Muslims live, the figure is only 10 per cent<sup>5</sup>. The national figure increased from nine per cent of Muslim students in 1996 to almost 21 per cent by 2006, or in terms of numbers, from 4,274 to 14, 253<sup>6</sup>. For Muslim parents, there is the question of whether or not these schools are providing their children with the appropriate Islamic education that they seek and whether an Islamic ethos pervades the whole curriculum rather than just covering the faith-teaching units<sup>7</sup>.

Opposition to new Islamic schools or the expansion of existing schools has often been expressed in recent years through the Australian values debate, initiated by the Howard Coalition government in 2003. Much has been written on this subject and the debate culminated in the release of the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools setting out the list of nine Australian values<sup>8</sup>. These were displayed on a poster and sent to every school in Australia (see Appendix Three). As outlined in the two chapters on the issue, the values debate has been conducted equally acrimoniously in Europe where, as in Australia, it has now become a debate on multiculturalism, with the critics of this policy showing their predilections by calling for a moratorium on Muslim immigration. In Australia, as in several other countries, such as Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands, the values debate led to the creation of a citizenship test administered to anyone wishing to become a citizen of their new country.<sup>9</sup>

Many Muslims, as well as critics of the Islamic schools, have expressed fears that what they are really creating are ghettos that isolate the students from mainstream Australian society. The schools themselves argue that their purpose is to create Australian Muslims rather than merely Muslims in Australia and give their students faith in their identity so that they can confidently thrive as a religious minority in a predominantly secular society.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Islamic Schools in NSW', Sydney, The Association of Independent Schools of NSW, 2006, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Buckingham, p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Two pieces of earlier research on the Islamic schools in Melbourne by Begum and Donohue Clyne took the expectations of parents into consideration and are referred to in more detail later in this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Released in May 2005 by the Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson.

<sup>9</sup> Sue Wright, 'Citizenship Tests in Europe – Editorial Introduction', in 'Citizenship Tests in a Post-National Era', *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, UNESCO, Paris, vol. 10, no 1, 2008, pp. 1-9

### **Background to the Islamic schools in Australia**

Most Muslim students in Australia attend state schools but apart from the private Islamic schools, three alternatives that exist for them are other Independent schools, in particular Catholic schools that are often single sex,<sup>10</sup> home schooling,<sup>11</sup> or being sent overseas to schools in Muslim majority countries in Asia or the Middle East. Here the question is raised as to whether the Islamic schools are in any way different from the other faith schools such as those in the Catholic education system. The tradition of independent faith schools is well established in Australia but in recent years has been followed by a rapidly increasing number of conservative Christian options as well as a variety of other traditions and denominations.

As noted earlier, the first two Islamic schools started in 1983 in Melbourne and Sydney, which is hardly surprising as over 80 per cent of Muslims in Australia live in these two cities<sup>12</sup>. Many Muslim families were keen for their children to be educated in an Islamic environment rather than the state education system where religion was traditionally left out of the syllabus or just treated as an option. The education system and curriculum also reflects Australia's Euro-centric origins.

There were several problems facing the early schools. These included lack of knowledge of the procedures involved in setting up a new independent school, obtaining adequate funding, finding a competent principal and trained staff, and getting planning permission for the school. The situation improved after new funding measures introduced by the Howard government in 1996 that were designed to encourage the creation of small faith schools, although these were overwhelmingly conservative Christian schools. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) set out to build a new school in each of the capital cities but owing to the diversity of the Muslim community in Australia, other schools were established by a mixture of individuals, organisations, trusts, and associations. Given the obstacles and difficulties, some did not last very long. Several of the schools faced local community hostility when it came to getting planning permission as all kinds of

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<sup>10</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Oxford, 2004, p.130.

<sup>11</sup> Sally Neighbour, 'A class of their own,' *The Australian*, June 19, 2009. There is also a Muslim Home Schools network website: [www.muslimhomeschool.net](http://www.muslimhomeschool.net)

<sup>12</sup> See Muslim population figures in Chapter 2.

strategies were employed to prevent them starting up<sup>13</sup>, a similar experience to that faced by Muslim associations seeking to open a new mosque.

Nonetheless the schools have continued to grow in number as the Muslim community has grown and today there are over thirty of them in six cities. They have faced increasing community opposition, particularly since the events of September 2001, but most schools have waiting lists and since some of the schools reached Year 12 classes, several of their alumni have returned as staff.

### **Existing research on Islamic schools**

In Australia, while much has been written about the history of private schools, the struggle of the Catholic schools for acceptance, and the older more established Jewish schools, very little has been written about the Islamic schools. Of the four theses that focused on the schools, three were set in Melbourne and one in Sydney. Only one was written in the last decade and it focused on only two schools in Sydney. This point about lack of research on the education of Muslim children was made by Donohoue Clyne<sup>14</sup>, in addition to Berber's later research when he made the same point in his thesis on the role of the principal in establishing and further developing an independent Christian or Islamic school in Australia.<sup>15</sup> Saeed has a concise chapter on Islamic Schools in 'Islam in Australia'<sup>16</sup> and Buckley has written a fairly lengthy though now dated article on the schools but with limited circulation.<sup>17</sup> Donohoue Clyne has a chapter on 'Educating Muslim Children in Australia' as part of a series of contributions from various writers in

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<sup>13</sup> The most recent example was a new campus extension of Malek Fahd Islamic College at Hoxton Park in Sydney being brought to a halt when the local Residents Action Group persuaded the Land and Environment Court to overturn the Liverpool Council's earlier decision in favour of it in 2009. The ostensible reason was that the Council had failed properly to consider the environmental impacts of the development. By then, the school had opened for about 100 students from K-3 who were already attending classes in demountable buildings and more permanent buildings were under construction (23 March 2012). Report in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 2012, [www.smh.com.au/nsw/islamic-schools-da-consent-invalid-20120326-1vuoy.html](http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/islamic-schools-da-consent-invalid-20120326-1vuoy.html), accessed 29 May 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Donohoue Clyne, 'Seeking Education,' unpublished thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Mujgan Berber, 'The role of the principal in establishing and further developing an Independent Christian or Islamic school in Australia,' unpublished thesis, Sydney, 2009, p.63.

<sup>16</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Sydney, 2003, pp. 149-156.

<sup>17</sup> Silma Buckley, 'Islamic Schooling in Australia', *Insight*, Sydney, 1997.

‘Muslim Communities in Australia’<sup>18</sup> but her Ph.D. thesis, ‘Seeking Education: The Struggle of Muslims to Educate their Children in Australia’ (2000) remains unpublished.<sup>19</sup>

Zubeida Begum focused her thesis<sup>20</sup> on the earliest attempt to set up an Islamic school in Melbourne and her involvement in the planning committee set up by AFIC while she was writing it. The school then known as King Khalid Islamic College<sup>21</sup>, opened in 1983, with 66 students, mostly from a Lebanese background. Quoting Kazi<sup>22</sup>, she points to the ethnic diversity within the Islamic community in Australia which prevents them from being a homogenous community, noting that the differences in languages adds to the diversity and thus limits the scope of social interaction. She points out that this diversity is reflected in the views on education, ranging between a flexible approach and a more conservative approach. This often depends where the educators come from, for example Turkey, Egypt, Albania, Yugoslavia or Lebanon. Since her thesis was written in 1982-83, the Muslim community has expanded and further diversified, provoking political tensions over the arrival of asylum seekers largely from Muslim countries like Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Balanced against this, however, is the growing percentage of Muslims born in Australia who are beginning to develop their own identity, though as several students told me, it is not easy responding to racist comments telling them to ‘Go Home’ when Australia is home.

Noha Sanjakdar’s thesis is on ‘Why do Muslim parents choose King Khalid College of Victoria?’<sup>23</sup> This was the first Islamic school in Melbourne and since 2006 has been known as the Australian International Academy. She had attended the school herself and her research was based on interviews with parents about why they sent their children to the college. She stressed that the strengths of the school lay with its reputation for high academic standards – it is the only Islamic school in Australia to teach the International Baccalaureate - and the religious component of the school curriculum. She added that its weaknesses included the need for more art lessons, a more comprehensive Arabic

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<sup>18</sup> Donohue Clyne, ‘Educating Muslim Children in Australia’, pp.116-137.

<sup>19</sup> Thesis viewed at the University of Melbourne, 16 June 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Islam and multiculturalism: with particular reference to Muslims in Victoria., unpublished PhD thesis, Monash, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> The school changed its name to the Australian International Academy in 2006.

<sup>22</sup> A. Kazi, *Islam in Australia. Its past history, present condition and future prospect*, unpublished paper, 1979.

<sup>23</sup> Noha Sanjakdar, ‘Why do Muslim parents choose King Khalid College of Victoria?’ unpublished thesis, Melbourne, 2000. Viewed at the University of Melbourne on 17 September 2008.

programme, greater computer facilities and a more effective discipline policy. Some of these issues have since been addressed but the matters she raised still apply to many of the other schools across the country.

Fida Sanjakdar presented a paper at a conference in Fremantle in 2001 on 'Educating Muslim Children: A Study of the Hidden and Core Curriculum of an Islamic school'<sup>24</sup> while her PhD research at the University of Melbourne was on the need to develop a sexual health education curriculum for Muslim students.<sup>25</sup> Her work will be examined later in the chapter on the 'hidden curriculum' in the Islamic schools.

Three brief articles on Islamic Education in Australia were published in *Insight* by the Islamic Foundation for Education and Welfare in Sydney in 1997<sup>26</sup> but they were very general, although one of the authors called for a wider discussion on the issue. Qazi Askfaq Ahmad said that Islamic education should foster and promote moral and academic excellence in students through a creatively designed curriculum implemented by concerned, inspired and dedicated teaching staff. However he bemoaned the fact that Islamic schools have sprung up all over the place in isolation without any short-term or long-term plan that is identifiable with the community and on-going life activities.

Mohamed Bhaba believes that Muslims in the 'new world' have put too much energy into building mosques rather than putting it into a broad-based Islamic education. He called for not only faith teaching but an awareness of the legacy of Islam and encouragement of an Islamic personality, based on developing learning skills rather than the feeding of information. Elsayed Kandil called for demographic surveys to find out the educational and professional standards among Muslims in Australia in order to promote further educational opportunities in the context of the wider community.

The research involved in writing this thesis is the first to cover schools in all six capital cities and to be based on in depth interviews with both teachers and former students of the schools. Earlier research was based on either one school or one city, and a much more limited outreach, with the most recent research in Sydney based on a survey that only two

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<sup>24</sup> Fida Sanjakdar, 'Educating Muslim Children: A Study of the Hidden and Core Curriculum of an Islamic School', Melbourne, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Fida Sanjakdar, Revelation versus Tradition. Beginning 'curriculum conversation' in health and sexual health education for young Australian Muslims, unpublished thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> E. Kandil, 'Education in Australia; An Islamic perspective', M. Bhabha, 'The Nature of Islamic Education', Q. A. Ahmad, 'Islamic Education in Australia', *Insight*, Sydney, 1997.

Islamic schools responded to. There have been surveys on specific issues, like cross-cultural communication, or research based on interviews in one particular city. Work on alienation of Muslim youth has tended to focus on Sydney where almost 50 per cent of Australia's Muslims live and where the Cronulla riots in 2005<sup>27</sup> triggered some insightful research, conference papers and articles<sup>28</sup>.

This thesis however addresses not only the question of what is taught in these schools but takes into account what both staff and students think about the values debate and the allegations that Islamic values are not compatible with Australian values. It looks at how the students feel about what a specifically Islamic education meant to them and whether they think this prevented their integration into the broader Australian society.

### **Australian views on Islam**

While there has been more research in recent years on the history of the Muslim presence in Australia, such as Bilal Cleland's 'The Muslims in Australia'<sup>29</sup> and his chapter on the same topic in 'Muslim Communities in Australia'<sup>30</sup>, very little of this has penetrated into the current school curriculum, while older Australians grew up with a syllabus that was overwhelmingly Euro-Centric. A number of articles and reports have been commissioned to find out how much Australians know about Islam or how they view Muslims in the community or in schools such as Kevin Dunn's report in *Studia Islamika* in Indonesia in 2006.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the same poll, one Anglican Bishop<sup>32</sup> observed that the figure would probably be similar to knowledge of and attitudes towards Christianity. While this may be true, the difference is that ignorance of Islam fuels hostility towards Muslims in

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<sup>27</sup> The Cronulla Riots in Sutherland Shire in December 2005 involved conflict between Lebanese-Australian young men and other young people who saw themselves as the real (Anglo) Australians. The clashes started on Cronulla beach but spread to other Sydney suburbs.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Nahid Kabir's paper, 'The Cronulla Riot: how one newspaper represented the event,' Perth, 2006. Also Arthur Saniotis, 'Embodying ambivalence: Muslim Australians as 'other', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 82, 2004, pp. 49-59.

<sup>29</sup> Bilal Cleland, *The Muslims in Australia. A Brief History*, Melbourne, 2002

<sup>30</sup> Cleland in A. Saeed and S. Akbarzadeh (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sydney, 2001

<sup>31</sup> K. Dunn, 'Australian public knowledge of Islam,' *Studia Islamika*, vol 12, no 1, pp 1-32, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Brain, the Anglican Bishop of Armidale. ABC News, 20 March 2006

Australia who are frequently inflicted with negative images about Islam. Maher<sup>33</sup> is another researcher who makes the point that the sources of knowledge about general social attitudes are for many Australians from media sources<sup>34</sup>, adding that social interaction with Muslims does have a positive impact on people's attitudes, and that social interaction in youth is important in the development of attitudes<sup>35</sup>.

Research on the way the media portrays Muslims in Australia is fairly extensive, such as 'Islam and the Australian News Media'<sup>36</sup>, Howard Brasted's chapter on 'Contested Representations in Historical Perspective: Images of Islam and Australian Press, 1950-2000',<sup>37</sup> and Abdalla and Rane, 'Knowing One Another: An Antidote for Mass Media Islam'<sup>38</sup>, which deals specifically with media representations of Islam in Queensland. Alice Aslan also has a chapter on the role of the Australian media in 'Islamophobia'<sup>39</sup>. These outline the way in which certain sections of the media have deliberately targeted Muslims with negative stories, particularly at times like the Gulf War (1990-91), the war against Iraq, the 2001 attacks on the United States and the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005. The 7/7 London bombings in 2005 were viewed as particularly horrific as the 'home-grown terrorists' who planted the bombs grew up in England<sup>40</sup>. Headline stories often focus on some of the more controversial preachers with extreme views, such as *Sheikh* Taj ad-din al-Hilali at the Lakemba mosque in Sydney<sup>41</sup> and more conservative Islamic groups like Hizb

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<sup>33</sup> Kate Maher, 2009, 'Social interaction and attitudes towards Australian Muslims: 'we' and 'they' constructions', Proceedings of the Australian Sociological Association 2009 Annual Conference, ANU, Canberra, [www.tasa.org.au/conference/conferencepapers09/](http://www.tasa.org.au/conference/conferencepapers09/)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> H. Rane, J. Ewart, M. Abdalla (eds.) *Islam and the Australian News Media*, Carlton, Victoria, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Howard Brasted, 'Contested Representations in Historical Perspective: Images of Islam and Australian Press, 1950-2000,' in Ather Farouqui (ed), *Muslims and Media Images. News versus views*, Oxford, 2009, pp. 58-90.

<sup>38</sup> M. Abdalla & H. Rane, 'Knowing One Another: An Antidote for Mass Media Islam', based on the report, *The Impact of Media Representations on the Understanding of Islam and Attitudes towards Muslims in Queensland*, [http://www.griffith.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/52083/MAQ.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/52083/MAQ.pdf), accessed 27 April 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Alice Aslan, *Islamophobia*, Sydney, 2009, pp. 134-142.

<sup>40</sup> This is particularly emphasised by Poynting in his article on 'The 'Lost ' Girls: Muslim Young Women in Australia', p.374.

<sup>41</sup> A brief outline of the sheikh's controversial role and his views about women are recounted in 'Australian Muslim Voices,' in G. Doogue and P. Kirkwood, *Tomorrow's Islam. Uniting age-old beliefs and a modern world*, Sydney, 2005, pp. 307-308.

ut-Tahrir<sup>42</sup> (Party of Liberation), giving the impression that all Muslims endorse their views. A number of newspaper columnists, such as Andrew Bolt<sup>43</sup> and radio ‘shock-jocks’ such as Alan Jones<sup>44</sup>, regularly target Muslims.

These stories and photos help to build up the negative impression of Muslims in Australia as a monolithic block committed to violence, the oppression of women and intolerance. Saeed, in ‘Islam in Australia’, has an insightful chapter on ‘Unity and Diversity’ among Australia’s Muslims, as well as his opening chapter on ‘Who are Australia’s Muslims?’<sup>45</sup> Quoting Hanifa Deen in ‘Identity, Education and Belonging’, Fethi Mansouri and Sally Percival-Wood, reiterate this point about stereotypes that ignore the enormous diversity among Australian Muslims and which define them as less than human: ‘veiled women, fierce bearded men, barbaric parents, rapists and suicide bombers – these are the images taken to represent Islam.’<sup>46</sup> Their interviews with young Arab-Australian school students carried out between 2003 and 2007 as part of the Diversity Project, describe the negative impact these images have on the teenage students interviewed at two state schools in the North Western suburbs of Melbourne.<sup>47</sup>

Another research study in 2007 confirmed the impact of these negative images, showing that almost half of Australians believe Muslims have an adverse effect on social harmony and national security while 35 per cent believe they threaten to change the Australian way of life. However the study also found that such beliefs were often based on misunderstanding with only 20 per cent of people having regular contact with Muslims and most thinking there are far more Muslims in Australia than the 340,000 indicated in the 2006 census.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> There is a detailed footnote on this movement in Chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> Such as his attack on ‘Learning From One Another: Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools,’ in ‘“Famous” Bin Laden: teaching children our fear of terrorism is racist,’ *Herald Sun*, 11 July 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Nahid Kabir refers to the role of Alan Jones on 2GB at the time of the Cronulla Riot in 2005, ‘The Cronulla Riot: How one newspaper represented the event,’ Perth, 2006. Aslan also describes his role in her chapter on ‘Muslims in the Australian Media’, pp. 138-140.

<sup>45</sup> Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, chs. 1 and 5

<sup>46</sup> Fethi Mansouri and Sally Percival Wood, *Identity, Education and Belonging*, Islamic Studies Series, Carlton. Victoria, 2008, p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>48</sup> Study conducted by Deliberation Australia, reported in article by Mike Steketee, ‘Myths about Muslims widen religious gulf’, *The Australian*, 15 September 2007.

It is in light of these findings, that Dunn's conclusion is so important, that contact with Muslims could have dramatic and positive effects by reducing intolerance. This is why one of the crucial research questions examined in this thesis concerns the allegation that Islamic schools actually teach intolerance and also asks students whether or not their schools encourage dialogue opportunities with other young Australians.

Several surveys on Muslim-Christian relations have also been carried out amongst students, exploring inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural differences as well as how each group perceives 'the other'. Abe Ata from the Australian Catholic University published his book of essays, 'Us & Them: Muslim-Christian Relations and Cultural Harmony in Australia' in 2009<sup>49</sup>, including a chapter on the attitudes of school age non-Muslim Australians towards Muslims and Islam. This was based on a national survey of 1,000 students enrolled at twenty secondary schools in six states and territories, and another on the attitudes of school-age Muslim Australians towards Australia based on 430 completed questionnaires from Year 10-12 students at eight schools in six states and territories. His conclusions suggest that a lot of work remains on how both communities, Muslim and non-Muslim, can improve their perceptions of each other and in particular, provide knowledge to counter the stereotypes that so many young people acquire from their homes and the mass media.

### **Australians and the 'Other'; the issue of identity**

The issue of values is central to this thesis insofar as allegations of promoting incompatible values is one of the charges made against the Islamic schools arising from the wider community debate that followed the events in the United States in 2001, the ensuing war in Afghanistan and the bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005. Critics of the schools argued that Muslim values were incompatible with Australian values and that they actually taught intolerance and hatred of other faiths. This in turn affects young Muslims who ask whether or not they belong in Australia as a result of this hostility. There is also the contradiction over the question of why there has never been a scrutiny of values applied to the other faith schools in Australia, ranging from the Catholics and the Quakers to the Jewish schools, which have all been in existence over many years.

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<sup>49</sup> Abe Ata, *Us & Them, Muslim-Christian Relations and Cultural Harmony in Australia*, Brisbane, 2009. Findings also summarised in Abe Ata and Joel Windle, 'The role of Australian schools in educating students about Islam and Muslims', *Australian Quarterly*, Sydney, 2007.

A substantial number of books and articles have been published on the issue of values since then, both in Australia and in Europe. In terms of the Australian values debate, Raimond Gaita's 'Muslims and Multiculturalism'<sup>50</sup> contributes a series of thought provoking essays by Australian academics while Nahid Kabir's article in *People and Place*, 'What does it mean to be Un-Australian?'<sup>51</sup>, is based on interviews with 60 Muslim students in Sydney and Perth conducted in the winter of 2006. Kabir also carried out interviews with 32 Muslim students, aged 15-18, from two state schools in Sydney, and published her findings in 'Are young Muslims adopting Australian values?'<sup>52</sup>

The main publication on the issue of identity is a set of papers published in the Islamic Studies Series, 'Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion'.<sup>53</sup> Yasmeen, who edits the book as well as contributing to it, explains the nature of the dynamics as they pertain to the Muslim community in Australia while other writers develop the theme, in particular, Humphrey with his paper on 'Secularisation, Social Inclusion and Muslims in Australia'. Danielle Celermajer, in her paper on 'Inclusion, Trust and Democracy', makes the important observation that 'hostility to Islam dominates analyses of Muslim exclusion'<sup>54</sup>.

When the Rudd Labor Government set up a review<sup>55</sup> of the Howard Government's Citizenship Test introduced under the Australian Citizenship Act 2007, 'it found that the test was being used as an instrument of social exclusion rather than an invitation to join the Australian community as full-fledged members'<sup>56</sup>, with Northcote and Casimiro arguing

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<sup>50</sup> R. Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims & Multiculturalism*, Melbourne, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> N. Kabir, 'What does it mean to be Un-Australian? Views of Australian Muslim students in 2006', *People and Place*, vol 15, no 1, 2007, pp. 62-79.

<sup>52</sup> N. Kabir, 'Are young Muslims adopting Australian values?' *Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 52, No 3, 2008, pp. 229-241.

<sup>53</sup> S. Yasmeen, (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* Danielle Celermajer, 'Inclusion, Trust and Democracy. Interfaith and Faith-Secular Dialogues as Strategies for Muslim Inclusion', p. 235.

<sup>55</sup> The review took place in 2008 and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, reported its findings in November that year, Chris Bowen MP, 'New Citizenship test to focus on responsibilities and privileges,' Canberra, 22 November.

[www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08110.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08110.htm)

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy Northcote and Suzy Casimiro, 'Muslim Citizens and Belonging in Australia. Negotiating the Inclusive/Exclusive Divide in a Multicultural Context,' in S. Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia*, p. 144.

that the ambiguity involved in the test ‘can have a particular effect on Muslim constructions of identity and belonging in terms of the practical issues of everyday living.’<sup>57</sup>

The issue of identity is explored in some depth in ‘Geographies of Muslim identities’<sup>58</sup> although apart from the Introduction, the case studies deal specifically with particular areas, groups or countries such as Germany, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Central Asia and South Asian Women, but the only reference to Australia is in a chapter on the Muslim Iranian Diaspora<sup>59</sup>.

The issue of why the citizenship tests in Europe were introduced is analysed by Sue Wright in ‘Citizenship Tests in a Post-National Era’<sup>60</sup>, though she concedes her interpretation is a personal view as there is no consensus in other literature on the tests or in the other articles in the journal. However her analysis might equally apply to Australia when she asserts ‘that the timing of their introduction suggests that they may have a gate keeping mechanism, designed to make it harder for would-be citizens to join the nation.’

While much of the literature is drawn from Australia and Europe, very little of it refers explicitly to the Islamic schools in Australia and what the teachers and students think. The research done so far tends to be focused either on Melbourne or Sydney or relies on surveys rather than personal interviews with people in the schools. As such the existing literature feeds into a useful background picture to the situation of Muslims as a minority or ‘the Other’ in Australia. However it does not respond to the key questions about how the religion units are taught in the Islamic schools, how far the ‘hidden Islamic curriculum’ goes in terms of other subjects taught, what the students thought about the Australian values debate or what these young Australian Muslims feel about their identity now they have left school and can look back on how they feel about their experience in the schools. The literature from Europe is helpful, as a lot more research has been done there, just as it has among sections of Muslim youth in Australia once they are out of school, but the research for this thesis is geared specifically to the Islamic schools in this country and as such, it is hoped that it will complement existing literature in other areas.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> C. Aitchison, P. Hopkins and M Kwan, *Geographies of Muslim Identity. Diaspora, Gender and Belonging*, Aldershot, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, C. McAuliffe, ‘Visible Minorities: Constructing and Deconstructing the ‘Muslim Iranian’ Diaspora’, pp. 29-55.

<sup>60</sup> S. Wright, (ed), *Citizenship Tests in a Post-National Era*.

### **Research Questions**

As suggested at the outset, the thesis essentially considers three main issues where very little research has been undertaken to date in the Australian context. These concern what is taught in the schools, the question of whether Muslim values conveyed to the students are incompatible with Australian values including whether the schools promote intolerance of other faiths, and whether for the students, being taught at an Islamic school positively strengthens their Muslim identity or instead acts to exclude them from the wider community.

#### **\* What exactly is taught in Islamic schools?**

This series of questions covers not only what is conveyed to the students in the faith-teaching classes but also inquires who teaches these subjects and how well they are taught. In addition it looks at whether there is a 'hidden curriculum' that pervades the rest of the curriculum to give an Islamic ethos throughout the life of the school? There are some useful comparisons to be made here with the other faith schools in Australia, in particular the Catholic education system. As Walid Aly has pointed out<sup>61</sup>, Catholics were once the folk devils of Australia, so there is also an analogy here with the perception of Muslims as the current folk devil in Australia. Given the increasing number of faith schools, it is useful to see how they relate to the issues and controversies that distinguish them as faith schools and what their different responses are. Faith schools in Australia today come not only from the traditional Christian denominations, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, but also various conservative Christian groups ranging from the Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostals to the Assemblies of God and the Exclusive Brethren. Issues they confront include financial viability, as many of them are fairly small (56 per cent have less than 200 students)<sup>62</sup>, whether teachers and principals have to be members of the faith and whether the religion teachers are adequately trained as classroom teachers.

Another important issue is whether the schools are co-educational as faith schools have traditionally been segregated on a gender basis and this has always had a strong appeal for a section of the Australian community. In addition, there is the question of the

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<sup>61</sup> W. Aly, 'Monoculturalism, Muslims and Myth making' in Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*, Melbourne, 2011, p.55.

<sup>62</sup> Independent Schools Council of Australia, Snapshot 2009 figures, [www.isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Snapshot-09.pdf](http://www.isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Snapshot-09.pdf)

availability of relevant texts, attitudes to technology and how they handle controversial issues like health education and evolution.

The largest private education sector in Australia has always been the Catholic sector. Catholics represent 25.8 per cent of Australians (2006 census figures<sup>63</sup>) and one in five Australian secondary students attend Catholic schools. Catholic schools developed from the 1830s although this was at a time when most Australian children did not go to school at all and the early Catholic community found itself overwhelmed with the demand. They lacked trained teachers, they lacked adequate buildings and they just used any textbook they could lay their hands on.

Church leaders appealed for help from overseas, particularly from Ireland, and soon the teaching orders like the Christian Brothers and Jesuits responded to the call. The Irish bishops who came to Australia ‘insisted that education must take place in, and be infused by, a religious atmosphere, which would act upon the child’s whole character of mind and heart’<sup>64</sup>. For the bishops, the secular system had no moral virtues. There are several relevant analogies here with the establishment of the Islamic schools in Australia. In addition, the role of the Catholic church in fighting for the right to a values based education system and for state funding for their schools have set a precedent for the Islamic schools, and this history will be traced in more detail in Chapter Three.

Another relevant comparison is with the Jewish schools in Australia, where compared to Catholics, there is a more definite connection with Judaism. However this connection is not always manifested in terms of regular participation in the activities of the Jewish community, apart from students coming from Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox families. This is because being Jewish is not necessarily a religious commitment as you can be Jewish by birth as well as by faith, and some families are content for their children just to be aware of the tradition they come from rather than becoming a religious practitioner of Judaism. Today there are about 100,000 Jews in Australia and some 20 schools, with ten in Melbourne and six in Sydney<sup>65</sup>. More than 68 per cent of Jewish students attend an Independent School.<sup>66</sup> However each of the Jewish schools represents one of the several

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<sup>63</sup> ABS data 2006. Census of Population and Housing, Table 14.38. Major Religious Affiliations

<sup>64</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community. An Australian History*, Sydney, 1985, p. 160.

<sup>65</sup> Jewish Australia website: <[www.jewishaustralia.com](http://www.jewishaustralia.com)>

<sup>66</sup> Figure cited by Buckingham from 2006 census data, p. 6.

different branches of Judaism, with the result that some of the more Ultra-Orthodox ones are very small. While the Catholic schools now accept non-Catholic children, the Jewish schools are more like the Islamic schools, insofar as while they might be willing to take students who are not members of their faith, few non-Jewish parents would see little or no point in sending their children to them. Consequently very few other children have attended these schools, though it has happened.

One other denomination worth examining is the Exclusive Brethren schools because according to Buckingham, they are the ones that have seen the most rapid growth in the decade, 1996-2006<sup>67</sup>. In addition, along with the Islamic schools, they have also attracted the most media attention<sup>68</sup>. The Brethren schools have the unique problem of having to employ non-Brethren staff because church members are not allowed to go to university. The schools only started in 1993 in Australia and are very small but their existence means that they can implement some of their faith teachings like not eating with non-believers (Brethren children attending state schools have to go home at lunchtime). There is an interesting parallel with Islam, which the media conveniently ignore, as women members of the Brethren are obliged to have long hair (1 Corinthians 14, v 34) and cover their heads, though not as totally as with the *hijab*. Beyond school, the Brethren also forbid marriage with people outside the religion and they take literally St Paul's injunction for women to hold their silence (1 Timothy 2, verse 11) and not to minister over men (1 Corinthians 14, verse 34). The Brethren schools have attracted media attention because of charges over funding arrangements and allegations by former teachers that the students are brainwashed.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the Brethren are forbidden to vote, a line not taken by the vast majority of Muslims in Australia, though a view held by some more extreme elements on the Islamist spectrum. The term 'Islamist' can be considered here as an umbrella concept, because there is no precise definition of the term and scholars differ on how they define it. Roy equates it with the idea of those who want to build an Islamic state<sup>70</sup> while Eickelman and Piscatori<sup>71</sup> use it to describe Muslims whose consciousness has been objectified although they differ on 'who speaks for Islam.' However they envisage their vision of

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<sup>67</sup> Buckingham, p. ix.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> 'Exclusive Brethren enjoying \$1m taxpayer windfall' (*Australian*, 13 January 2010), 'Exclusive Brethren parents claim 'tax lurk of biblical proportions' (*Age*, 28 March 2011), 'Exclusive Brethren school kids 'brainwashed' (*Australian*, 25 September 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam*, p. 2

<sup>71</sup> Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 1996, p. 44

Islam as a corrective to current “unIslamic” practices. Kurzman<sup>72</sup> describes Islamism as ‘revivalist Islam’, which he describes as the alternative to customary Islam but adds that it is also known variously as fundamentalism or Wahhabism, a descriptive term which other scholars would differ over.

**\* How did the Australian values debate impact on the schools and the students?**

Islamic education was put under the spotlight after 2003 by the Australian values debate. Although the Islamic schools were given a boost by the new funding arrangements introduced by the Howard government in 1996, at the same time they suffered from the rising tide of Islamophobia. Even before the events of September 2001, the schools had been a target for attacks<sup>73</sup> along with the general Muslim community. However the focus of opposition to the schools after 2001 was to become ‘Australian values,’ with those opposing the existence of the schools<sup>74</sup> arguing that Muslim values were incompatible with Australian values<sup>75</sup> and demanding that the government needed to thoroughly check on what was taught in the schools. This of course ignored the fact that the Federal Government already monitored all schools in Australia but the accusations were to lead to the broader Australian values debate in the community and the media. Critics of this debate asserted that it was just a cover for attacks on Islam and Muslims in general, questioning the government’s commitment to its own list of official values<sup>76</sup>. Many of the Islamic schools asserted that they already taught ‘values’<sup>77</sup> and the content of the Muslim Schools charter<sup>78</sup> first endorsed in 2001, suggested that the wider community had nothing to fear from what was taught in the schools. This however did not stop opposition to new Islamic schools nor to the

<sup>72</sup> Kurzman, *Liberal Politics. A Sourcebook*, 1998, p.5

<sup>73</sup> S. Poynting and V. Mason, ‘The resistible rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001’, *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 61-86, <http://jos.sagepub.com/content/43/1/61>, viewed 1 May 2012. Nahid Kabir also has a chapter on this, mentioning attacks on Islamic schools and students, ‘The 1990-1991 Gulf Crisis: Impact on Muslims in Australia,’ in *Muslims in Australia*, pp. 207-254.

<sup>74</sup> For example, the Camden School Protest Site, referred to in Chapter 7.

<sup>75</sup> Or as Michael Humphrey puts it, ‘Islam is represented as culturally incompatible with multicultural society (or Western secular society),’ in his chapter, ‘Secularisation, Social Inclusion and Muslims in Australia,’ in Samina Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, Carlton, Victoria, 2010, p. 57-58.

<sup>76</sup> for examples of such criticism, see R. Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*, Melbourne, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> For example, ‘Prominent Muslim educators argue that values are already being taught in Islamic schools’ in ‘Battlelines drawn on values,’ *Age*, 5 September 2005.

<sup>78</sup> For text, see Appendix 2.

expansion of existing schools, with the same accusations being made as before. In the fieldwork for this thesis, the issue of values was central to the questions given to staff and former students of the Islamic schools, though students who were at school before 2003 were unable to respond to the specific question on the values debate. The background to the Australian values debate and student responses are covered in detail in Chapter Seven.

**\* Have the schools been effective in giving students a clear identity as young Australian Muslims ready to take their part in the wider Australian community or are they contributing to the creation of a ghetto?**

This question is central to many of the arguments about the exclusion or inclusion of Muslims in Australian society. Jeremy Northcote and Suzy Casimiro<sup>79</sup> call for more research on the discourse on identity that permeates Muslim communities, as they have been grossly under-researched, so the question to participants in the Islamic schools is designed to respond to this call. The schools assert that they exist to provide their students with a clear identity as Australian Muslims and strike a balance between giving them knowledge and self-confidence as young Muslims and, at the same time, involving them in the wider community with non-Muslim students and activities. Samina Yasmeen, in the same book,<sup>80</sup> acknowledges that the schools play a role in ‘developing the set of ideas that have guided Muslims in Australia in which they are operating’ and help young Muslims to construct a firm religious identity as well as providing them information on the world as it exists.

Despite these efforts, there are still commentators in the media who see the schools as divisive, preventing full participation of their female students in education and Australian society.<sup>81</sup> The writer, Tariq Ramadan, though not opposing Islamic schools in principle, warns of the danger of such closed spaces cutting students off from the surrounding society<sup>82</sup>. The charge of creating Muslim ghettos is also made in the European context by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She warns of Wahhabis and other wealthy extremists seeking to isolate and indoctrinate vulnerable groups of children.<sup>83</sup> J. Mark Halstead and Terence McLaughlin have responded to these allegations in the British context with their chapter, ‘Are Faith

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<sup>79</sup> Northcote and Casimiro, ‘Muslim Citizens and Belonging in Australia. Negotiating the Inclusive/Exclusive Divide in a Multicultural Context,’ pp. 152-153.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, Yasmeen, ‘Conclusion. Promoting Social Inclusion’, pp. 292-293.

<sup>81</sup> A. Saeed, ‘Islamic Schools’ in *Islam in Australia*, p. 57.

<sup>82</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, p. 131.

<sup>83</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad. A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilisations*, New York, 2010, p. 20. There is a detailed footnote on this author in Chapter 3.

Schools Divisive?’<sup>84</sup>. However to date, no research has been conducted in Australia in terms of asking the students themselves whether they feel that attending Islamic schools divides them from other students and the wider society, although Feristah Celik, the Values/Harmony Coordinator at the Australian International Academy in Melbourne, has published an article, ‘Are Faith Based Schools Divisive? A response from Australian International Academy’<sup>85</sup>.

As far as Australia is concerned, there has been little research on these questions compared to the situation in Europe and North America. This thesis then is a study based on six years of field research in Islamic Schools in the six capital cities of Australia. It explores the development of these schools since the first two started in Sydney and Melbourne in 1983. In particular, despite fears in the wider Australian community and prejudice against Muslims in general, the argument is presented that in terms of values and curriculum, the schools are virtually no different from most other faith schools in Australia, although there are one or two on the fringe<sup>86</sup> where it is harder to know exactly what goes on in them.

Given fears and general ignorance of Islam in much of Australian society, the thesis also explores whether the schools are sites of inclusion or exclusion for the students who attend them, taking into account that these schools only accommodate 20 per cent of Muslim students in Australia. The thesis also considers the question of how Muslim students develop and maintain an Islamic identity in an increasingly Islamophobic society, particularly since 2001. It explores this dimension within the context of the Australian values debate that was initiated by Brendan Nelson as Minister of Education (2001-2006) in the Howard government, with reference to allegations that Islamic values were incompatible with Australian values, and with the view in some sections of the community that Muslims in general did not fit into Australian society. This argument was prominent in the opposition to the proposed school at Camden (near Campbelltown, south west of Sydney) in 2007-2009.

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<sup>84</sup> J. Mark Halstead and Terence McLaughlin, ‘Are Faith Schools Divisive’ in Cairns and Gardner (eds), *Faith Schools: Conflict or Consensus?* Abingdon, 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Feristah Celik, ‘Are Faith Based Schools Divisive?’ ACIES Newsletter, Semester 1, 2008, p.7

<sup>86</sup> This includes the Darul Uloom College in Fawkner that does not respond to requests for visits and is affiliated to the Tablighi Jama’at. See Chapter 2 for further details on this school.

None of the existing research on the Islamic schools has been conducted since 2001 yet this is the period when significant changes have taken place with regard to the situation of Muslims in Australia. As Shahram Akbarzadeh notes, migrants to Australia in the early period before 1980 were classified largely by their ethnicity, rather than religion. He goes on to point out that since the ‘war on terror’, Islamic community groups have set out to assert their collective religious identity while at the same time, reiterating their loyalty to Australia.<sup>87</sup> The question therefore remains, what role have the Islamic schools taken in this changed climate, asserting their identity as Muslims but also as Australians?

Particularly since 2001, growing hostility to the Muslim community in Australia has often been based on wild accusations of what Muslims believe and in relation to the schools, what is taught to the students. Letter writers to the press have accused the schools of teaching hatred and jihad against Jews and the West<sup>88</sup>, or the students being forbidden to mix with Christians.<sup>89</sup> Opponents of the proposed Camden school said that the school would be a breeding ground for terrorists<sup>90</sup> and that the school’s backers advocated a political, ideological position that was incompatible with the Australian way of life.<sup>91</sup> One speaker told the Court that, ‘they will teach war and how to kill, Islamic science, *shari’a* law, terrorism.’<sup>92</sup> Rev. Fred Nile, MLC, leader of the Christian Democratic Party in the New South Wales State Parliament, quoted from the *Qur’an* at a public protest meeting at Camden in December 2007 saying that it called on Muslims to hate Christians.<sup>93</sup> The hate site, Australian Islamist Monitor<sup>94</sup>, specifically stated as one of its aims, ‘Islamic schools can exist only under strict government supervision and guidelines.’ This ignores the fact that they already do as a pre-condition for state funding.

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<sup>87</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, 2011, ‘Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Question of the Silent Majority’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 31, no 3, p. 310.

<sup>88</sup> A typical example of this accusation was a letter from a Michael Adler of Mount Waverley in *Age*, 6 July 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Such a letter appeared in the Hobart *Mercury* asserting that ‘Muslim kids attending religious schools are forbidden to mix with the mainly Christian community.’ 12 July 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Judith Bond, local Camden resident, speaking at the Land and Environment Court hearing, reported in ‘No lessons here’, *Australian*, 3 June 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Australian Islamist Monitor website, ‘Our objectives’, [islammonitor.org](http://islammonitor.org), accessed 2 June 2011.

<sup>92</sup> Judith Bond, 2009.

<sup>93</sup> As reported on the PM programme on ABC radio, 20 December 2007.

<sup>94</sup> Australian Islamist Monitor : <[islammonitor.org](http://islammonitor.org)>

These views fit in with the findings of Kevin Dunn<sup>95</sup> whose survey of 1,300 people found that only one in six Australians had a good understanding of Islam and its followers while one-third claimed complete ignorance about the religion. Whether or not people felt threatened by Islam partly depended on their knowledge of the religion, though even 46 per cent of those with a reasonable or better knowledge still felt threatened by it. The most common negative stereotypes of Islam were that it is a fundamentalist (27 per cent) and intolerant (24 percent) religion. The next most common Islamic stereotypes were that its adherents were fanatical (11 percent) and hostile to women (11 percent). In addition, more than half the people surveyed had no contact with Muslims (55 percent) and these were most likely to be women, people with no tertiary training and the over-50s. People with no contact with Islam were twice as likely (45 percent) to be ignorant of it, compared to those who had some contact with Islam (21 percent)<sup>96</sup>. He concluded,

Australians' views of Islam and its followers are worrying but hopeful. The linkages between ignorance, lack of contact, feelings of threat and stereotyping of Islam is saddening. But it's not all bad news. I think we could build more tolerant, informed views if we promote greater contact and education, and encourage greater visibility and celebration by Muslims of their faith.<sup>97</sup>

The misunderstanding and ignorance in much of the wider community along with the kind of allegations made in Camden have made it difficult for new Islamic schools to get planning permission, despite the extraordinary growth in the number of faith schools in Australia since 1996. This is why researching what is actually taught in the faith units and the curriculum as a whole is central to this thesis, hopefully to feed into the schools, policymakers and the mainstream media of Australian society. However it is unlikely that the findings will do anything to sway the opinions of the more extreme opponents of the schools. They are just as likely to select and distort texts from the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* as

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<sup>95</sup> K. Dunn in *Studia Islamika, the Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, reported in 'Ignorance rules our knowledge of Islam' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 2006, and Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education, Erebus International Report, Sydney, 2006, pp. 9-10.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

the Islamists who can be equally selective in their distortion of the sacred texts to justify patriarchy, religious intolerance and the use of violence to achieve their ends.

For Muslims, seeing other faith schools as an integral part of the Australian education system, the question was somewhat different. How could they develop a clear identity as Australians and Muslims in a predominantly secular society? As one school principal put it during an informal conversation, are the schools fulfilling their aim of producing Australian Muslims, not an Australian who is a Muslim? <sup>98</sup> This forms the focus of the questions on values as well as the final chapter on inclusion or exclusion where research has been carried out with some sections of the Muslim community in Australia<sup>99</sup>, but none has been carried out in the Islamic schools to date.

This introduction sets out the background to the study, the research questions put to the participants in the interviews, and its aims and objectives within the current debate over faith schools, Australian values and the position of Muslims in a predominantly secular but increasingly multicultural society. This thesis builds on the figures for the increasing number of Islamic schools and the growing number of students attending them by looking in more detail at whether what is taught in them is what the parents and students are looking for. In addition it seeks to complement the existing literature that at the moment mainly comes from Europe and North America. What makes this thesis different is that it is based on acquiring knowledge drawn from a wide range of interviews right across Australia.

### **Methodology**

The title of this research – Islamic Schools in Australia: Muslims in Australia or Australian Muslims? – was originally chosen (2006) because it seemed to sum up the question facing Muslims in Australia today in light of the Australian Values debate and its extension, the debate over multiculturalism. In the days of White Australia, the question of identity focused on Catholics and their loyalty to Australia, with the right to set up separate Catholic schools very much part of the debate. It was a long and difficult struggle for both acceptance and funding but now Catholic schools are very much an integral part of the Australian education scene, although the argument over funding of private and public education still continues. Today, the focus has been transferred to the existence of Muslims as part of Australian society and their right to have their own schools. Just as it was for

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<sup>98</sup> Personal interview, 8 September 2004

<sup>99</sup> For example, N. Kabir, 'Are young Muslims adopting Australian values?' *Australian Journal of Education*, vol.52, no.3, 2008, pp. 229-241.

Catholics, Muslims are questioned about whether or not their so-called values are compatible with mainstream Australian values and critics allege that what is taught in Islamic schools is incompatible with bringing up our children as Australian citizens holding these values.

Research on the Islamic schools in Australia to date has been focused on one or two schools in a single state, though more has been written about multiculturalism. Opposition to new Islamic schools continues but surprisingly very little has been written about them in recent years, apart from research in the general area of Australian values, following the launching of the Australian Values debate. For this reason, it seemed timely to initiate research based on primary sources, the schools themselves, with questions designed to elicit information and comment from a range of participants around Australia, both staff and former students.

The research design involves a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to gather the material that forms the core of the thesis. It was felt that the purpose of this research, an adequate cross-section would involve interviews with 50 teachers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to be conducted in the schools, following a letter of introduction sent to school principals. In addition, 31 interviews would be conducted with former students of the schools, although finding subjects would be a rather haphazard process as there was no straightforward way to locate them. As no other research in Australia had been constructed along these lines, it was crucial to first follow Woods' advice<sup>100</sup>, 'that the researcher needs to develop a certain rapport with the subjects of the study and to win their trust'. This was particularly important, as many Islamic schools and institutions were suspicious of non-Muslim researchers who in the past had then published negative and critical reports despite the welcome extended to them. In my case, I was able to stress my credentials as a teacher of Comparative Religion who had visited a number of Muslim countries and who had published an earlier thesis on Islamic Schools in Australia for my Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies, which I was happy to share with them. With the former students of the Islamic schools, it was more a question of personal recommendation as this proved the only way to find them in the first place.

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<sup>100</sup> Peter Woods, *Qualitative Research*, University of Plymouth, 2006.

The approach taken was also one of what Lofland<sup>101</sup> describes as ‘open research’ although limited by being perceived as an ‘outsider researcher role.’ However prior connections made entry to the schools and finding students much easier. Teaching about Islam at both high school and tertiary level, as well as having pursued a course in Islamic Studies at university, meant that I had some credibility in an Islamic school as well as an understanding of the terms used, particularly by teachers of Islamic Studies. I did not, however, claim to be able to read Arabic, despite knowing many of the relevant terms used about Islam in Arabic, although I have read the Qur’an in translation.

As interviews are one of the main methods employed in qualitative research, the questions had to be drawn up in advance and endorsed by the University Ethics Committee. This required participants to be over eighteen while anonymity was maintained through omitting any names or reference to the schools they taught or had attended. All interviews were taped then transcribed before copies were sent to participants for their endorsement. No transcripts were rejected.

The staff who were formally interviewed were drawn from ten schools in five cities although a total of nineteen schools were visited over the six year period of research. I started by meeting the principal, ‘the gatekeeper’<sup>102</sup>, sometimes for a second time, then being allowed to tape the interviews in a small private room or the staff room. Each school arranged for a number of staff to meet me when they could fit in 15-20 minutes, though sometimes the interviews went on for longer. By the conclusion of the process, of staff interviewed, 33 were Muslims and 17 were not. In addition, 29 were men and 21 were women. Six younger teachers interviewed were former students at Islamic schools so could be interviewed in both capacities.

In each school, apart from one, I got to interview the imam but a number of other staff interviewed sometimes taught units in Islamic Studies as well. The faith teaching units in all schools covered Islamic Studies, Arabic and the Qur’an, though sometimes these subjects were merged. When talking to imams, I always asked them where they had been educated and trained, discovering that while all theological training had been overseas, teacher

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<sup>101</sup> John and Lyn Lofland, *Part I, Gathering Data, Analyzing Social Settings. A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, Belmont, CA, 1984

<sup>102</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography, Principles and Practice*, Routledge, p. 65.

training, if any, had either been overseas or in Australia. This was important as former students were quick to criticise imams who spoke poor English or who had not been in Australia very long, while feeling a lot more positive about younger imams who had done some training in Australia as well as overseas. Arabic teachers also received a lot of criticism, as many were not qualified teachers, particularly in the early days of the schools. I also met the imam in several other schools visited. However I did not interview them formally at the time, though always noting where they had come from and where they had trained. All interviews were conducted in English, apart from one where an interpreter was needed.

Of the former students interviewed, 20 were women and 11 were men, many having attended a range of other schools as well as Islamic schools. Most were under 30 years of age, apart from a few who had attended the early-established Islamic schools in the 1980s. These interviews were conducted in a wide range of settings, ranging from university campuses and private homes to libraries, Muslim student barbecues and a cold railway platform.

As Woods suggests<sup>103</sup>, the best technique to gather material in this kind of situation, is to develop deep empathy with interviewees and win their confidence, using unstructured interviews. As a result, although the questions drawn up beforehand and shown to the participants were structured, the interviews were more unstructured so that in the course of discussion, other points would come up and could be explored. In this respect, they constitute what Hammersley and Atkinson<sup>104</sup> describe as ‘non-directive questions’ designed to stimulate the interviewees into talking about a particular broad area. On the other hand, I was unable to pre-determine ‘the sample’<sup>105</sup>, an important part of ethnographic research, although the cross-section of people involved was designed to overcome this weakness as much as possible.

My role as a ‘participant observer’<sup>106</sup>, was to develop questions that, while not too detailed for the interviewees to respond to, would draw them out into further discussion. Although I was not a Muslim, this did not appear to make any difference, and the comments

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<sup>103</sup> Woods, p.13

<sup>104</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson, p.113

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25

made by teachers could be balanced against those from former students when it came to analysis.

In terms of what Hammersley and Atkinson<sup>107</sup> describe as ‘the development of research problems’, the questions prepared were designed to gather material that could lead to a theoretical answer as a generalised account of the perspectives and practices of a particular group of actors, in this case the teachers and in particular, the imams.

The questions for teachers were formulated to learn how much of the subject they taught was permeated by what might be termed ‘Islamic values,’ in other words constitutes part of the ‘hidden curriculum’ of the school, a term further explored in Chapter Six. Given the context of the question, they were also asked if they saw the teaching of values as an important and integral part of the school’s curriculum, a question which could be directed at many other schools in Australia where the official literature promoting the school stresses its ‘values.’

Frequently the answer to these questions was likely to be quite straightforward, as many teachers would just see themselves as teaching their subject and nothing else, particularly if they were non-Muslims. However the ensuing discussion encouraged by the question was designed to present an opportunity to reflect on whether any specifically Islamic values could be involved in what was taught. Staff members were also asked about their involvement in any co-curricular activities in the school that might also reflect this ethos, such as sport, debating or inter-school forums. The question was also crucial in terms of ascertaining whether the school stood for anything more than teaching the normal national or state curriculum plus a religious component, given that this was ostensibly why many parents sent their children to Islamic schools. On the other hand, it could offer proof to critics who said the schools functioned in such a way as to separate young Muslims from other young Australians.

The questions to imams and teachers of other units of Islamic Studies were also designed to ascertain exactly what was taught and how it was taught, balanced in turn by the responses of former students who were asked about what they learned at school and whether they felt positive about it. The question to imams was designed to not only ask how and what they taught the students but what other role they played in the school, as this varied from organising prayers and assemblies to acting as a consultant on what was or was not

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32-33

‘Islamic.’ This was important for non-Muslim teachers worried about the suitability of teaching material, as a number of them explained to me during interviews.

Lofland asks researchers to reflect on the guiding consequences of their analysis, both in terms of the reactions of people studied and consequences for foes of the people studied<sup>108</sup>. This was the rationale behind the later questions on values, outreach and identity, as the overall goal of the research was to collect the ‘richest possible data’<sup>109</sup> and then analyse it, without knowing in advance what the results would be.

Although the heart of the thesis centres on material gathered in the interviews, each question is put in the context of documentary research available to give it a theoretical framework, where one exists. The existence of faith schools is put in the context of the development of this sector in Australia, in particular the Catholic system and more recently, the growth of faith schools encouraged by new funding arrangements initiated by the Howard Coalition government (1996-2007). The history of the Catholic schools in Australia has been well documented so there was no shortage of materials to turn to as secondary sources.

Part of the thesis also covers what Islam historically views as the importance of education. Much has been written about this context and a wide range of views are apparent, reflected in some of the difficulties faced by principals of Islamic schools in determining what is taught in their schools and conveyed to the students. Although no interviews with principals were conducted as part of the research, informal conversations with them brought up many of these issues, and it certainly affected the curriculum in terms of what could or could not be taught in the schools. Wide differences were evident, reflecting the ‘broad church’ that constitutes Islam in Australia today and the variety of bodies sponsoring the schools. These differences are examined in the analysis of the relevant chapters.

The discussion that arose out of the questions on faith teaching units is particularly valuable, as nothing has been written about this before in Australia as far as I am aware. While teachers gave a straightforward response to the question on what they taught and how they taught it, as well as where they were trained, the input from former students was extremely valuable in terms of analysing how effective this has been. Those interviewed felt free to say what they thought because of the anonymity guaranteed and once again, it was in

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<sup>108</sup> Lofland, p.155

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11

the ensuing discussion, that important points arose in terms of critical analysis. However it must be acknowledged that an outside researcher and a non-Muslim in my position was unlikely to learn anything about the possible role of 'extremist' opinions manifested in any of the schools, other than through individuals or visiting speakers. What evidence of this that exists at a secondary level, is only anecdotal or through media reports.

The question on the Hidden Curriculum was designed to draw out a wide range of responses in discussion, and is explored in the context of secondary sources focused on a definition of what constitutes a 'Hidden Curriculum,' as well as an 'Islamic identity.'

It has been frequently alleged that Islam promotes intolerance of other faiths, or indeed of different strands of Islam itself, so the question on whether the schools actually promote such intolerance as an integral part of Islam is a crucial one. Secondary material in this chapter is often drawn from overseas sources or through media reports in Australia, like the coverage of the Catch the Fires Ministry case in Victoria<sup>110</sup>. Visiting speakers in Australia have also made such allegations although none appear to have visited any Islamic schools in Australia to see for themselves and almost all their allegations are drawn from overseas sources, as an examination of these secondary sources seems to indicate.

There is an abundance of secondary sources on the Australian Values debate, ranging from political comment reported in the media and Letters to the Editor to academic conferences on the subject, sometimes involving high school students themselves. The questions asked have to be seen in this context so secondary sources form an important background to this chapter, although it is obvious that it constitutes a highly polemical subject and no consensus on what constitutes 'Australian Values' is evident.

The final question was designed to elicit what former students felt about the allegations that the schools separated them from other young Australians. It was at this point that many students reported that they had often attended other schools during the course of their education or had experience of Islamic education overseas. Although this evidence is anecdotal it proved substantive enough to raise other questions that might form opportunities for further research ranging from how other schools in Australia react to the

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<sup>110</sup> Hanifa Deen, *The Jihad Seminar*, Perth, 2008

presence of Muslims in their classes<sup>111</sup> to how many young Muslims actually do get sent overseas for some of their education and how does this affect them when they return home.

The thesis breaks new ground because it is the first to be based on visits to so many schools in six states and territories in Australia as well as drawing on in-depth interviews with both teachers and former students. In a sense, this thesis also responds in part to Mujgan Berber's suggestion on future research following his own thesis, which focused on the role of principals in establishing new Islamic and Christian schools since 1997<sup>112</sup>. In his thesis, he called for a broader sample of responses that involved both parents and students and which asked how values and belief-based education could be incorporated into the school's curriculum. His own thesis covered five Islamic schools with an in-depth focus on two of them for his qualitative research, but they were all in Sydney. Initially he wrote to twenty principals but only 25 per cent responded and only two were Islamic schools. Two other theses in Melbourne and Perth<sup>113</sup> focused on parents and their choice of schools but they were based on very small samples, although this is an area where further research could be of interest.

Anecdotal evidence from former students, reflecting on why their parents chose Islamic schools for them, offers a wide range of reasons, especially as so many of them had also attended state schools and Catholic schools as well, and in one case, a very elite boys' grammar school. In addition, we know that many parents would like to send their children to Islamic schools if there were more places or they were close by or cost less. Likewise, there are evidently other parents who do not feel this need and are quite content for their children to attend public schools, perhaps with extra classes at the local mosque to provide them with some Islamic education as well. Several students interviewed had taken part in such classes when attending non-Islamic schools. Bearing in mind Lofland's observations about 'Getting In,'<sup>114</sup> 'research of this nature is likely to be more effective if conducted by someone from a Muslim background and fluency in Arabic, Turkish or other languages

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<sup>111</sup> Aileen Farquer's unpublished thesis on '*The Impact of the Inclusion of Muslim Students into a Catholic School*,' UNE, 1988, is the only existing research I could find on this subject.

<sup>112</sup> Mujgan Berber, *The role of the principal in establishing and further developing an independent Christian or Islamic school in Australia*, p. 243

<sup>113</sup> Noha Sanjakdar, *Why do Muslim parents choose King Khalid College of Victoria?* University of Melbourne, 2000, and Amida Ma's thesis on five case studies of how parents chose schools for their children in Perth.

<sup>114</sup> Lofland, chapter 3, pp. 20-30

likely to be used at home. Perhaps this is why the two examples of this research conducted to date in Melbourne and Perth were organised by Muslim women.

While this thesis breaks new ground in terms of the material gathered from interviews in the schools as well as from former students, it cannot be considered fully comprehensive, despite the breadth of the sample. Because it covers stories from people involved with the Islamic schools since they first began in 1983, it is evident that the system is still evolving and further more recent research could trace how this process continues, perhaps tracing the history of one school in depth. In it unlikely that the material gathered will convince those people that Lofland refers to as ‘foes of the people studied<sup>115</sup>,’ but hopefully it will provide useful social knowledge for people with more open minds as well as being of interest to ‘the people studied<sup>116</sup>.’

### **Chapter Outline**

My thesis will unfold through eight chapters. Chapter two gives an overall background to the history of Muslims in Australia and the nature of the Muslim community today in order to illustrate its enormous diversity and thereby counter the widespread perception that Islam is monolithic. In addition it helps to explain the way in which the schools have been started by various different organisations or individuals with the ongoing problems that this process has created.

The third chapter looks at the development of Islamic schools in the historic context of private faith schools in Australia. In particular it looks at the Catholic schools with their original close connections with Ireland as this leads to some useful insights into how the Islamic schools in Australia might develop in the years ahead. There is also a section looking at the contrasting experience of Islamic schools in four countries in Western Europe, visited in January 2009.

The fourth chapter moves on to consider a definition of Islamic education considered in the broader debate within what is called or perceived as the *Umma*<sup>117</sup> and the perceived goals of

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<sup>115</sup> Lofland, p.158

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157

<sup>117</sup> The term used to describe the global community of Muslims that transcends national boundaries. Although the expression is frequently used in this respect, there are times when internal tensions arise and some Muslims may be excluded from this concept of a global community because more orthodox Muslims feel that they should not be included in the fold. In some areas of conflict, this can apply to Sunni Muslims excluding Shi’a, as well as groups considered to be totally deviant such as the Ahmadis in Pakistan.

Islamic educators in Australia, particularly based on interviews with principals and *imams* in the schools here, both primary and secondary through to Year 12. Much of this chapter covers literature published in Europe and North America as very little has been written on notions of Islamic education in Australia to date.

The subsequent chapters focus on the evidence based on material gathered during interviews with teachers and alumni from a mixture of K-6 and K-12 schools in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Perth (as well as a visit to the one school in Adelaide). Chapters five and six focuses on the exact nature of faith teaching, the subject of so much media controversy in terms of what is taught in the schools, and also whether or not this extends to the ‘hidden curriculum’ which many Muslim parents hope for to supplement the more formal classes on Islam: Arabic, the *Qur’an* and Islamic Studies. Both Ramadan<sup>118</sup> and Donohue Clyne<sup>119</sup> warn of Islamic schools having unqualified teachers, especially in Arabic, where many teachers have no pedagogic background, so part of the research is to inquire if this is the case in Australia, as well as to observe the diversity in faith teaching. This diversity is also referred to by Saeed where he points out in the eyes of many commentators, all Islamic religious educational systems and institutions seem to be virtually identical whereas in reality it is quite the opposite.<sup>120</sup>

Chapters seven and eight lead into the question of whether the schools promote intolerance and then the values debate. Chapter seven also take a look at interfaith dialogue opportunities with other non-Islamic schools and what other opportunities the students have to mix with non-Muslim students. Questions about religious tolerance were particularly appreciated by Muslims who had recently arrived from countries where there was a high level of intolerance displayed towards Muslims with dissenting minority beliefs, such as the *Shi’a* in Pakistan and Afghanistan or the *Sunni* in Iran. The value of tolerance in Australia was refreshing to them while younger students soon got used to the diversity they were not aware of if they came from a mono-cultural society, a point made by a number of *imams* interviewed. Chapter eight is based on interviews with staff and students, exploring what they thought about the values issue, after looking at the wider community debate, both in Australia and in Europe where a lot more has been written about it. This chapter also explores the term, Judeo-Christian values, as it is a recent essentially political construct and

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<sup>118</sup> Ramadan, p.32.

<sup>119</sup> Donohue Clyne, ‘Educating Muslim Children in Australia,’ in Saeed & Akbarzadeh, *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Sydney, 2001, p. 129.

<sup>120</sup> Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, p. 63.

as far as its critics like Aly are concerned, has no historical validity, therefore rendering it quite misleading.

Chapter Nine considers whether or not the students feel that by attending their schools they have strengthened their faith and identity, along with the question of whether a specifically Islamic education cuts the students off from the wider Australian community, the so-called ‘ghetto’ argument.

In Australia, there has been considerable research on the marginalisation of Muslim youth, on selective reporting by the media, and on the inadequacy of mainstream Australian textbooks<sup>121</sup> when it comes to introducing students to a worldview that incorporates the Golden Age of Islam<sup>122</sup> and its contribution to the world we now live in or a less Euro-centric approach to the Crusades. Given the growing number of Islamic schools in Australia and the lack of any recent general research on them, this thesis seeks to give an overview of the current state of the schools and how they are evolving, in addition to contributing an analysis of how the faith education components are taught and what is taught, which has not been done before. In this context, the thesis also considers arguments on whether the schools are divisive and whether for the students, they are inclusive or exclusive. This is done by inquiring whether the schools take part in inter-faith dialogue and other co-curricular activities that bring them together with other schools, and what the students feel they have gained from attending an Islamic school. Finally, as the Australian values debate morphs into arguments about the effectiveness of multiculturalism in Australia and the political debate over asylum seekers arriving by boat through Malaysia and Indonesia, the thesis explores for the first time how students and staff feel about arguments that Islamic values are incompatible with Australian values through specific questions on how they see this issue.

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<sup>121</sup> For examples Joel Windle, ‘The Muslim Middle Ages in Victorian Classrooms’, paper presented to the NCEIS conference in Melbourne, 2008. Also Abe Ata, ‘Moslem Arab Portrayal in the Australian Press and in School Textbooks,’ *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.19, no.3, pp. 207-217

<sup>122</sup> The Golden Age of Islam refers to the period between 750 and 1258 when the Caliphate was based in Baghdad. Several books about this period are referred to in Chapter 4.



## CHAPTER 2

### ISLAM IN AUSTRALIA

#### A brief history of Muslims in Australia

Although Muslims now constitute 2.2 per cent of the population of Australia (2011 census figures)<sup>1</sup>, they have only been a significant presence since the end of the White Australia policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What is not widely understood is how diverse this population is, with estimates that Australian Muslims originate from over 70 different countries. This is despite the widespread perception in the community that Islam is somehow monolithic. It is also not appreciated that Muslims quite possibly had been coming to Australia for some time before any Europeans arrived and were certainly among the first ‘White’ settlers after 1788. As Mansouri points out, ‘within the ongoing debate about identity, nationalism and citizenship, the history of Arab and Muslim settlement in Australia has been the subject of scant research and analysis.’<sup>2</sup>

While traditional Australian history teaching still tends to focus on European discovery and early settlement, there are now a growing number of books and articles that focus on the importance of a Muslim role during this period, although it has yet to reach a mainstream audience. Nonetheless Kabir could still write in 2004 that ‘the historical literature on Australian Muslims is limited.’ Importantly this awareness that Australia does have a Muslim history has not affected school textbooks so Muslim students and teachers are often unaware of it.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071,O](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071,O) main+features 902012-2013, Cultural diversity in Australia. The 2006 figure of 340,000 was questioned by various scholars like Christine Asmar in *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Saeed & Akbarzadeh, p.139-40. They argue that for various reasons, some Muslims would not fill in the question on their religious affiliation in a census so the figure is probably on the low side. AFIC has also said that the real figure is more like 480,000 – 500,000 as many Muslims were reluctant to give their religion in the 2006 census. *Census in Australia*. AFIC, Sydney. Undated statement by the AFIC President urging Muslims to register as Muslims in the 2011 Census.

<sup>2</sup> Mansouri, ‘Citizenship, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Australia,’ in Akbarzadeh & Yasmeeen (eds), *Islam and the West. Reflections from Australia*, Sydney, 2005, p. 149. He makes the same point in a more recent publication, ‘Surprisingly little research has been undertaken to place this early presence within the social and economic framework of nation-building that shaped post-Federation Australia. Despite the recent publication of a number of studies on Arab and Muslim Australians, early Muslim settlement in Australia remains a neglected topic in mainstream historical studies,’ ‘Muslim migration to Australia and the question of identity and belonging,’ in Mansouri & Marotta (eds), *Muslims in the West and the challenges of belonging*, Melbourne, 2012, p.16.

### Existing literature on the Muslim history of Australia

As far as early voyages of discovery are concerned, the most comprehensive account is in Haveric's 'Australia in Muslim Discovery'.<sup>3</sup> He details the early Arab and Persian trading voyages as well as Chinese and Malay influences. Cleland covers the story of early Muslim settlement in his chapter in 'Muslim Communities in Australia'<sup>4</sup> and in 'An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the Seventeenth Century to the Present'<sup>5</sup> by Jones.

Cleland, an Anglo-Australian convert, also contributed an article on 'Muslims in Australia: A brief history'<sup>6</sup>, for the Islamic Council of Victoria, followed up by its publication in book form. Weeks makes the point in his foreword to Haveric's 'Australia in Muslim Discovery'<sup>7</sup> that now is the time to acknowledge that Australia has many more histories than those of the English and Irish early settlers, because more people understand that our history can only be truly told when all of our many voices are allowed to speak and be heard.

Deen also relates the story of settlement from her own background as a third generation Australian of Pakistani Muslim ancestry in 'Caravanserai: Journey among Australian Muslims'<sup>8</sup>, then develops this personal perspective in 'Ali Abdul v. The King. Muslim stories from the dark days of White Australia'<sup>9</sup>.

More recently, Regina Ganter has a chapter on 'Remembering Muslim Histories of Australia' linked to Deen's chapter on 'Excavating the Past: Australian Muslims',<sup>10</sup> in a special edition of the La Trobe Journal published to coincide with the exhibition *Love and Devotion: from Persia and beyond*, held at the State Library of Victoria from March to June 2012.

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<sup>3</sup> Dzavid Haveric, *Australia in Muslim Discovery*. Deakin University, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Cleland in Saeed & Akbarzadeh (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, pp. 12-32.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, M, *An Australian Pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, Melbourne, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Cleland, *The Muslims in Australia. A Brief History*, Melbourne, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Haveric, p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai. Journey among Australian Muslims*, Fremantle, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Deen, *Ali Abdul v The King. Muslim Stories from the dark days of White Australia*, Fremantle, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> These chapters appear in Rachel Woodlock and John Arnold (eds), *Isolation, Integration and Identity: the Muslim experience in Australia*, Melbourne, 2012.

Bouma refers to the growing religious presence of Muslims in Australia in ‘Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia’,<sup>11</sup> while Omar and Allen described the Muslim community in Australia in the series on Religious Community Profiles, including a brief history of Muslim settlement in Australia as well as a description of the contemporary Muslim community based on the 1991 census figures.<sup>12</sup>

There have been a number of books on the Afghan role in opening up the Desert Centre of Australia in the nineteenth century. These include ‘Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia’<sup>13</sup> by Christine Stevens, and a South Australia Museum publication, ‘Australia’s Muslim Cameleers. Pioneers of the Inland 1860s-1930s’<sup>14</sup>, that includes a list of other specialised publications on the subject. This was produced to accompany their exhibition *Australia’s Muslim Cameleers*, which has travelled around Australia from its home base in Adelaide and in Melbourne at least, was visited by students from Islamic schools.

The Muslim population of Australia has increased substantially since the end of the White Australia policy and although there have been a number of specialised articles and statistical surveys about the large variety of ethnic groups who now make up Australia’s Muslim community, no comprehensive overview has appeared in recent years, apart from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship website ‘Uncommon Lives: Muslim Journeys’.<sup>15</sup> This is partly because the situation is changing so fast with increased immigration, comprised of family reunions, skilled workers and the Special Humanitarian Programme. In addition in recent years, there have been a number of converts to Islam, often Anglo-Australians, although little research seems to have been carried out on this phenomenon<sup>16</sup>. A number of these converts are teachers and have played a significant role in the development of Islamic schools in Australia.

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, Canberra, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> W. Omar & K. Allen, *The Muslims in Australia*, Religious Community Profiles, Canberra, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, Melbourne, 1989. Also the chapter on the Afghan Camel Drivers in Jones, Mary (ed), pp. 49-62.

<sup>14</sup> P. Jones & A. Kenny, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> *Uncommon Lives: Muslim Journeys*, National Archives of Australia, launched on 29 August 2007. uncommonlives.naa.gov.au

<sup>16</sup> One exception was an article by Linda Morris, ‘Converts in the houses of the Lord’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 November 2003.

### History of Muslim settlement in Australia

The earliest contact might possibly have been with the great Chinese fleet of 1421 if Admiral Zheng He (a Muslim himself) and his ships got as far south as the Australian continent, as argued by Mackenzie in “1421”, although this hypothesis has been largely discounted by critics. Haveric suggests that there were even earlier contacts by Arab and Persian trading vessels going back to the eighth century as well as the Chinese voyages.<sup>17</sup> He cites early records, Aboriginal paintings and oral tradition to justify his arguments.

There are no doubts about contact between the Macassars (alternatively spelled Makassars) and Aboriginal people during their seasonal visit to the north coast of Arnhem Land (known locally as Marege) looking for trepang to sell to the Chinese who regarded it as a great delicacy.<sup>18</sup> They arrived in their prahus (outriggers) every year in December and left four months later. There are records of Aboriginal people travelling to the home of these Muslim fishermen and divers in what is now Southern Sulawesi in Indonesia, but what was then the Sultanate of Gowa. These contacts took place over a long period of time, dating from the mid-seventeenth century or earlier<sup>19</sup>, until the Australian government put a stop to it in 1907. The most detailed account of these visits is by Macknight who says we really do not know when they began but his personal opinion is that it was probably between 1650 and 1750.<sup>20</sup> A well illustrated account of the trepang trade between the Macassars, the Chinese and Aboriginal people written in English and Chinese by an Aboriginal author was also recently published for an exhibition in Beijing.<sup>21</sup>

The relationship of the Macassars with the Aboriginal people they met with was a model of what could have been, as Dodson pointed out in his keynote address to the Muslim Students at Australian Universities National Conference in Parramatta on 3 September 2007<sup>22</sup>. In his speech, Dodson described the amicable nature of these encounters based on trading, when the Macassars arrived every year with the seasonable winds then stayed fishing for trepang until it was the right time to sail home. They made no attempt to claim the land and a

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<sup>17</sup> Haveric, Chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Keneally, *Australians origins to Eureka*, Sydney, 2009, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Haveric suggests they go back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century or earlier in Ch. 6 of his book, ‘Macassan visitors to Australia and early European explorations’.

<sup>20</sup> C.G. Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege. Macassan trepangers in northern Australia*, Melbourne, 1976, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> Marcia Langton, *Trepang. China and the Story of Macassan-Aboriginal Trade*, published for the Centre for Cultural Materials Consortium, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Access, Inclusion and Success, organised by the University of Western Sydney, 3-4 September 2007

number of the Yolngu people they encountered, sailed back to the Celebes (now Sulawesi) and stayed with them there. They traded in goods, sought sexual favours from the women and although they were exposed to smallpox, yaws, venereal disease, firearms, tobacco and alcohol, the Yolngu people look back favourably on this period. To this day, they commemorate the visitors in songs and paintings, as well as having incorporated some of their words into the Yolngu language. Dodson contrasted these encounters with the arrival of Europeans who instead claimed the land and its resources for themselves and used the superiority of their weapons to slaughter those Aborigines who resisted the loss of their land and hunting grounds.

There were certainly Muslims amongst the convicts coming from England after 1788<sup>23</sup> and aboard the ships of the Royal Navy supplying New South Wales from India, when the Muslim sailors were known as lascars.<sup>24</sup> There were several Muslims of Indian origin amongst the early settlers in Van Diemen's Land, most of them coming from Norfolk Island. The first Muslim settler, Jacob Sultan, arrived in Hobart with the *Lady Nelson* on the First Fleet (for Van Diemen's Land) in November 1807<sup>25</sup>. Cleland relates in detail the known stories of some of the other early Muslim settlers who arrived as sailors or convicts.<sup>26</sup> The first census in New South Wales in 1828 recorded the presence of ten 'Mohammedans', mainly from the Wooden family living in Clarence Street, Sydney. All of them had arrived there in 1816 with the patriarch, William Wooden, having been transported for life before being pardoned in 1828. Another Muslim, Abraham Cullen, had arrived in 1817 after getting a life sentence but by the time of the census, he had been set free and was working for a local shoemaker.<sup>27</sup>

### **i) Afghan cameleers**

During the nineteenth century, the first major Muslim presence came with the arrival of the 'Afghans' and their camels after 1860. Although they were collectively known as Afghans, they came from a broad area encompassing what is now India and Pakistan as well

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<sup>23</sup> Cleland refers to some of them in his chapter on The History of Muslims in Australia in *Muslim Communities in Australia*. Also in his chapter, *The Experience of an Anglo-Celtic Muslim in Australia*, in Jones, M. (ed), 'An Australian Pilgrimage', pp. 105-116

<sup>24</sup> 'Mohammedan' convicts and settlers are mentioned in the musters of 1802, 1811 and 1822, plus the census of 1828. Kabir also details further references in *Muslims in Australia. Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, London, 2004, pp. 3-5.

<sup>25</sup> H. Abdullah, 'Muslims in Tasmania: Early History', in *Muslim Australia* No. 13, AFIC, Melbourne, 2011, pp. 36-37.

<sup>26</sup> Cleland in Saeed & Akbarzadeh, pp. 13-17.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Matthews, 'Muslims in Australia', Australian Islamic Mission, 2007, based on an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 2007, p. 2.

as Afghanistan. Their contribution to the opening up of the interior was vital, as they provided transport and supplies to a number of expeditions including that of Burke and Wills and the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1870-72. They also supplied food and water to the Coolgardie area after the 1894 gold rush. Indeed by 1898, there were 300 Muslims in Coolgardie with two mosques while in other settlements in Western Australia like Perth and Fremantle, other buildings were used for public worship.

Although the Afghan cameleers were not allowed to bring their wives with them, some married Aboriginal women or poor Europeans, and their descendants are still in Australia, although most of the cameleers were sent home at the end of the century. Between 1901 and 1921, the number of Afghans in Australia fell from 393 to 147<sup>28</sup>. By then, they had built the first mosques in Australia – at Maree in South Australia in 1861, Adelaide in 1890, Broken Hill in 1891 and Perth in 1905.<sup>29</sup> On the eastern side of Australia, there were also Muslims amongst the Syrian and Indian hawkers who moved around isolated rural communities there.

In the late nineteenth century, Malay Muslims were brought to Australia as divers and crewmen for the pearl shell industry in Broome, Darwin and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. One Sumatran-born pearl diver, Samsudin bin Katib, served as a commando in Australia's 'Z' special unit during the Second World War and operated behind enemy lines.<sup>30</sup>

## **(ii) White Australia**

After Federation and the formal introduction of the White Australia policy with the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, the number of registered Muslims in Australia dropped from 0.09% of the total population in the 1911 census to 0.03% by 1931. After that, it grew slightly to reach 0.04% in 1947 and 1.12% by 1971. In numerical terms, that meant there were 2,000 to 4,000 Muslims between 1911 and 1947, after that growing from 2,704 in 1947 to 22,311 by 1971. This period is covered by Jones in 'An Australian Pilgrimage' in

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<sup>28</sup> Kabir, p.66.

<sup>29</sup> Between the late 1880s and the 1920s the number of cameleers in Australia was estimated at somewhere between 2,000 and 6,000, Muslim Journeys, National Archives of Australia.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

her chapter, 'The Years of Decline: Australian Muslims 1900-1940'.<sup>31</sup> Kabir also has two chapters on much the same period in her book, 'Muslims in Australia'<sup>32</sup>.

Prior to 1947, what were referred to as 'European Turks' were allowed to work in Australia, and a number of young men from Albania came during the years between the wars, many working in Queensland in the sugar plantations<sup>33</sup>. By 1942, there were just over 1,000 of them but when the Albanian government declared war on the Allies in June 1940, Albanians living in Australia were deemed to be enemy aliens.<sup>34</sup> Not all Albanians were Muslims, and the Victoria Museum gives a figure of 60% for the state during this period. Albanians counted as European and started to come to Australia after US immigration laws were tightened up in the early 1920s, settling in North Queensland, particularly around Mareeba near Cairns. There were also Albanians who found work in Western Australia where they could take part in religious festivals at the mosques in Perth and Fremantle. Others settled later around Shepparton in Victoria where they built a mosque in 1960. The Australian government was uneasy about their presence and tightened up quotas but by 1933, 770 Albanians were recorded in Australia, with most in Queensland, almost all male. It was the Albanian community in Victoria who built another of the state's first mosques in Carlton (Melbourne) in 1963.<sup>35</sup>

Post war new arrivals were mostly made up of Turkish Cypriots, some refugees from Cyprus, Bosnia, Albania (which closed its borders in 1948), Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, and some Malays allowed to stay after the Pacific War. Other Malays had also been working in Broome as pearl fishers from the late 1800s to the early 1900s<sup>36</sup>. Many of these Malays were later replaced by Japanese divers. There were also a number of Javanese in North Queensland around Mackay working as labourers in the sugar industry. One anecdote from one of their descendants, estimated the presence of around 600 Javanese still there at the turn of the century<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Jones, pp. 63-86.

<sup>32</sup> Kabir, 'Muslims During Wartime: 1914-1918 and 1939-1945' and 'From the End of World War II to the Gulf War' in *Muslims in Australia*, London, 2004, pp. 95-206.

<sup>33</sup> Kabir, *Ibid*, refers to a thesis by J.C. Carne, 'A history of Albanians in North Queensland', James Cook University, 1979, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Abdalla, 'Muslims in Australia', in Rane, Stewart & Abdalla, *Islam and the Australian News Media*, Melbourne, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> The Albanian experience is described more fully in Jones M. 1993, pp. 68-86.

<sup>36</sup> There were 1,800 there in 1875, *Ibid.*, pp. 40- 48.

<sup>37</sup> Kabir, p. 86.

**(iii) The first Muslim organisations**

The first Islamic societies were set up during this period, such as the Islamic Society of Victoria in 1957, while the Australian Federation of Islamic Societies (AFIC) was established in 1964. A two man delegation from Saudi Arabia, Dr Ali Kettani and Dr Abdullah al-Zayed, came to Australia in 1974 to investigate the needs of the local Muslim community, encouraging a new approach to national organisation to overcome the ethnic divisions.<sup>38</sup> AFIC, with its main office now in Sydney, has published different journals over the years, starting with *The Australian Minaret*. Currently it publishes *Muslims Australia* every three months.

The White Australia policy had been used primarily to remove the Chinese from the new nation but it also excluded most of the Afghan cameleers who were already beginning to be made redundant by new forms of motorised transport along with the Kanaks in Queensland and other Asian workers in Northern Australia. As de Lepervanche points out, while many of the Indians who settled in Queensland or northern New South Wales were Sikhs or Muslims, Australians called them Hindoos, and when she visited some of their descendants in 1970 and 1973, three families were Muslim<sup>39</sup>. In essence, migration was limited to people who were deemed to be of British and Irish descent, through the implementation of what was generally known as the White Australia policy.

This policy was primarily directed against Chinese diggers who had arrived in the 1850s and Kanak indentured labourers in Queensland. Leading NSW and Victorian politicians at the time of Federation had warned that there was no place for 'Asiatics' or 'coloureds' in the new country. The Immigration Restriction Act (1901) was described as an Act 'to place certain restrictions on immigration and to provide for the removal from the Commonwealth of prohibited immigrants.' Though some people slipped through the net, it received general support in the community and was only gradually dismantled after the Second World War, when 800 non-European refugees were allowed to stay and Japanese war brides were admitted.

Later, in 1957, non-Europeans with fifteen years residence were allowed to become citizens and the controversial dictation test was scrapped in 1958, when the revised Migration Act avoided any references to race. This was the time when the first Lebanese families began to arrive (a few had arrived in the period 1880-1920 when Lebanon was part

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<sup>38</sup> Cleland in Saeed & Akbarzadeh, p.27.

<sup>39</sup> M. de Lepervanche, *Indians in a White Australia*, Sydney, 1984, pp.13-14.

of Syria), though most of them were Christians, largely Maronite and Melkite.<sup>40</sup> Non-European migration began in earnest from the mid-1960s, when an agreement with Turkey allowed for over 10,000 migrants but the Act was only finally dismantled by the Whitlam Labor government in 1973. However an increase in the number and percentage of migrants from non-European countries did not take place until after the Fraser Liberal government took office in 1975.

The Lebanese civil war after 1975 resulted in the arrival of a large number of migrants speaking Arabic while the division of Cyprus after the war there in 1974, brought more Turkish Cypriots to Australia. This is why the largest Muslim communities in Australia today are descended from those who came from Turkey and Lebanon, helping to make up the figure of 38% of Muslims here who were born in this country (2006 national census). According to the 1991 census, the Turkish and Lebanese communities represented 14.5 per cent and 17.4 per cent respectively of Australia's Muslim population,<sup>41</sup> a figure that has not changed very much since then.

### ***The Muslim community in Australia today***

Census figures since the lifting of the White Australia policy restrictions indicate a substantial growth in the Muslim population of Australia<sup>42</sup> although as previously indicated, the figure is likely to be on the low side as some Muslims, for various reasons, do not want to reveal their faith for the census data.

As the years go by, more and more Muslims are Australian born, with a figure of 36 per cent in 1996 growing to 38 per cent by 2006, and 38.5 per cent in 2011. After those families of Lebanese and Turkish origin, the next largest number are Afghans with 4.7 per cent, Pakistanis with 4.1 per cent, Bangladeshis with 3.9 per cent, Iraqis with 2.9 per cent, Indonesians with 2.5 per cent, Bosnians with 2.2 per cent, and Iranians with 2.1 percent<sup>43</sup>, but these figures are likely to have changed in recent years with refugee arrivals.

The 2006 census figures indicated that 50 per cent of Muslims in Australia live in New South Wales (48 per cent in Sydney), with 32 per cent in Victoria (31 per cent in Melbourne). In Sydney 38 per cent of Muslims were Australian born,

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<sup>40</sup> T. Batrouney, *The Lebanese in Australia*, *Australia Lebanon Historical Society of Victoria*, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> figures quoted by Humphrey in Saeed & Akbarzadeh, p.36.

<sup>42</sup> Between 1986 and 2001, the population grew by 157 per cent.

<sup>43</sup> 'Muslims in Australia – a snap shot', Canberra, 2006 figures.

while 15 per cent are from Lebanon and 7 per cent from Turkey. In Victoria, 37 per cent of Muslims were born in Australia while 13 per cent are from Turkey and 7 per cent from Lebanon. In New South Wales, Muslims make up 2.6 per cent of the population and in Victoria, 2.2 per cent. This explains why most of the Islamic and Turkish schools are in Sydney and Melbourne. In other states too, the overwhelming majority of Muslims live in the capital cities.

There are 20,318 Muslims in Queensland (6 per cent), making up 0.5 per cent of the state population, where 29 per cent were born in Australia while 9 per cent come from Bosnia and 5 per cent from Indonesia. The Muslim population in the state, mainly concentrated in Brisbane, is far more diverse than in Sydney or Melbourne with no one particular group forming a majority.<sup>44</sup> South Australia has a Muslim population of 10,521 (3.1 per cent) making up 0.7 per cent of the state population with 26 per cent born in Australia, 11 per cent from Bosnia and 7 per cent from Afghanistan. In Western Australia, there are 24,187 Muslims (7.1 per cent), making up 1.2 per cent of the population, 31 per cent were born in Australia, 6 per cent are from Indonesia and 6 per cent from Bosnia. In the Australian Capital Territory, 4,373 Muslims make up 1.3 per cent of the population, with 10 per cent born in Bangla Desh and 8 per cent from Pakistan. Smaller groups are in the Northern Territory (1,083) and Tasmania (1,049), where they make up 0.3 per cent of the population, but apart from those Muslims born in Australia, in the Northern Territory 19 per cent come from Indonesia and 7 per cent from Pakistan, while in Tasmania, 7 per cent are from Bosnia and 3 per cent from Iraq.<sup>45</sup> The low number of Muslims in these two states and territories explains why no Islamic school has been established there yet.

These figures are relevant because mosques and Islamic schools tend to reflect this enormous ethnic diversity amongst Australia's Muslims<sup>46</sup>, and as Husain has observed, 'in any city in Australia where there is a substantial Muslim population, mosques will be established and supported by particular ethnic groups.'<sup>47</sup> This diversity is important to note because as a number of writers such as Akbarzadeh have observed, 'Australian public

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<sup>44</sup> Halim Rane et al, 'Towards understanding what Australia's Muslims really think,' *Journal of Sociology*, March 2011, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> These figures come from *Bringing Communities Together. A statistical representation of Muslims in Australia*, 'Muslims in Australia – a snap shot', Canberra, 2007, *Practising Diversity* published by the NCEIS and ACSA and *Muslims in Australia*, Australian Islamic Mission, p. 5. They are based on the 2006 census figures.

<sup>46</sup> In the 1991 census, Muslims nominated over 67 countries as their countries of origin.

<sup>47</sup> Jamila Husain, *Islamic Law and Society. An Introduction*, Sydney, 1999, p. 16.

opinion as a whole tends to favour the broad-brush treatment of Muslims as an undifferentiated mass with uniform characteristics.<sup>48</sup> Saeed also makes the point that in the eyes of many Western commentators, all Islamic religious educational systems and institutions seem to be virtually identical, whereas in reality it is quite the opposite.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise in each of the capital cities where the schools are located, the school population reflects this diversity and at times the association setting up the school may be linked to a particular ethnic group, although no school is exclusive when it comes to the students themselves. Recent refugee arrivals from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia have shifted the national mix even further, but the dominant Muslim groups, especially in Sydney and Melbourne, remain Lebanese and Turkish. Of 102,566 Australian born Muslims, 30 per cent claimed Lebanese ancestry and 8 per cent Turkish ancestry.

Looking to the future, the figures published by the Pew Research Centre in January 2011, have implications for the growth of Islamic schools in Australia.<sup>50</sup> The report points out that the number of Muslims in Australia will grow four times more quickly than non-Muslims over the next two decades because of instability in developing Islamic countries in South and Southeast Asia (more specifically Indonesia, Pakistan and Malaysia) which will drive migrants to this country. They would come under two migration categories according to Birrell at Monash University: family reunion and refugees.<sup>51</sup> The report estimates that the Muslim community will grow from about 399,000 to 714,000 by 2030, an increase of 80 per cent. In effect this means a percentage increase from 1.9 per cent of all Australians to 2.8 per cent. The 2011 census figures represented a 69 per cent growth since 2001 and indicated that Muslims now constitute 2.2 per cent of the overall population.

Overall, 36 per cent of Muslims were born in Australia, 28 per cent come from the Middle East or North Africa, 16 per cent came from Asia, 9 per cent from Europe, 4 per cent from Africa and 3 per cent from Oceania<sup>52</sup>. Bouma refers to information from Hassan when pointing out that 43 per cent of Muslim immigrants to Australia have come from Muslim majority countries while those coming from countries where they are a minority,

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<sup>48</sup> Akbarzadeh, 'Unity or Fragmentation' in *Muslim Communities in Australia*, Saeed & Akbarzadeh, p. 232.

<sup>49</sup> Saeed, *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010-2030, Pew Research Centre, Washington DC, 27 January 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Drew Warne Smith, 'Muslim numbers to rise 80pc in 20 years', *Australian*, 29 January 2011, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> 2001 figures.

are often seeking refuge from religious and political persecution<sup>53</sup>. Not surprisingly, several people interviewed, referred with appreciation to the Australian tradition of toleration, which they had not encountered in the country they originally came from as members of a minority group.

Sixty three per cent of Muslims are *Sunni* and 37 per cent are *Shi'a*, a difference that the majority of Islamic schools ignore, apart from the two specifically *Shi'a* primary schools in Sydney.

### **Mosques in Australia**

While the oldest mosque in Australia is the one in Adelaide, today there are around a hundred<sup>54</sup>, in addition to prayer rooms and the *imams* who are mainly represented through the Australian National Imams Council. Many of the *imams* teach in the Islamic schools or offer their services to government schools as well as organising weekend classes. All the *imams* encountered in my visits to schools around Australia received their theological education overseas, mainly in the Middle East or South Africa, a similar situation to that in Europe. However some of the younger *imams* have later trained as teachers in Australia.

Although the oldest mosques are in South Australia and West Australia, founded by the Afghan community in the late nineteenth century, many of the mosques today are associated with a particular ethnic community. Examples in Sydney include the Turkish Gallipoli mosque in Auburn and the predominantly Lebanese Lakemba mosque, while the Pakistani community initiated the Surry Hills mosque in 1974. The mosque at Broken Hill was built around 1887 by Afghan cameleers and after the last practising Muslim died in the 1950s, the mosque fell into a state of neglect though looked after by the local historical society. It has recently been revived by members of the *Sufi* Burhaniyya-Shadhuliyya order who moved to Broken Hill from Hobart.<sup>55</sup>

In Melbourne, the largest mosque is the Omar Bin Khattab mosque in Preston, where the *sheikh* originally came from Lebanon in 1951, but there are others like the Albanian mosque in Carlton, the Turkish mosque in Coburg, and ones that minister especially to more recent arrivals like the Afghan community and Burmese Muslims.

<sup>53</sup> Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> Kabir lists 81 mosques from the 1996 census figures but the number has grown since then, *Muslims in Australia*, p. 285.

<sup>55</sup> The story of Broken Hill and its religious history, including interviews with Muslim descendants and the recent Sufi arrivals, was told in 'Desert in Bloom. The Broken Hill story,' ABC Radio National Encounters programme, 23 October 2011.

In Perth there are now four mosques, where the main ethnic groups are South African, Turkish, Lebanese and Indonesian, while in South Australia there are eight mosques, mostly around Adelaide but some as far away as Renmark and Whyalla. The Hobart mosque in Tasmania, opened in 2006, was funded with assistance from Malaysia, derived from links through the University of Tasmania and the fact that the current *imam* originally came from Malaysia under the Colombo Plan.

### **The diversity of Islam in Australia and popular misconceptions**

This diversity has also affected some schools when a majority of the students spoke Arabic at home, causing them to run two streams of Arabic language classes. However a number of students interviewed said that although they understood some spoken Arabic at home, it did not always mean they could read the classical Arabic of the *Qur'an* or even modern written Arabic. A few students interviewed also referred to gang rivalry in school where two dominant groups sometimes clashed in the yard, or as individuals they felt left out as a minority ethnic group. These different affiliations have caused differences in Muslim community organisations, of which there are a large number, as well as some of the school boards and committees.

This diversity is also not well understood by those many Australians who think of Muslims as a homogenous block and fail to grasp that no one individual in the Muslim community can speak for the whole faith. Unfortunately a hostile media likes to focus on some of the more outspoken representatives of the Muslim community when they 'stir the possum' with provocative remarks about the place of women in society, multiple wives or the introduction of that grossly misunderstood term, *shari'a*. Students interviewed said they often got hostile feedback after these types of headlines and they dreaded what might follow.

This hostility is reflected in community opposition to new mosques and schools<sup>56</sup>, with one recent one being the Cairns mosque opened in May 2010 after several years of protests and a court case opposing its construction in the Planning and Environment Court. Most other mosques in Queensland are in and around Brisbane but others are in towns along the coast in centres like Rockhampton and Townsville. While these mosques still represent the diversity of Islam in Australia, their small number in the congregation make it difficult for Muslim children to attend anything other than a state school so their weekend classes

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<sup>56</sup> Kabir lists five examples of opposition to new mosques in the 1980s in *Muslims in Australia*, pp. 180-200.

contribute a great deal to the religious education of young Muslims. Opposition to new schools has also been most intense in Sydney where planning objections are often cited or in the case of the proposed Camden school in 2009, when most of the opposition was obviously racist.<sup>57</sup> Hussain also refers to the case brought by the Bangladeshi community in Sydney in 1998 after they purchased the disused Presbyterian church in Sefton to convert into a mosque but were opposed by the Bankstown Council<sup>58</sup>. The NSW Land and Environment Court upheld the objection but the case was appealed and the decision overturned by a higher court in 2000. Cleland outlines a number of similar cases involving community objections around Australia in a website on the History of Islam in Australia.<sup>59</sup> Kabir also gives details of attacks on mosques and Islamic schools around Australia at the time of the Gulf War (1990-1991)<sup>60</sup>, while Howard Brasted mentions a campaign in 1996 in the Sydney suburb of Bass Hill to declare it as 'Mosque Free Zone.'<sup>61</sup>

The most recent controversy in Australia has been over the *burqa*, an issue seized on from Europe and used within the context of the community debate over security with some of the wilder allegations being about what might be hidden underneath these garments<sup>62</sup>. Not surprisingly there is some confusion over the different terms by Muslim women for the garments they use to cover themselves and especially their hair and face<sup>63</sup>. Muslim female students sometimes told me about the abuse they have encountered wearing their scarf or *hijab* as part of their school uniform or when they are out in the community wearing it as part of their faith. This has been particularly more marked since 2001 to the extent that

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<sup>57</sup> As shown in film footage of the public meeting against the school in the ABC Four Corners programme, *Dangerous Ground*, 10 March 2008. Ryan al-Natour outlines the whole story of the Camden School controversy in his article, 'Folk devils and the proposed Islamic School in Camden,' *Continuum, Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no.4, 2010, pp. 573-585.

<sup>58</sup> Husain, *Islamic Law and Society*, Sydney, 1999, pp. 200-201.

<sup>59</sup> [www.islam.iinet.net.au/channel/after\\_ww2.html](http://www.islam.iinet.net.au/channel/after_ww2.html)

<sup>60</sup> Kabir, 'The 1990-91 Gulf Crisis: Impact on Muslims in Australia', in *Muslims in Australia*, pp. 207-253.

<sup>61</sup> H. Brasted, 'The Politics of Stereotyping,' *Manushi*, New Delhi, no.98, p.14

<sup>62</sup> Such as the call to ban the burqa by NSW State MLC, the Rev. Fred Nile, in 2002.

Martha Nussbaum spoke on 'The burqa and the new religious intolerance' on ABC Religion and Ethics, 22 May 2012, accessed 23 May 2012.

<sup>63</sup> The burqa is a garment that covers the whole body from head to foot; the chador is a long coat worn with a hijab or scarf; the niqab is worn to cover the head leaving only a space for the eyes (see Chapter 2 for a court case over an Islamic school in Perth involving a Muslim teacher who wore the niqab). Most older Muslim girls and women in Australia just wear the hijab or headscarf if they do choose to cover their head and it is a part of the school uniform in the Islamic schools.

some of their parents have even told their daughters that could take their scarf off out of school to avoid harassment. NSW Liberal Senator, Bronwyn Bishop, said in 2005 that the government should ban the headscarf from public schools as it represented ‘a clash of cultures’ and ‘a challenge to our freedoms and way of life.’ She went even further, claiming the *hijab* was antithetical to gender equality as an intrinsic part of Australian values, and likened the Muslim girls wearing them to school ‘to slaves claiming they feel free under slavery.’<sup>64</sup>

While Islamic high schools include the *hijab* as part of the girls uniform, policy varies considerably in the primary schools. Non-Muslim female teachers also encounter different school policies with regard to their head cover<sup>65</sup> and dress but the few schools which are more observant, tend to employ Muslim teachers only so the issue does not arise. The *hijab* has been more of an issue for girls attending non-Islamic schools in Australia and it is interesting to note that the first Islamic school in Sydney started in 1983 because the daughter of a Muslim couple, both Anglo-Australian converts, was denied entry to a private girls school if she wore her *hijab*.

This diversity amongst Muslims is obviously reflected in the Islamic schools so that although the schools put a lot of emphasis on forging an Australian identity, differences will inevitably appear. This may be at the level of organisation, in terms of who started the school or who runs it now or who is on the School Board. It may affect where the *imam* or *imams* come from, where they trained and what they teach. Obviously there is a difference between where all the teachers are Muslim or when there are a substantial number of non-Muslim teachers, as this can affect the hidden part of the curriculum outside of faith teaching. A few students interviewed said there was some conflict in the playground at times between different ethnic groups at their school but given the remarkable diversity of the students compared to most Australian schools, this appeared to be fairly minimal.

Where the differences are most significant is in trying to forge a common approach to Islamic education in Australia and developing relevant curriculum materials to share, rather than using a variety of material sourced from overseas. Parents in Sydney or Melbourne do have the option of sending their children to a different school, but elsewhere there is little

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<sup>64</sup> Aslan, *Islamophobia in Australia*, p. 149.

<sup>65</sup> Non-Muslim female teachers at the Australian International Academy said ‘they got round the hijab question by wearing hats or berets’, quoted in article by Geoff Strong, ‘Muslim students still call Australia home,’ *Age*, 29 July 2005.

choice. Whether these differences affect parental choice might be an area for research but to date the only work carried out in this area is Noha Sanjakdar's thesis on why parents send their children to King Khalid Islamic College (now the Australian International Academy)<sup>66</sup> and Barbara Giles whose research focused on the choices of schools for their children made by eight Somali mothers in Perth in 2007<sup>67</sup>. Teachers certainly seem to move around and could be quite critical of some schools rather than others, though this usually reflected personalities rather than other factors.

The obvious contrast is with the Catholic Schools who have a central organisation in the Catholic Education Board though even they have small more conservative schools on the fringe like the PARED (Parents for Education) schools closely linked to Opus Dei. Another interesting contrast is with the Jewish schools, where the differences amongst their smaller number of schools reflect the wide spectrum of modern Judaism, rather than the variety of differences faced by the Muslim community. Conservative Christians also have some coordination through Christian Schools Australia and Christian Education National (formerly the Christian Parent Controlled Schools) but again there are smaller denominational differences that lead to the creation of other schools and organisations such as those associated with the Exclusive Brethren or Seventh Day Adventists.

The difference with the Islamic schools is that because Islam in Australia is so diverse, both theologically and ethnically, there is no equivalent network or organisation that can link all of them together. While some of the other denominations, like the Catholics and Christian Schools have a certain level of coordination, others like the Jewish community function without this, and even with the Catholics and Christian schools, there are fringe groups that operate on their own. However this problem for the Islamic schools, which are relatively few in number and lack many of the resources of other groups, was noted by early researchers such as Donohue Clyne and still remains the case today, despite efforts to create a coordinated network.<sup>68</sup> Even with the issue of training imams in Australia, there are differences as was clear from a radio interview with Ameer Ali from AFIC and Kuranda Seyit from the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations about this very issue, when

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<sup>66</sup> Noha Sanjakdar, 'Why do Muslim parents choose King Khalid College of Victoria?'

<sup>67</sup> Barbara Giles, 'Somali narratives on Islam, Education and Perceptions of Difference', in Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, pp. 162-185.

<sup>68</sup> The main example is the ACIES, now ISAA, but not all the Islamic schools are affiliated to it. The six AFIC schools are also obviously coordinated.

the speakers could not agree on a common approach to establishing such a programme, though agreeing that it was a good idea<sup>69</sup>.

The next chapter looks at the history of the independent or non-government sector schools in Australia as they paved the way for the Islamic schools, in particular the Catholic schools. This is followed by background information on the Islamic schools around Australia with details on how they have evolved since 1983.

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<sup>69</sup> Ameer Ali and Kuranda Seyit interviewed by David Rutledge on *The Religion Report*, ABC Radio National, 12 October 2005.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

The existence of faith schools, especially when comparing them with other countries, is very much tied up with the history of independent or non-government<sup>1</sup> schools in Australia and in particular, the history of the Catholic schools. Understanding the background to this situation offers a key to understanding the way in which Islamic schools have been able to develop in Australia since 1983, particularly with regard to allowing them to become financially viable and acquiring government endorsement. This is in sharp contrast to the situation for Islamic schools in a number of other Western countries.

As a nation, Australia has a higher percentage of students at non-government schools than any other country in the world, a figure boosted by ideological and financial support given by the Howard Coalition government of 1996-2007. As a result, over the last decade, the proportion of students enrolled in government schools declined from 69 per cent in 2000 to 66 per cent in 2010. One in five went to a Catholic school (unchanged since 2000) and 14 per cent went to an independent school.<sup>2</sup> Figures for Independent schools in 2012 indicate that there were 134 Christian schools, 19 Jewish schools, 8 Brethren schools and 33 Islamic schools<sup>3</sup> but the biggest growth in recent years has been in the Christian schools. Striepe and Clarke, writing from Western Australia, trace the recent growth of these schools, particular the Christian schools, as well as the funding arrangements, suggesting that this phenomenon offers an important area for future research.

No figures are available for the number of Muslims who are home-schooled and the evidence for them is anecdotal so while the research might be of interest, it would be hard to undertake. However there was an article on Muslim students in church schools in Sydney which gives a figure of 145 Muslim primary and high school children at Catholic schools,

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<sup>1</sup> There is some argument about this term as the schools still receive government funding.

<sup>2</sup> [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) (cat.no. 4102.0)

<sup>3</sup> Independent Schools Council of Australia,. Snapshot 2012.  
[isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ISCA-Snapshot-20121.pdf](http://isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ISCA-Snapshot-20121.pdf)

including 39 at La Salle Catholic College in Bankstown<sup>4</sup> and several students interviewed during the research for this thesis said that they had been to Catholic schools at some point. Donohoue Clyne refers to the attraction of Catholic schools for many Muslims because of their perceived discipline, religious ethos and the provision of single sex schools at a secondary level<sup>5</sup>. Dupuche and Soliman make the point that while Australian Muslims do not know much about Catholics, they hold a good level of respect for them. This is indicated by the large number of Muslim parents who send their children to Catholic schools<sup>6</sup>.

Jakubowicz, Collins and Chafic give a figure of government primary schools in Sydney taking about 80 per cent of Muslim children (16,000) and non-government schools 20 per cent (4,000). For 15-19 year old Muslim youth, they give a figure of about 2,800 boys and 2,900 girls in government schools, about 130 boys and girls at Catholic schools and about 390 at other non-government schools<sup>7</sup>.

This encouragement of private schools is important because it has allowed the development of government funded Islamic schools, particularly during this period. Donohoue Clyne has outlined how hard it was for small and poorly resourced Islamic schools to be financially viable before the new funding arrangements were introduced in 1996<sup>8</sup>, though she also warned that there had been a small number of Islamic schools that were opened by individuals for worthy motives but without consideration of their educational viability. She added that these schools had ‘photogenic buildings, glossy marketing but grossly inadequate teaching resources. Such schools do not provide parents with an appropriate choice of school, especially since many parents are unfamiliar with the other options.’<sup>9</sup> The current policy also makes it difficult for opponents to call for a ban on Islamic schools, given community acceptance of faith schools in Australia, as opposed to other countries where they are the exception or do not exist at all.

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Morris, ‘Not all of the old school. Muslim students in Christian schools?’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May 2007, [www.smh.com.au/news/national/not-all-of-the-old-school/2007/05/01/1177788142524.html?page=2#](http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/not-all-of-the-old-school/2007/05/01/1177788142524.html?page=2#), accessed 11 May 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Donohoue Clyne, *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic Schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*, undated, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> John Dupuche and Yasser Soliman, ‘Muslim-Catholic Relations in Australia’, in Ata (ed), *Catholics and Catholicism in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne, 2012, p. 55

<sup>7</sup> A. Jakubowicz, J. Collins and W. Chafic, ‘Young Australian Muslims: social ecology and cultural capital,’ in Mansouri & Marotta (eds), *Muslims in the West and the challenges of belonging*, p.37. Figures based on the 2006 census.

<sup>8</sup> Donohoue Clyne, *The political framework*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The Catholic struggle for separate funding as faith schools has also made it possible for the Islamic schools to benefit from current funding arrangements that are the result of this long struggle.<sup>10</sup> The issue of government funding for the Islamic schools is well dealt with by Donohoue Clyne who traces government policy on the issue since 1969. She notes the surge in growth of non-government schools during the period of the Howard government, though observing that while most of these are established by religious groups, the bulk of them have been Christian Community and parent-controlled Christian schools. She goes on to note that this growth has re-ignited the debate on secular versus religious education and just as the debate on state aid in the 1960s focused on allegations that the Catholic schools were creating ethnic and religious ghettos, similar themes have now surfaced with the charges levelled against the Islamic schools.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Irish in Australia and the Catholic schools – an important precedent**

The debate over funding for faith based schools is particularly tied up with the history of Irish Catholics in Australia<sup>12</sup> and the struggle of Catholic schools for community acceptance, an area where there are some relevant parallels for Muslims and Islamic Schools in today's Australia. In addition, Australia's system of free, secular and compulsory education was introduced in the late nineteenth century to avoid this deep conflict between Irish Catholics and British Protestants which constituted a major fault line in the first century or more of 'White' Australia's history. It is partly as a reaction to this, that faith education based schools have always attracted those families who want an element of religious faith taught to their children in addition to the national curriculum. In this respect, Muslims are only one of the latest groups to follow Catholics, various Protestant denominations and then Jews<sup>13</sup> in setting up their own faith based schools as Australia increasingly becomes a multi-faith society. Differences amongst the Christian denominations and branches of Judaism also reflect a parallel situation with different

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<sup>10</sup> This story is related in many Australian history books including M. Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand, Religion in Australian History*, Ringwood, Victoria, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Donohoue Clyne, *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic Schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*, pp.7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Dupuche and Soliman in Ata (ed), *Catholics and Catholicism in Contemporary Australia*, refer to a seminar organised by the Islamic Council of Victoria when they invited Father Edmund Campion to speak about the struggle of the early Catholic settlers in Australia. He saw their ultimate acceptance as an encouragement for Muslims to look forward to a brilliant future in Australia, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> The first Jewish school in Australia, Mount Scopus Memorial College, started in Melbourne in 1947, visited on three occasions during my research.

Muslim groups or individuals setting up their own schools to reflect their own particular approach to Islam.

As Kabir points out<sup>14</sup>, Irish Catholics who were also once a rejected religious group, were eventually accepted as Australians when they integrated into the wider British-Australian community. Over time, this will hopefully be the path taken as new faith groups, including Muslims, will be accepted as part of the multicultural Australia of the future. Just as so many young Muslims are not accepted as ‘Australian’<sup>15</sup> although they are born here, so the Irish suffered from accusations of disloyalty, along with accusations of supporting violence, or in today’s terminology, ‘terrorism.’ The other parallel of note is with many of these faith groups rejecting the secular approach to education that has characterised public education since the 1870s. This point is made by a number of writers on Islamic education and those educators who have set up Islamic schools in Australia over the last three decades, as emphasised by Barcan,

However from the start of European settlement, the Catholic Church would not accept the secular education of government schools and established an alternative system, united by class and ethnicity as well as religious belief: Catholics were overwhelmingly working class and of Irish heritage.<sup>16</sup>

By 1853, just on 40,000 convicts had been sent direct from Ireland to the Australian colonies, while another 8,000 Irish-born convicts had been sent from England. About four fifths of Irish convicts were ordinary criminals and under two per cent (less than 600) were convicted of political offences, in particular those convicted following the United Irishmen’s rising in 1798 and the 1848 Young Ireland movement rebellion.<sup>17</sup> Ten per cent were also Protestant.<sup>18</sup> For the most part, the Irish were poor, and their church was not only the road to salvation but their social centre and their defiant profession of separate identity,

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<sup>14</sup> Kabir, *Muslims in Australia. Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History*, London, 2004, p. 333.

<sup>15</sup> typical examples of such labelling and rejection were featured in the ABC TV programme *Dangerous Ground*, 10 March 2008.

<sup>16</sup> A. Barcan, *Two centuries of education in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1988, p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> P. O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, Sydney, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

the classic immigrant church. The Irish Catholics were also seen as a major political threat by the colonial authorities, particularly after the rebellion at Castle Hill in March 1804 led by two Irishmen, Philip Cunningham and William Johnston. Reflecting the situation in Britain, Catholicism was proscribed by law and assembly forbidden, although it gained government recognition in the Australian colonies in 1820, some nine years ahead of the United Kingdom.

In contrast to England at this time, 10 per cent of early convicts were Catholic, and their ranks included those convicted following involvement in the 1798 Irish uprising. The English, on the other hand, had not encountered the Irish until the 1830s ‘invasion’ and Catholics there had been largely invisible from the seventeenth century until Catholic emancipation in 1829.

While some of the early Irish convicts spoke Gaelic, they seem to have not held it in high regard as part of their identity (the language was already dying in Ireland). In Australia, they adapted to the use of English very quickly, though the first Catholic chaplains had initially sought the recruitment of Irish speaking priests from home as a preference for the confessional.<sup>19</sup> The question then arises at what point the Irish convicts ceased thinking of Ireland as ‘home’ while the same question could then be posed for the teaching orders that came out from Ireland

The Anglican chaplain in New South Wales, Rev. Samuel Marsden, declared in 1807 that ‘if the catholic religion was ever allowed to be celebrated by authority ... the colony would be lost to the British Empire in less than one year.’<sup>20</sup> Sir Thomas Brisbane reported in 1824, that ‘every murder or diabolical crime, which has been committed in the colony since my arrival, has been perpetrated by Roman Catholics.’<sup>21</sup>

Though the first Catholic priests came in 1799 and the first schools were started around 1803-1806, the parish schools began after the arrival in 1820 of Father Thierry and Father Connolly. There were ten by 1833 and 45 by 1848. The colonial authorities provided grants-in-aid till 1848 but it was run down after that and only books and salaries were covered. There were problems with who was to be on school boards and it was hard to find suitable teachers. The first Catholic training school was set up in Sydney in 1848.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Catholic denominational schools reached their highest point of development during the 1860s but had disappeared by the 1890s as national schools started to develop. Many people objected to funding denominational schools and the Australian Catholic bishops had decided in response to the emergence of this new secular school system, to create a network of schools centred in the parishes and supported by the local communities. It was first intended to preserve the religious culture of the Catholic people and then to be the means of their salvation, and was staffed almost exclusively by members of religious congregations.<sup>22</sup> All in all, about 2,000 Catholic priests came to Australia in the nineteenth century, and nearly all were Irish, especially during the period 1880-1930. Various teaching orders, again mostly Irish, sent a steady stream of their members to the Australian Catholic schools, often replacing teachers who went over to the state system following the Secular Act of 1872. Theologically they reflected the devotional movement in Ireland that came after the Great Famine (1847-53).

Seventy years later, the Australian Catholic bishops were to admit, that, ‘without the religious teaching orders, Catholic schools might gradually have disappeared after the passing of the State Education Acts.’<sup>23</sup> Over the next century, the religious communities were admitting to their ranks the products of their own schools, so that by 1950, a majority of 13,000 religious were Australians.<sup>24</sup> At the first Provincial Council in 1862, the clergy were instructed to do all they could to save Catholic children from the mixed schools and at the same time secure for them an education that was truly Christian and Catholic. In 1879, the Joint Pastoral from the Council said the ‘State had no power or commission to compel parents to violate their conscience by sending their children to schools where an alien religion or no religion at all was taught.’ The First Plenary Council of Catholic Bishops in Australia meeting in Sydney re-emphasised in 1885 that a Catholic primary school was to be established in every parish where there was a priest.

There was growing hostility to Irish Catholics as this separate school system developed and in 1872, Henry Parkes was to declare, ‘Until Irishmen learn to be Australian colonists – until they learn to tolerate free discussion – until they understand the uses of liberty, they must not be surprised if people regard their presence as something not very desirable. I object to seven Irishmen coming here to every three Englishmen. I object altogether to any

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<sup>22</sup> B. Dwyer, *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*. Blackburn, Victoria, 1986, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> R. Fogarty, *Catholic Education in Australia, 1806-1950*, Carlton, Victoria, 1959, p. 257.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

class of men coming here, to set themselves in motion to extinguish freedom of speech and to impede the work of free institutions.’<sup>25</sup> In the same year continuing his line of argument, he declared that, ‘he had no desire that his adopted country, the birth place of his children, should be converted into a province of the Pope in Rome...’ At the other end of the spectrum, Archbishop Vaughan referred to State schools (1879) as ‘seed-plots of future immorality.’<sup>26</sup>

In 1886, there were 215 Catholic schools in New South Wales, and by 1889, there were 267. By the 1890s, as there was growing Irish involvement in the ALP, there was an enormous network of church schools. However they did not reach more than two out of three Catholic children, especially in remote areas and the crowded inner city.<sup>27</sup> The Catholic Church in Australia was now headed by its first Cardinal, Patrick Moran and he announced his national integrationist policy from the time of his first policy speech in 1885. In order to ensure consensus rather than conflict, Moran did not advocate a policy of fierce agitation over State funding of private schools. Moran was a contrast to the fierce opposition of Cardinal Mannix in Melbourne, so that even in the 1920s, some Catholic schools were still being accused of openly fostering disloyalty.<sup>28</sup>

While religion was the centre of the day, the main goal for students was to obtain a job in the civil (public) service, but as good Catholics. Every school day started with prayer, including one for the Pope, there was Mass on Friday, frequent religious processions and for eighty years from 1885, the central textbook was the Catechism, mandatory for all students to learn through Question and Answer (a total of 61) to be ready for confirmation.<sup>29</sup> Three other new developments are also worth noting. The first elite Catholic boys’ schools were established between 1878 and 1880, Xavier College in Melbourne and St Aloysius College and St Ignatius Riverview in Sydney. These three colleges were started by the Jesuits, a teaching order which had been developing a Catholic education system with high academic

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<sup>25</sup> O’Farrell, p.113. The author notes that Parkes used incorrect figures but the parallel stands today with the kind of allegations made by racist politicians like Liberal MP, Danna Vale, who said on 13 February 2006, that Australia was aborting itself out of existence and could become a Muslim nation. Stephanie Peating, ‘Abortion will lead to Muslim nation: MP’, Sydney, SMH, 14 February 2006, [smh.com.au/news/national/muslim/2006/1139679540920.html](http://smh.com.au/news/national/muslim/2006/1139679540920.html)

<sup>26</sup> Fogarty, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> C. McConville, *Croppies, Celts and Catholics, The Irish in Australia*, Caulfield East, Victoria, 1987, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Fogarty, p. 466.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics*, Ringwood, Victoria, 1987, pp. 146-147.

standards since the sixteenth century. Secondly, Cardinal Moran founded St Patrick's College in Manly in 1885 to start training Australian priests, although the Catholic church still relied heavily on Irish priests. Thirdly, while Catholic student organisations had developed after 1930 with the Campion Society in Melbourne, Catholic universities were not established until much later. The Australian Catholic University started in 1991 following the amalgamation of four Catholic tertiary institutions in eastern Australia while the University of Notre Dame, after early problems, opened its doors to students in Perth in 1992.

Other recent major changes that again offer interesting parallels followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Latin was replaced with English in church services, which meant that Catholic students did not have to learn it in school any more. The schools started to rely more on the laity for religion teaching as well as other subjects, as the number of teachers from the religious orders declined drastically. The number of non-Catholics attending the schools has greatly increased too. Aileen Farquer did her thesis research<sup>30</sup> on the impact of Muslim students in a Catholic primary school in Newport in the western suburbs of Melbourne. She made the point that until 1975, there was little enrolment of non-Catholic students into any Catholic school because there were not enough places. This had changed by 1982, when out of 330 students at the school, 115 were Lebanese, and of these, 77 were Muslim children. She added that the school had originally had some communication problems, assuming these children were Catholics too, because they had attended a Catholic school in Lebanon. Buckingham also quotes from a pastoral letter, *Catholic Schools at a Crossroads*, citing the fact that the number of non-Catholic families in Catholic schools in NSW and the ACT had increased from 9 per cent in 1986 to 20 per cent in 2006.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the improved climate of tolerance for Catholics by the second half of the twentieth century, notwithstanding 'the Split' in the Australian Labor Party in 1955, hostility to Catholic schools was to resurface in the 1960s in the context of the national debate over education funding. At this time, the Commonwealth, rather than the State, became the primary source of economic decision in education and independent schools successfully claimed a significant share of public money from both levels of government.

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<sup>30</sup> Aileen Farquer, 'The impact of the inclusion of Muslim students into a Catholic school,' unpublished thesis, UNE, 1988, p.10.

<sup>31</sup> Buckingham, p.25.

There was also a crisis for Catholic education at another level. Although the number of Catholics had doubled in the twenty years after 1945, the growth of high school education had been another feature of the period at the same time as the supply of religious teachers had seen a steady decline relative to the school population. One consequence of this growth, has been the moves to introduce co-educational Catholic schools, although single sex schools still exist, providing an option for some Muslim families who would rather send their daughters to a Catholic girls school rather than a co-educational Islamic school. In this respect, the Islamic schools, though some Muslim parents may prefer single sex schools, have followed more along the lines of the Friends' School in Hobart, the only Quaker school in Australia, which has been co-educational since it was established in 1887.

While the Catholic schools are still steadily growing with the influx of non-Catholic students, the Jewish schools face other issues that again offer some interesting parallels for the Islamic schools. Unlike the Catholic schools, which are coordinated through the Catholic Education Office, the Jewish schools are more like Islamic schools. However each of their schools represents one of the several different branches of modern Judaism, with some of the Ultra-Orthodox ones being very small in size and often relying a great deal on Jewish philanthropy. Each school decides what works for them with regard to teachers and textbooks so there is no unified curriculum. Over the last decade, most schools have been creating in-house teaching materials suitable for their school, sometimes in consultation with overseas Jewish education faculties like the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The religion units are sometimes taught by rabbis, who, like Muslim imams, tend to have trained or come from overseas. Otherwise they are taught by locally trained Jewish Studies teachers but 'they are a rare breed and in high demand.'<sup>32</sup> A rabbi at Mount Scopus Memorial College in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, when interviewed on the SBS Insight programme, said that about a quarter of the week at school was devoted to Jewish Studies and the Hebrew language. Progressive or Reform Judaism has no problem with co-education while Orthodox schools are segregated. There is a strong connection with Israel, and many students either go there on a visit or males might go there for military service after leaving school.

Judaism has a strong moral code of values with more Orthodox Jews following a strict dietary code and other mitzvot (commandments) as laid out in the Torah, so the schools can observe the kashrut (dietary laws) with the food provided on the premises. Jewish

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<sup>32</sup> Personal communication with a teacher at one of the Jewish schools in Melbourne

schools, like the Islamic schools, can design their school year around their own calendar too. Religious devotion focuses on the Sabbath, starting on the Friday evening, which at least complements the traditional secular weekend, even if the seasonal festivals move around slightly every year. Jewish schools rely heavily on philanthropy for financial support and many buildings are named after their benefactors.

This is however one crucial difference for Islamic schools in Australia as in Islam there is no hierarchy comparable to the Catholic Church and schools have been started by a mixture of associations and individuals, one of their major weaknesses, especially in terms of agreeing on a common curriculum and publishing Australian material to fit in with it.

Manar El Chelebi, in her report on the faith based schools symposium in Sydney in 2006,<sup>33</sup> notes that challenges they faced were analogous in all the faith based schools, not just Islamic ones. She reported that some of the main challenges they faced were a continuous onslaught from the media regarding 'minority schools' and the values they taught, as well as challenges unique to immigrant families like refugees. In addition, there was a problem with finding suitable staff as trained language teachers, plus financial issues and always the need to justify their existence to the wider Australian community.

Clearly there are some interesting parallels between the situation and history of the Catholic schools in Australia and the Islamic schools today, not least their association with what is perceived by some in the dominant ruling group as an alien value system, if not disloyalty to Australia itself. This was particularly the case for Muslims after the Gulf War in 1990-1991, which Saniotis refers to as a landmark in the politics of exclusion<sup>34</sup>. In addition, it is because of their fight for faith-based education, largely financed by the state, which has laid the ground for the establishment of Islamic schools since 1983. The fact that Catholic schools are now seen as a valid alternative to the public education system, and that young Australians take their existence for granted without even knowing the difference between a Protestant and a Catholic, lends hope for a day in the future when the same can be said for the Islamic schools which have had less than thirty years to evolve compared to the Catholic schools in Australia which have existed here for close to 180 years.

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<sup>33</sup> ACIES Newsletter, 2006, p 4

<sup>34</sup> A. Saniotis, 'Embodying ambivalence: Muslim Australians as 'other'', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 28, issue 82, 2004, p. 51.

### **ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1983**

Islamic schools in Australia are as diverse as Islam itself and the students certainly represent the enormous diversity of Australia's multicultural society that has developed over the last forty years. The ethnic background of students varies in the different cities, although the largest proportion on the eastern seaboard of Australia, always come from a Lebanese or Turkish background. A number of the schools have a significant number of refugee children, especially from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, so ESL classes or support specialist teachers are often then provided. According to the Islamic Schools Association of Australia or ISAA (formerly ACIES), in 2010 there were 31 Islamic schools in Australia but at least one new one opened the following year and others are planned.

The first Islamic school in Melbourne, originally King Khalid Islamic College, but now called the Australian International Academy, was started by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) in 1983 with a view to establishing one such school under their auspices in each major capital city. The first campus was purchased with a contribution from the late King Khalid of Saudi Arabia so the school was named after him, though it changed its name to the Australian International Academy in 2006. The senior school and middle school is housed in what was a former government school in North Coburg shut down in 1995 during the Kennett era in Victoria, while the junior school is in a former Catholic school two kilometres away which was badly affected by a fire in 1981.

The school is no longer under the auspices of AFIC and has set up another branch in Abu Dhabi as well as taking over the Noor Al Houada Islamic College in Strathfield, Sydney, in 2006 as their Sydney campus. The Sydney Academy is housed in a set of buildings, which also includes a medical centre and Hindu Temple. Like many other Islamic schools, constrained by limits on space, plans were developed to find more spacious accommodation elsewhere in Sydney and in early 2012, it was announced that the Academy had bought 2 hectares of land at Kellyville in the Hills Shire in Sydney, where the new school hopes to be open for 500 primary school students in 2013. The Academy is also the only Islamic school to offer the International Baccalaureate in Australia (for an extra charge of \$2,000 a year) and the new campus at Kellyville would be open to students of a non-

Muslim background, with Australian values and civics classes offered instead of Islamic studies<sup>35</sup>.

The history of the school is recounted in the college's 2008 annual yearbook<sup>36</sup>, with a foreword<sup>37</sup> by Abdulkarim Galea, the current principal, who has been with the Melbourne school since it started in 1983. He recounts the difficulties of the early years and the battle for Commonwealth funding in its first seven years as well as the turnover of exhausted staff, adding that he had also observed a number of other Islamic schools opening their doors and facing the same difficulties.

Right from the start, there was opposition to the school, and Ata recounts some of the objections published in letters to the press in Melbourne with one local resident writing to the *Herald*,

We are not going to let this happen. It will create a traffic hazard and it would be a health hazard to have another couple of hundred people inside my driveway ... and they abuse you<sup>38</sup>.

The other AFIC schools are in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra and Perth, while a new Melbourne one opened in 2011. Malek Fahd in the Sydney suburb of Greenacre, often referred to as 'the flagship school' because of the high standard of its academic results, was opened in 1989, and today has over 1,700 students, with a long waiting list. Because of these pressures, it is selective and gives priority to the siblings of enrolled students. The school has encountered a lot of planning problems over the years but has recently managed to open a second campus as well as build a large new mosque on their main campus. The school took its name from an early royal benefactor in Saudi Arabia but today gets 80 per cent of its funding from the Commonwealth because of the socio-economic rating of the part of Sydney where its students mainly come from.

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<sup>35</sup> 'All welcome at Kellyville Islamic school', *Rouse Hill Times*, 10 March 2011, <http://rouse-hill-times.whereilive.com.au/news/story/all-welcome-at-islamic-school/> viewed 14 May 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Australian International Academy, *2008 Journey*, Melbourne, pp. 11-19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Abe Ata, Moslem Arab Portrayal in the Australian Press and in School Textbooks, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.19, no.3, p. 214.

The Brisbane school has a purpose built campus at Karawatha, 20 kms south of the city centre, but the Adelaide school which started next to a mosque as a K-3 school is now in the former Croydon Primary School, to which they have added other buildings since they acquired the site in 2000. In Canberra, the school was severely constrained by size as it was originally accommodated on the third floor of the wing of a Technology Park in Watson but in August 2010, a new campus was opened at Weston Creek which gives the school room to expand beyond primary level and cater for more students, as like many of the other Islamic schools, they have a long waiting list. In Perth, the AFIC school is at Langford where there is a reasonable amount of space in an outer suburb. This was opened in 2004 when the site of the former Langford College was purchased to develop a school for K to 12 students. AFIC also opened their new school in Melbourne at Tarneit in January 2011, right out on the southwest edge of the urban conurbation. It commenced as a P-4 school but ultimately aims to be a K-12 school, planning to add two new classes each year. The school started as a set of demountable classrooms but the new school should be complete by the end of 2011. AFIC originally controlled King Khalid College in Coburg but parted ways before it became the Australian International Academy in 2006.

The other Islamic school to start in 1983 was the Al Noori Primary School started by Silma Ihram after her daughter was turned away from a private girls college because she wore a hijab<sup>39</sup>. She herself had attended this school as a young woman before she became a Muslim in Indonesia in 1976. The story of its wanderings around Sydney and a long series of battles with Bankstown Council have been outlined in 'Bridges of Light' by Silma Buckley (now Ihram)<sup>40</sup>. She also refers to the problem of raising money for the new schools, with some of the early funding coming from sources in Kuwait and the Gulf states. Her school took its name from a Kuwaiti benefactor who donated \$100,000. She also persuaded a Kuwaiti princess to donate \$7,500 but the rest of the money she needed came from public donations.

Some of the other schools, such as the largest one, the Australian Islamic College in Perth, with over 2,000 students and three campuses, were started by an individual, Dr. Abdallah Magar, who came to Australia from Egypt in 1966, Others have been started by a group of individual sponsors, like Unity Grammar at Austral, west of Liverpool (NSW),

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<sup>39</sup> K. Rasool, *My Journey behind the veil. Conversations with Muslim Women*, Melbourne, 2002, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> The story was also shown on ABC TV Compass programme as *Silma's School* on 3 September 2006.

which started in 2008 on three acres and doubled its numbers after the first year of its existence. They have acquired adjacent land to develop a high school on as the school grows. By 2010, they had 550 students up to Year 8, a common pattern where new schools add classes each year.

The largest co-educational school in South-Eastern Melbourne is Minaret College, started by Mohammed Hassan. It opened up in 1992 as the Islamic College of Noble Park. It commenced with 22 students in a former state school closed down by the Kennett government but has acquired new premises to form two campuses. Today it has 1,200 students with a VCE class of 98 in 2009 besides being a founder member of the ACIES (renamed ISAA in February 2010).

Several schools, both Islamic and Turkish-Australian, are concentrated in the north west of Melbourne. The largest is Ilim College, which began in 1995 with 50-60 students in the former Broadmeadows Technical College, but now has almost a thousand students and a waiting list. It forms a part of the Australian Social Islamic Association (ASIA).

Other schools started up in the grounds of a mosque like the Australian Islamic College (formerly King Abdul Aziz College) in Rooty Hill, Sydney. The original name was in honour of the Saudi royal family as they were hoping for a donation but nothing came of it. Another option for the schools has been to rely on bussing the majority of students to a new green fields site on the edge of an urban conurbation, like Al Taqwa College (formerly Werribee College) at Hoppers Crossing, south west of Melbourne, which started in 1986. The College was purpose built on 54 acres of land and comes under the auspices of the Islamic Trust of Victoria.

Many of the schools have started from a few classes and gradually expanded year by year. However in this situation they often have to rely on demountable classrooms, as in the case of the Brisbane Muslim School that became the Australian International Islamic College in 2007 and is under the auspices of the Australian Islamic Educational Trust.

Arkana College in Kingsgrove, Sydney, started when the Egyptian Islamic Society of New South Wales purchased an old state primary school in 1986 and kept its name, while Noor Al Houda Islamic College was started by Silma Ihram (formerly Buckley) and her husband in demountable buildings on the edge of Bankstown Airport in 1995. After the site was found to be unsuitable because the land was a former dump, the school moved in 2003 to Strathfield where smaller premises meant it could not accommodate all its previous 720

students. Originally it was a girls school but later it became co-educational. The Australian Islamic Academy then took over the school as its Sydney Campus and is hoping to soon move to a larger site.

Rissalah College was established by the New South Wales Federation of Islamic Councils in 1997 as a K-6 primary school, while Al Amanah College, with one campus in Bankstown and another in Liverpool, started in 1998. The college was sponsored by the Islamic Charity Projects Association and goes up to Year 12. Two other schools in Sydney, Al Zahra College in Arncliffe, which started in 1998 next to the local mosque, and a new school, Bellfield College (the school kept the name of the property which the four man board bought to start it on) at Rossmore, which started in 2008, are for Shi'a students only. While both started as primary schools they have expanded up to high school level with a long term plan to develop classes for older students in the following years, a common pattern for many of the schools provided they have the space to expand in. While Al Zahra is in an inner city suburb, Bellfield College has seven hectares on a greenfields site in the south west of Sydney, although this means that 90% of their students (there were 250 in 2011) have to come to school by bus.

Another early school in Perth, the Al-Hidayah Islamic school, started in 1994 in what used to be the Bentley Junior Primary School. The school only covers K-7 students and is not affiliated to any organisation, while the principal has to be a Muslim. Like so many other schools it started with 33 students but now caters for over 200, separating boys and girls into different classes, as they get older.

The most conservative Islamic school, which I was unable to visit, is Darul Uloom College in Fawkner (in the NW suburbs of Melbourne where there is a relatively high concentration of Muslim families). It is affiliated to the Tablighi Jama'at<sup>41</sup> and devotes more time to religious education than the other schools as well as being much more strict on gender segregation. In this respect, it is akin to the second dar ul-uloom in England, at Dewsbury in Yorkshire, which Gilliat-Ray was unsuccessful in gaining permission to visit

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<sup>41</sup> Jan Ali has an interesting chapter on 'The Tablighi Jama'at in Australia' in Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, pp. 118-140.

for research purposes.<sup>42</sup> Donohoue Clyne likewise notes that she was unsuccessful in obtaining permission to visit the Darul Uloom College in Melbourne<sup>43</sup>.

There are also a growing number of Turkish schools but while almost all their students are Muslim and they offer Islamic teaching, they do not see themselves as Islamic Schools.<sup>44</sup>

Some of the schools are linked together through the Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools, which changed its name to the Islamic Schools Association of Australia (ISAA) in 2010 and meets regularly in different capital cities. They produce a newsletter and have a website. In 2010, ISAA had 14 affiliated schools, representing about half the total while AFIC had six schools, with an overlapping membership of ISAA.

Donohoue Clyne wrote in 2001 that the most notable omission in Muslim community organisations 'is the lack of a coordinating body to enable the community to communicate effectively with Australian education authorities and to undertake the coordination, curriculum development and professional development necessary in Islamic schools'<sup>45</sup> but since then the ACIES (ISAA) has been created, although its membership fluctuates and it does not include all the Islamic schools.

Staff in most of the Islamic schools, are a mixture of Muslim and non-Muslim, generally around fifty per cent, and while the principal is usually a Muslim, there have been cases where a temporary principal has been appointed by the school board who is not a Muslim. AFIC schools in particular have had a number of non-Muslim principals when they were unable to find a Muslim one. Bellfield College, the Shi'a school at Rossmore, currently (2011) has a Catholic woman principal, much approved of by the School Board and the parents who are closely involved in running the school.

Principals are drawn from a mixture of overseas backgrounds with a significant number originally coming from the Fijian Indian Muslim community. Several others are Anglo-Australian converts, often coming from a Catholic background. Early founders of Islamic schools often came into this category, like Silma Ihram and her first husband, Siddiq

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<sup>42</sup> S. Gilliat-Ray. 'Closed Worlds: (Not) Accessing Deobandi dar ul-uloom in Britain,' *Fieldwork in Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Donohoue Clyne, 'Seeking Education: The Struggle of Muslims to Educate their Children in Australia', p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> I visited one of these schools in Melbourne, Isik College.

<sup>45</sup> Donohoue Clyne, 'Educating Muslim Children in Australia' p. 118.

Buckley. It has not been easy to find competent principals for a number of schools and there is a significant turnover at times, as with other private schools, often caused by differences with the School Board.

AFIC schools have also had a significant turnover of principals for various reasons. One Christian who had been an acting principal of an Islamic school for a while, commented that all models showed that the Islamic schools in Australia are going through a pioneering stage when administration tends to come last<sup>46</sup>, although this situation is not unique to Islamic schools. Berber who did his research on the role of principals in Islamic schools in Australia, as well as Christian schools, makes the point that Muslim schools differ from the Christian schools in this respect as they have been willing to employ non-Muslim principals. He notes that both kinds of schools have had a lot of trouble finding competent principals and he details some of the problems they have faced with school boards, funding, parent input, and sometimes a high turnover because of these issues. Several of the principals interviewed for this research mentioned the difficulties they faced at times, with more conservative Muslim parents complaining about issues like music or discipline problems.

As more Muslims come through the education system, this situation of finding competent and qualified principals and staff is likely to improve, although as one teacher put it, many Muslim parents have a low regard for teaching as a career for their children compared with other professions. Others disagreed with this view. Several schools, having got up to Year 12 classes, expressed the hope that some of their alumni would return to the school to teach. Six of the former students interviewed were in this position so were interviewed in their capacity as staff as well. This meant they were able to provide a unique perspective on the changes they had noted since they were students there.

The ethnic diversity is represented in the intake of the schools, which varies widely, though there are no exact figures. Some schools, like Malek Fahd in Sydney, have an intake of students almost entirely born in Australia, with parents mainly from a Middle East background. By contrast, the Brisbane Muslim School is exactly the opposite, relying on new arrivals for an intake mostly from Sudan and the Middle East, with heavy emphasis on ESL teaching. In both Sydney and Melbourne, students from a Lebanese or Turkish background predominate but with quite a few students now coming from a Somali background as well as refugee families from Iraq and Afghanistan. King Abdul Aziz

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<sup>46</sup> Personal conversation in Sydney, 3 May 2008.

College in the western suburbs of Sydney, now the Australian Islamic College, has a high number of students from the Indian sub-continent, reflecting its connection with the mosque in whose grounds it was built, but also the diversity of the Muslim community in the area.

Students from a South East Asian background (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei) are more apparent in Perth schools although the Australian Islamic College has its largest intake from an Iraqi background but also includes Somalis who have moved from New Zealand to get Islamic schooling. Al-Hidayah, which used to be Bentley Junior Primary School, has students from the Christmas Island and Cocos-Keeling communities, while some of the staff have come from South Africa. In Adelaide, students from a Middle East background predominate but there is also a significant Uygur community, and one of the imams at the AFIC school in the city is a Uygur<sup>47</sup>. A *Shi'a* school, Al Zahra in Sydney has a large number of students coming from a Lebanese, Iraqi and Iranian background, while the AFIC school in Canberra has a high turnover of different students because so many of them come from graduate student or diplomatic families.

All the schools teach Arabic as the language of the *Qur'an*, although students who spoke Arabic at home said this was an advantage while others often found it difficult, but some schools also offered Turkish or Urdu as a second language as well as Arabic in the Religion classes.

### **The issue of funding the schools**

While the first Islamic schools in Australia started in Sydney and Melbourne in 1983, they were to benefit from the increased funding for private schools during the ALP government up till 1996, but even more from the Howard Coalition government that followed it. Donohue Clyne points out that the Labor Government's New Schools Policy (1985-95) tended to penalise the small and poorly resourced new Islamic schools established after 1988 because they had not formed an education system. In addition Muslim parents, though eager to form new schools, lacked experience in dealing with

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<sup>47</sup> Adelaide is the main centre in Australia for Uygurs (or Uyghurs/Uighurs) living in exile. Y. Shichor has a chapter on the Uygur diaspora, 'Virtual transnationalism: Uygur communities in Europe and the quest for Eastern Turkestan independence' in S. Allievi and J. Nielsen, *Muslim networks and transnational communities in and across Europe*, Leiden, 2003, pp. 281-311.

Australian bureaucracy and sometimes their unfamiliarity with English hindered the application process as well.<sup>48</sup>

Singleton (The First Howard Government, 2000) refers to the Howard Government's 'penchant for funding new religious schools' and continues,

The steady growth of Commonwealth funding to non-government schools reflected both political and fiscal convenience from the Commonwealth's viewpoint (because funding could be withdrawn from the states as private education expanded), the apparent preference of many Australian parents for private education for their children, and the success of the private schools lobby in using the federal system to gain additional funding.

Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, presented this ideological commitment 'as an option for choice' in 2003, having also changed the provision of a start-up grant by reducing requirements for a new school establishment. As a result, Maslen<sup>49</sup> reported that 85 new schools opened between 1999 and 2002, enrolling less than 8,000 students, with two thirds having forty or fewer students. By 2004, a new religious school was opening in New South Wales every six weeks, and some 330,000 students or 30 per cent of the state total, were attending religious schools (thirteen of these were Islamic schools covering 6,200 students). The National Council of Independent Schools Associations calculated that 84 per cent of independent schools have a religious affiliation while Catholic schools account for 20 per cent of all enrolments. By 2004, there were 2,650 non-government schools receiving \$4.3 billion from the Commonwealth, a \$1 billion increase since 2001, when private school funding was changed to a system based on the socio-economic status of parents.

Berber<sup>50</sup> also charts the growth of the Islamic schools using figures provided by the Association of Independent Schools. The figures indicate that while in 1997, there were 15 Islamic schools in Australia, by 2008 there were 30, an increase of 100 per cent. He also

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<sup>48</sup> Donohue Clyne, *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Geoff Maslen, 'AEU Concerns at Growing Number of Private Schools', *Education Review*, vol. 5, no. 10, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Berber, p. 4.

quotes Daniels' report, *Enrolment Trends in Independent Schools*<sup>51</sup>, which concluded that although proportionately there were fewer Islamic schools compared to the growth in Christian schools, they showed the fastest rate of growth (11 per cent) of all the affiliations over the period 1996 to 2003. The ISCA Report<sup>52</sup> also gave a figure of 15,938 students in Islamic schools across Australia for 2008, or 3.47 per cent of the total student population of the independent schools sector.

Many of these schools, including the Islamic schools, were charging low fees and had waiting lists, especially for high schools. Two-thirds of the schools established since 1996 were in low socio-economic areas. Not surprisingly, Islamic schools would benefit from this policy, and ten of the thirteen schools in New South Wales have opened since 1990.<sup>53</sup> Malek Fahd Islamic College in Bankstown started in 1990 with 150 students in K-4 classes and reached Year 12 in 1998. By 2009, it had 1,800 students with 120 staff and received \$10.2 million in funding, as it is categorised as one of the poorest schools with an SES score of 89.<sup>54</sup>

In a foreword to a booklet put out by the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales in 2005, Prime Minister John Howard stated that from 2005 to 2008 the Australian Government was providing record funding of over \$33 billion for Australian schools, including over \$21 billion specifically for non-government schools. The brochure then gave a figure of 12 Islamic schools in New South Wales with approximately 7,000 students (with 10 per cent of Muslim students attending an Islamic school in the state and the other 90 per cent at other Independent, Catholic or Government schools) out of a national total of 28 schools with 13,000 students. The booklet reiterated that the experience of students in Islamic schools is essentially the same as for students in any other Independent, Catholic or Government school, as each school has to meet registration requirements by teaching the approved curriculum and had to meet educational standards as prescribed by State and Commonwealth governments.

Because of the relationship between some of the Islamic schools and their sponsors, some have got into financial difficulties causing the NSW government to recently freeze

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<sup>51</sup> B. Daniels, 'Enrolment trends in independent schools', *Independence*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2005, pp. 29-35.

<sup>52</sup> *ISCA Report – Snapshot*, 2008, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> L. Morris, 'God in the classroom', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 2003.

<sup>54</sup> K. Burke, 'And the winner is: how private schools get paid', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 March 2004.

funding to three of them in Sydney and together with the federal government, launch an audit into what was happening. The Federal Minister of Education, Peter Garrett, announced in April 2012 that he was going to tighten up on the arrangements with independent schools as a result, although his concern was not exclusively about Islamic schools.<sup>55</sup>

### **The growth of the schools**

A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>56</sup> in 2003 made the point that,

Islamic students are leading the flight into private religious education as parents seek value-based education in a school that enforces a strong disciplinary code, and teaches Arabic language and Islamic cultural traditions.

The journalist quotes Irene Donohue Clyne, then a lecturer in cross-cultural communications at the University of Melbourne,

Muslim parents choose Islamic schools because the secular education system is underpinned by Judeo-Christian values that either ignore Islam or present it in a biased manner. Like other Australian parents, Muslims believe private schools deliver high academic standards, discipline and a moral framework consistent with home values.

She continues,

Ten per cent of Muslims send their children to Islamic schools, 30 to 40 per cent of non-Muslims send their children to non-government schools. The reasons are the same. There are not enough places for Muslim students in Islamic schools and the Muslim community does

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<sup>55</sup> Leo Shanahan, 'Peter Garrett plans to reform funding', *The Australian*, 20 September 2012.

<sup>56</sup> L. Morris, 'Islam leads into rush in faith education', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 2003.

not have the same economic resources that longer settled religious communities ... have to build schools or pay for their children's education.

One other interesting question arises at this point and that is whether the schools are prepared to include non-Muslims in their student body. Several schools said they were prepared to and two visited said they had had one or two primary students very briefly, but for girls the major obstacle is probably the Islamic dress code. The Australian Islamic College at Durack in Brisbane got into the headlines in 2011<sup>57</sup> when the school board said they were considering their school uniform code and the compulsory wearing of the *hijab* as they planned to offer five scholarships to indigenous students and were also expecting some Mormon children who had shown interest in enrolling. They had earlier refused to allow one of the girls to wear the *niqab* and told her parents it was not part of the school uniform. The proposed new school at Kellyville in Sydney to open in 2013 under the auspices of the Australian International Academy also proposes to welcome non-Muslim students with an alternative timetable in place of Islamic Studies<sup>58</sup>.

The majority of independent schools in Australia today operate autonomously and are accountable to their parent and school communities. Overall, state and territory governments provide 27% of total government recurrent funding for independent schools although the level of funding for schools and methods used to assess them vary between states and territories. The Federal Government uses the Socio-Economic Status (SES) funding model for non-government schools that is a great benefit to Islamic schools that tend to be located in poorer socio-economic areas in the major cities.<sup>59</sup>

### **Religious aspects of the schools**

The vast majority of *imams* in the Islamic schools come from Africa or Asia and were often trained at Al-Azhar in Cairo or Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, although the *imam* at one of the *Shi'a* schools in Sydney originally came from Burma and was trained in Iran while the *imam* at the other *Shi'a* school comes from Iraq but also trained in Iran. The AFIC school in Adelaide has one *imam* who is a Uyghur, trained in Pakistan, while the

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<sup>57</sup> C. Hennessy, 'Islamic school debates uniform quandary', *Brisbane Sunday Mail*, 26 February 2011.

<sup>58</sup> 'All welcome at Kellyville Islamic school', *Rouse Hill Times*, 10 March 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Snapshot 2008, Independent Schools Council of Australia.

*imam* at the new AFIC school in Melbourne came from Sri Lanka, but did his teacher training at RMIT. Another imam at a Sydney school came from Fiji, had a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of the South Pacific and had trained in Australia as a primary school teacher.

Provision for prayer space also varies a great deal. Several schools, especially the older, more well-established ones like the Australian International Academy in Melbourne and Malek Fahd in Sydney, have their own mosque, others have them on the planning board, but most of the smaller schools just use the library or an undercroft or have a small prayer hall to meet in. Some meet outside when the weather is favourable. Sometimes there is a nearby mosque they can use for the Friday prayers.

The Erebus International report noted the problem with lack of Australian developed teaching materials on religion for the Islamic schools, with much of it sourced from South Africa, India, the UK and the USA<sup>60</sup>, but schools like Malek Fahd and Minaret College are now developing their own publications. Again this situation is likely to improve, though all the materials I have seen to date were designed for primary school level, apart from the VCE course in Texts and Traditions designed by Minaret College.

While most of the schools would like to cover K-12 classes, they are often constrained by lack of space to expand, though in Sydney a number are quite satisfied to be just K-6 primary schools. All schools are co-educational, though the Australian Islamic College in Perth does offer separate campuses for secondary girls classes. Many classes for older students have boys and girls on different sides of the classroom, just as at prayer time. There was a Muslim Ladies College briefly established in Perth but it was one of the schools that ran into a number of problems and was closed down. The court case, involving the principal who was charged with fraudulently obtaining State and Federal Government grants worth \$1.125 million by inflating student numbers in 2006-2007, was unique in Australian legal history. This was because one of the staff called to testify was wearing a *niqab* which she said that she had worn for 20 years and did not want to appear in court without it. The woman judge finally ordered her to appear without it for 15 minutes but the only men allowed in court while she gave evidence were male jurors, the judge's usher, the principal on trial and the lawyers. Male journalists were excluded. The case attracted international

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<sup>60</sup> Erebus International Report, p. 20.

attention as a result and the principal was found guilty and sentenced to a minimum of two years and nine months in jail<sup>61</sup>.

This lack of space also hinders provision of physical education facilities for many schools, though some can make use of local council sports grounds. Finding women's only space for girls having swimming classes has predictably caused local opposition at times, so this provision also varies.

However in most cities, there is more demand than supply at Islamic schools and the Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools, at one stage was aiming to double the overall number by 2010. Unfortunately, although the number of schools slowly continues to grow, several proposals for new ones have run into local opposition<sup>62</sup>, particularly in Sydney, and this particular target was not reached. In addition, many Muslim families either prefer, for various reasons, to send their children to government schools or in the case of older girls and boys, to Catholic schools or other single sex private schools,<sup>63</sup> or their children cannot get a place in their local Islamic school, either because there are no more places available or they cannot afford it.<sup>64</sup>

According to the 2001 census, 10,079 Muslim students attended independent schools while 2,045 attended Catholic schools and 50,148 attended government schools. The national figures for the 2001 census indicate that of 62,272 Muslim students in Australian schools, 50,148 attended government school and 2,045 attended Catholic schools while 10,079 attended independent schools.

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<sup>61</sup> 'WA: School head jailed for falsifying student numbers', *Australian Teacher Magazine*, 30 November 2010, [www.ozteacher.com.au/html/index.php?option=com\\_content&vie... head-jailed-for-falsifying-student-numbers&catid=1:news&Itemid=69](http://www.ozteacher.com.au/html/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&layout=edit&id=69), accessed 11 May 2012.

<sup>62</sup> The most vocal opposition was to the proposed Quranic Society school in Camden, NSW, in 2007-2008 but Al Amanah College had a battle with Bankstown City Council from 2007 to 2009 over a proposal for a 1,200 student primary and secondary school in Bass Hill. The most recent case in March 2012 is the Land and Environment Court overturning a decision by the Liverpool Council to allow an extension of Malek Fahd Islamic College at Hoxton Park.

<sup>63</sup> Irfan Yusuf in *Once were radicals*, Sydney, 2009, refers to this practice in the South Asian Muslim community in Australia, p. 80, as does Donohoue Clyne, 'The political framework to the establishment of Islamic Schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity,' p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Malek Fahd Islamic school in Sydney is well known for the sign it displays: "There are 25,000 Muslim students in Sydney. We cannot take them all. No place in any class K-12."

Donohoue Clyne comments that some parents, especially from the Indian sub-continent, also feel that the independent schools have a higher standard of education.<sup>65</sup> Figures for home schooling are impossible to come by as many do not register but it appears to be growing.<sup>66</sup> As for the children sent overseas to nearby Muslim majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, or further afield to the Indian subcontinent or the Middle East, with no figures available, evidence is only anecdotal. How these young people reintegrate into Australian society after graduation can only be a matter for conjecture, although it would be an interesting area to research, if it were possible. Student H said that this had happened to her after Year 6 at an Islamic primary school and she thought it was quite a widespread practice. Her parents took her to Saudi Arabia then brought her back to Australia for Years 11 and 12 at a public school.

Interviews with former students indicated a significant proportion of them had moved between different schools, which often included Catholic primary schools. Others attended public schools at primary level while some went to state colleges for Years 11 and 12, either because they were unhappy at their Islamic high school or wanted to do courses they could not do there, especially if their interests were not academic subjects or the school had suggested they 'leave.' Students who told me that they had left after Year 10 explained it was usually because they wanted to do subjects that were not regarded as prestigious like medicine and law, though others were expelled for unruly behaviour. However, not surprisingly, no figures exist for this, and in my research, such references by staff and students as well as parents, were purely anecdotal. In this respect, the schools are like all private schools in Australia, which are unable to cope with students who do not fit in, usually boys, although at one school there was reference to a couple told to leave for forming an inappropriate relationship.

Apart from the specifically Islamic schools, there are also a number of Turkish-Australian schools, primarily in Melbourne and Sydney, where virtually all the students are Muslims but which do not consider themselves specifically 'Islamic'. The uniform rules are less rigid for girls and religious education is not compulsory nor is Quranic teaching in

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<sup>65</sup> Donohoue Clyne, unpublished thesis, p. 192.

<sup>66</sup> Sally Neighbour, 'A class of their own', *The Australian*, 19 June 2009. The Muslim Home Schools network gives overall figures for home schooling in Australia, but concedes the real figure is much higher. 'How Many Children are Home Educated in Australia?' [www.muslimhomeschool.net/has/homeschoolingaustralia.html](http://www.muslimhomeschool.net/has/homeschoolingaustralia.html), accessed 23 April 2012.

Arabic. Isik College<sup>67</sup> in Broadmeadows, where many Turkish Australians settled, comes under the Selimiye Foundation, while Sule College in Preston (Sydney) is controlled by the Feza Foundation.

### Questions about the schools

While the development of Islamic schools was encouraged by the policy of the Howard Coalition government in office between 1996 and 2007, since the events of September 2001 concern has been expressed within sections of the Australian community about what is taught in these schools. This culminated in the launching of the Australian values debate in 2005, which to many commentators was aimed at the Muslim community and in particular, Islamic schools.

John Howard echoed these concerns after meeting Muslim leaders in Canberra in August 2005 when he said, that ‘there was discussion about what is taught in Islamic schools’. Then ALP leader, Kim Beazley, went further and said that ‘the funding of schools should also be conditional upon ensuring students are not exposed to extremist material or teachings,’ adding that all schools should teach ‘respect for democratic values, including their civic and legal responsibilities as Australian residents and citizens.’<sup>68</sup>

The opposition to Islamic schools expressed particularly in Sydney in recent years, focuses on a general hostility to Islam or rather, community perceptions of what Islam stands for. A group of local churches – Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian and the Evangelical Sisters of Mary - opposed to the proposed Quranic School in Camden claimed that Islam was not a private religion but was driven by a powerful political agenda based on a plan for ultimate world domination. They added that the Quranic Society espoused a world view which was not compatible with the broader, Australian egalitarian culture.<sup>69</sup>

Along the same lines, the Camden Islamic School Protest wikispace site<sup>70</sup> stated that their primary opposition was based on VALUES and went on to quote various *Quranic suras* and *hadith* concerned with under-age sex and hatred of non-Muslims to justify their fears of what would be taught in the school.

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<sup>67</sup> Visited on 7 June 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Sophie Morris, ‘Muslim schools on latest front of values battle’, *Australian Financial Review*, 25 August 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Submission to the Land and Environment Court, April 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Accessed 26 May 2009.

The Western Sydney Street Corner blog discussing the proposed school had one comment calling for a review of programmes run by Islamic schools ‘as they may be going against the grain of our great Australian culture and turning innocent young boys into violent sex predators.’<sup>71</sup> Another post says the schools are just the first step into taking over Australia, while a third asks, ‘is there nothing illegal about teaching students *sharia* law or the extreme interpretations of Islam such as the preaching of violence towards women and Allah calling for husbands to beat<sup>72</sup> there (sic) wives (*sura* 4:34).’

One Camden resident, testifying at the Land and Environment Court hearings about the proposed Quranic Society school, claimed that the school would teach war and how to kill, as well as be a breeding ground for terrorists.<sup>73</sup>

This is despite the Muslim Schools Charter<sup>74</sup>, adopted by the Australian Islamic Schools affiliated to the ISAA (formerly ACIES) making quite clear its opposition to violence, hatred and terrorism as incompatible with Islam.

Minaret College in Melbourne cites its values on its website:

We abide by the Islamic values that promote love, care, respect, tolerance, honesty and perseverance.<sup>75</sup>

Hostility to Islamic schools reached new levels of aggression from certain sections of the community after October 2007 when a proposal for an Islamic primary and high school for 1200 students in Camden from the Quranic Society came to local attention. After two pigs heads were put on stakes on the site, with an Australian flag strung between them, a public meeting was held on 5 November and around a thousand people turned up to it, while other citizens put in objections to the Camden Council. Kevin Rudd visited Camden to support the local ALP candidate during the Federal Election campaign and opposed the application ‘on planning grounds’.

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<sup>71</sup> Street Corner, 22 January 2009.

<sup>72</sup> There is a great deal of debate in the Muslim community about the translation of this particular Arabic word used in the Qur’an with many saying that ‘beat’ is not an accurate expression in the context of the passage concerned.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted by Neighbour, ‘No lessons here’, *The Australian*, 3 June 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Muslim Schools Charter, 2001, readopted in 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Minaret College Mission Statement, 2001.

So did Rev. Fred Nile of the Christian Democratic Party, a speaker at the public meeting, whose policies include support for Christian Schools but also a moratorium on Muslim immigration to Australia for the next ten years.<sup>76</sup> Other right wing organisations distributed leaflets at the meeting like the Australia First Party, the Australian Protectionist Party and the Anglo-Australian National Community Council. Pauline Hanson also came to support the protests.

Opposition to further immigration by Muslims also featured in the 2010 Federal Election campaign, tied in with fears of the ‘boat people’ coming from Afghanistan, calls for the banning of the burqa<sup>77</sup>, and a media focus on Hizb ut-Tahrir<sup>78</sup> which held a conference in Sydney in July 2010 as part of what *The Australian*’ columnist, Sally Neighbour, described as their campaign for the formation of a trans-national Islamic state<sup>79</sup>. The Liberal Party did however disendorse their candidate for Chifley, David Barker, after he claimed that Labor would bring Australia ‘closer to the hands of a Muslim country.’<sup>80</sup>

Fred Nile’s Christian Democratic Party had also returned to the fray in December 2009 when they put up nine candidates in the Bradfield by-election (ironically after the seat was vacated by Brendan Nelson) arguing that the party was opposed to racism, ‘But Muslim is not a race. It’s a religious and political ideology.’<sup>81</sup> The party also put out a survey that amongst other questions asked if the Federal Government should have the power to deport any Muslim and whether there should be a ten year moratorium on Muslim immigration. Their nine candidates only polled 3.58% of the vote despite Fred Nile’s claim that at least 10 per cent would agree with his party’s policies but afterwards he said that his party would not run multiple candidates again.

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<sup>76</sup> Christian Democratic Party. About Us. [http://www.cdp.org.au/fed/about\\_us.asp](http://www.cdp.org.au/fed/about_us.asp) accessed 23 October 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Though AFIC leader, Ameer Ali, at Murdoch University endorsed the call to ban the burqa in public, causing some criticism from fellow Muslims, *The West Australian*, 6 August 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir (the party of liberation) was formed in Palestine in 1953 and now operates in more than 40 countries. It calls for the restoration of the caliphate and argues that Islam is incompatible with secular democracy. There is some confusion as to whether it constitutes a terrorist organisation, as though it is banned as such in some countries, in Australia it says it is nonviolent, although the authorities regard it as dangerously extreme.

<sup>79</sup> Neighbour, ‘Islamic hardliners return for Sydney convention after push for ban fails’, *The Australian*, 3 July 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Nicky Phillips and Debra Jopson, ‘Liberal candidate falls on in his Facebook’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Imre Salusinszky, ‘Fred Nile raises crusade in by-election’, *The Australian*, Sydney, 6 November, 2009, p. 6.

Fred Nile was also a speaker at an anti-Muslim National Conference for all Concerned Christians on the theme 'Australia's Future and Global Jihad' at the Assyrian Sports Club in Fairfield Heights in Sydney on November 21, 2009, when Pastor Danny Nalliah from the Catch the Fire ministries in Melbourne took up the theme of values again, stating,

At some point we have to draw the line and say enough is enough. The nation has to stand for its Christian values, irrespective of whether all people practise Christianity or not.<sup>82</sup>

More attacks on Islam and Muslim immigration were generated early in 2011 when community debate on 'multiculturalism' was triggered off again by speeches on the subject by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel in October 2010, and the British Prime Minister, David Cameron in February 2011, reflecting on the experience in their own countries. In Australia, the debate was exacerbated by the increased number of asylum seekers coming from Indonesia by boat, in addition to the tragedy of the SIEV 221 in December 2010. Liberal Senator for South Australia, Corey Bernardi, told Adelaide radio station MTR in March 2011,

Islam itself is the problem – it's not the Muslims. Muslims are individuals that practise their faith in their own way, but Islam is a totalitarian, political and religious ideology. It tells people everything about how they need to conduct themselves, who they're allowed to marry and how they're allowed to treat other people.

He added that Islam had 'not moved on' since it was founded and that extremists wanted fundamental Islamic rule implemented in Australia.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Josephine Tovey, 'Christian leaders plan anti-Islam conference', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 August 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in 'Adelaide Now' website, accessed 2 March 2011. Original report in the *Herald Sun*, 19 February 2011.

Pauline Hanson returned to the political arena in the New South Wales State Election on 26 March 2011, along with Jill McCulloch who led the campaign against the Islamic School in Camden in 2009-10, but narrowly failed to gain a seat in the Legislative Council.

The debate over introducing *Shari'a* law into Australia surfaces every now and again and is used to whip up further prejudice, as commentators clearly have no understanding what it means. Usually the media seeks to associate it with punishments that are now viewed as 'cruel and unusual' by current Australian standards, conveniently forgetting some of Australia's colonial past or some of the punishments laid out in the Old Testament for transgressing God's laws.

It is these arguments that are then tied to the existence of Islamic schools. They then provoke the kind of hatred exhibited in meetings to protest against the Camden school in which Fred Nile teamed up with other right wing hate groups. It ties in with the argument put out by various anti-Muslim groups that Muslims are planning to take over Europe and Australia as part of a demographic jihad.

The debate in Europe over the *burqa* and minarets on mosques also triggered off community discussion in Australia. As one letter published in *The Australian* after the Swiss referendum on minaret construction put it,

Europe is in very serious danger from Islam. The Islamic demographic jihad being waged against Europe has been very successful since it started in the 1970s. There is every danger that within the next 50 years, Europe will be Islamised, with Muslims becoming the majority and *shari'a* law ruling the streets of London, Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin... Europe needs to forget about politically correct multiculturalism and take drastic action to halt and ultimately reverse this serious threat. And if Europe is lost to Islam, Australia will surely be next.<sup>84</sup>

In North America, these arguments are tied in with attacks on Islamic schools by a leading commentator hostile to Islam, Daniel Pipes. One article on '*What Are Islamic*

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<sup>84</sup> Letter to the Editor from Andrew Martin in Adelaide, *Australian*, 8 December 2009, p. 13.

*Schools teaching*<sup>85</sup> focused on seven Islamic schools in North America but three years later was extended to cover schools in Europe and two in Australia. The author targeted these schools because he said they taught hostility to Jews and Christians or had suspected links to terrorism.<sup>86</sup>

Speaking at the Sydney Writer's Festival on 3 June 2007, Somali-born writer, Ayaan Hirsi Ali<sup>87</sup>, asked her audience to consider the need for separate Muslim schools in Australia.

Australians must ask why there is need for Saudi Arabian financed Muslim schools? Young people should be groomed to be Australians first, to see their nationality first, not religion.<sup>88</sup>

Her argument was weakened by the fact that Saudi Arabia no longer finances any Islamic schools in Australia, although some of the first schools did appeal to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for finance, though with limited success. The school director of the Australian International Academy in Melbourne said that the school did get a \$200,000 grant from Saudi Arabia when it first set up a primary school in 1983 but that was the only foreign money they received<sup>89</sup>. However, this is why several schools originally bore the names of royal families in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States such as Malek Fahd, Al-Noori and King Khalid. The Howard government put strict controls on any Saudi money coming to Australia for mosques and schools,<sup>90</sup> and all schools now rely on local funding and government grants. However it should be noted that there was a row over Griffith University seeking \$1.37 million as a Saudi government grant of which \$100,000 for the Islamic Research Unit was received in 2008. The Vice Chancellor then tried to cover it up

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<sup>85</sup> Daniel Pipes. <http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2005/03/troubles-at-islamic-schools-in-the-west>, 29 March 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Pipes, updated blog 26 May 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a well-known Somali-born critic of Islam and female genital mutilation. She is the author of *The Caged Virgin* (2004), *Infidel* (2006) and *Nomad* (2010). In 2002, she declared she had become an atheist and was no longer a Muslim.

<sup>88</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 4 June 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Reported by Geoff Strong in 'Muslim students still call Australia home,' *Age*, 29 July 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Cameron Stewart, 'Islamists starved of funds', *Australian*, 16 May 2007, p. 1.

after justifying the grant application on the grounds that Griffith University was the ‘university of choice’ for Saudis.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s argument also runs into trouble with the line that if Muslim schools are not allowed, the question arises as to whether all faith based schools should be closed or is she just picking on Islam? She is on record in the Netherlands as calling for the closure of all Islamic faith schools<sup>91</sup>, having earlier said that no religious school should receive government funding<sup>92</sup>. In her latest book, *Nomad*, she also stated that Muslim schools in England isolate their students from the values that underlie success in Britain and that education there was by rote learning and submission, not inquiry and an open mind.<sup>93</sup> Later she asserted that Muslim schools are different from Christian and Jewish schools and more like *madrassas* that emphasise religion more than other subjects. She added that ‘the establishment of a Muslim school anywhere in the world but especially in the West, gives *Wahhabis* and other wealthy Muslim extremists an opportunity to isolate and indoctrinate vulnerable groups of children.’<sup>94</sup>

Ali also asserts that the Muslim masses are insulated from all alternative religions<sup>95</sup> but while this is true in some corners of the world, it is not true for the Islamic school students in Australia where they get to dialogue with students from other faiths or study the Abrahamic faiths at a comparative level. The question arises of whether her criticism can also be levelled against Islamic schools in Australia when she writes,

In a free society, if Jews, Protestants and Catholics have their own schools, then Muslims should have theirs, too. But how long should we ignore that in Muslim schools in the West, kids are taught to believe that Jews are pigs and dogs? Or that they should distance themselves from unbelievers and that *jihad* is a virtue?<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> In an interview with David Cohen, ‘Violence is inherent in Islam. It is a cult of death’, *London Evening Standard*, 2 February 2007.

<sup>92</sup> While living in the Netherlands in November 2003.

<sup>93</sup> Ali, *Nomad. A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, p. 20.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>95</sup> ABC Religion and Ethics programme, 30 July 2010.

<sup>96</sup> Ali, 2006, cited in Lichter, *Muslim Women Reformers, Inspiring Voices Against Oppression*, New York, 2009, p. 314.

None of the Islamic schools in Australia would fit into this picture although there have been one or two allegations of individuals making these kind of statements, gleefully picked up by the media<sup>97</sup>. Rather, the wider debate over the existence of faith based schools has characterised much of the popular argument over Islamic schools in Australia, and other Western countries, with a certain section of the Australian community making it clear that faith based schools can only reflect Judeo-Christian Australian Values but no others. It goes to the heart of the debate over whether so-called Australian Values are compatible with Islamic Values and what is taught in Islamic schools in Australia, the purpose of this thesis.

When in 2010, the Australian Curriculum Studies Association Incorporated brought out a booklet *Learning from One Another – Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools*, the hate website, Australian Islamist Monitor, ran a campaign against it, circulating a petition to the House of Representatives in Canberra, with a Sydney address on it:

This petition of the undersigned draws the attention of the House to significant community concerns over the overt and explicit Islamisation of Australian school-age children through the agency of the text-book, *Learning from One Another. Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools*, which is to be introduced into our schools in the coming year.

We the undersigned are extremely concerned that such a textbook would be introduced into our schools under the guise of ‘diversity’ when it is, quite evidently, active proselytising. Such ability to proselytise in our schools has been removed from all other religions, and we are extremely concerned that Islam has, once again, contrived to receive what appears to be special status to advance their religion.

The Petition sought to ask the House to (1) reaffirm its commitment to the ‘wall of separation’ concept concerning church and state that is the foundation of our education system. This ‘wall of separation’ is required to safeguard our multicultural, multi-faith and

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<sup>97</sup> Two Melbourne schools hit the headlines in July 2005 and December 2006 with allegations about hate messages delivered by visiting speakers.

non-faith liberal democracy that has become the hallmark of the civilised 21<sup>st</sup> century nation Australia rightfully claims to be, and (2) indicate to Muslim educators the inappropriateness of their attempts to proselytise by stealth.

The Australian Islamist Monitor website also contained a long article by someone who attended the launch of the publication on 2 June, 2010 at Melbourne University, bitterly critical of the Myer Foundation and the University for supporting the publication, which was then promoted in a series of seminars around Australia.<sup>98</sup> In addition, the publication was attacked by Kevin Donnelly of the Education Standards Institute<sup>99</sup> who was then interviewed on radio by a supportive John Laws and attacked by Andrew Bolt in the *Herald Sun*<sup>100</sup>. *Quadrant* also ran a critical article on the publication<sup>101</sup>.

### THE CONTRAST WITH ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

The situation in Australia with regard to Islamic schools and funding for non-government schools also marks a contrast with efforts to start Islamic schools in Europe. There have been a considerable number of books and articles published on the situation in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, although the references here are only to those published in English. The European Commission is also currently funding a project through the University of Antwerp, which is carrying out a survey of 'Islam (Instruction) in state-funded schools' in all member states.<sup>102</sup>

Fetzer and Soper, in 'Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany',<sup>103</sup> devote a fair amount of their analysis to the situation with regard to schools, putting each country in the context of the different Muslim migration patterns, with Britain dominated by migration from the Indian sub-continent, France and the Netherlands from North Africa and Germany from Turkey. They point to substantially different attitudes to faith education and government funding in each country, with France the most hardline. Yvonne Haddad's 'Muslims in the West' describes the situation with regard to schools in eight countries in

<sup>98</sup> I attended the one in Hobart on 22 July 2010.

<sup>99</sup> <http://australianconservative.com/2010/07/call-for-schools-to-teach-a-positive-view-of-Islam-while-branding-australia-racist/>, accessed 30 April 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Bolt blog, 11 July 2010.

<sup>101</sup> [www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/qed/2010/07/oz-bad-islam-good](http://www.quadrant.org.au/blogs/qed/2010/07/oz-bad-islam-good), accessed 30 April 2012.

<sup>102</sup> [www.lawandeducation.com/main.aspx?c=ELA&n=96055&ct=86719](http://www.lawandeducation.com/main.aspx?c=ELA&n=96055&ct=86719)

<sup>103</sup> Fetzer & Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany*.

West Europe as well as the United States and Canada. The issue of education is included in the general context of problems that face Muslims in each country concerned, as outlined by the various contributing writers.<sup>104</sup>

Roy also asks why there are so many Muslim faith schools in Britain and so few in France and makes the point that in countries with a tradition of faith schools, like Britain and the Netherlands, Muslims develop such schools, while in countries like France where state schools dominate, there are very few Muslim schools.<sup>105</sup>

The conference report on 'Reforms in Islamic Education' held in Cambridge in April 2011, included presentations on the situation in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Denmark as well as Muslim majority countries beyond Europe.<sup>106</sup>

Berglund<sup>107</sup>, a speaker at the conference, said in her doctoral thesis on Islamic schools in Sweden, that the first Muslim school was founded there in 1993. Today there are fifteen<sup>108</sup>, while Sweden's diverse Muslim population now comes to 400,000 out of a total population of 9 million. Her research covered three of these schools where they have managed to couple Islamic teachings with the state-controlled education system, which imposes comparative religion teaching on all its schools. The unit on Islamic religious education often made use of music, song or poetry in teaching.

There are a number of publications on the situation in Britain, where there are now over a hundred schools in the independent sector and seven with state funding. Halstead has written extensively on aspects of Islamic education in England as well as Sophie Gilliat-Ray in 'Muslims in Britain'.<sup>109</sup> Another recent article is by Nasar Meer who wrote on 'Identity articulations, mobilization, and autonomy in the movement for Muslim schools in Britain'<sup>110</sup> while Gilliat-Ray in a more specialised article detailed her failed attempts to visit

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<sup>104</sup> Yvonne Haddad (ed), *Muslims in the West. From Sojourners to Citizens*, New York, OUP, 2002.

<sup>105</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for the New Umma*. New York, 2004, p. 205.

<sup>106</sup> *Reforms on Islamic Education*. Report of a conference held at the Prince Alaweed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, April 9-10, 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Berglund. *Teaching Islam: Islamic Religious Education at Three Muslim Schools in Sweden*, unpublished PhD thesis, Uppsala, Sweden, 2009.

<sup>108</sup> This had increased to sixteen by 2011 according to her conference presentation.

<sup>109</sup> Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain. An Introduction*. Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>110</sup> Meer, 2009, in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. vol. 12, no 3, September 2009, pp. 379-399.

four *Deobandi dar ul-uloom*<sup>111</sup> schools in England. She notes that 16 out of the 25 registered *dar ul-uloom* in Britain are *Deobandi*, but whereas there is no problem gaining access to the *Barelvi* and *Shi'a* institutions, their world remains shrouded in mystery to many. Interestingly, there are no Muslim schools in Scotland, as Muslim parents were not in favour of a Muslim primary school in Glasgow. They felt it would lead to racial segregation, harm community cohesion and they thought it might endanger the fact that Muslim pupils were already outperforming others.<sup>112</sup>

Claire Dwyer and Astrid Meyer trace the development of Islamic schools in the Netherlands and the UK<sup>113</sup>. The first two Dutch Islamic schools were established in 1988 but the national umbrella organisation which initiated them – the Dutch Islamic Foundation for Education – was disbanded in 1993 so independent foundations took over the first three schools. By 1993-1994, there were 29 schools (their article was written in 1995) but the schools remain controversial, especially with the emergence of right wing anti-immigration and anti-Muslim political parties. The difference with the Islamic schools in Australia is that the Dutch schools are to date all primary schools.

In the UK, where religious education and a daily act of collective worship have been compulsory since 1988, there has been an ongoing struggle to secure state funding for Islamic schools. A small number of private schools were set up but because of lack of government support, they are not well financed. The exception was the King Fahd Academy in London, which is sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Government and caters largely for the children of expatriates. The Islamia Schools Trust, set up by Yusuf Islam, was founded in 1982 and first applied for state funding in 1986. Since then, after a long struggle, the primary school has secured funding along with some other schools, but the big difference with the situation in Australia is that the predominantly South Asian Muslim community is insistent on single sex education in high school.

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<sup>111</sup> Gilliat-Ray, *Dar ul-uloom* translates as 'houses of science/knowledge' and they are usually described as seminaries rather than schools, in 'Closed Worlds: (Not) Accessing Deobandi dar ul-uloom in Britain', *Fieldwork in Religion*, vol 1, no. 1, 2005, pp. 9-10.

<sup>112</sup> Cambridge conference report, p. 34.

<sup>113</sup> C.Dwyer & A. Meyer, 1995, 'The institutionalisation of Islam in The Netherlands and in the UK: The case of Islamic schools,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.21, no.1, pp. 37-54.

North America has not been covered as the situation there is more complicated and very different<sup>114</sup>, although the educational materials developed there are often used by Islamic schools in Australia, and a number of articles on Islamic Education published there are referred to in the next chapter on this subject. Selby<sup>115</sup> points out that the earliest Muslim schools in North America were begun by Elijah Muhammad in the early 1930's as part of the 'Nation of Islam' movement and by the early 1970's there were 33 of them, renamed Sister Clara Muhammad schools. In addition to these, there were 29 independent Islamic schools in operation with various other affiliations, and the students attending the schools were ethnically diverse, though the majority came from the Indian subcontinent, as their parents were professionals who had migrated to the United States. Others came from families who had emigrated from North Africa and the Middle East.

Haddad and Lummis in their 1983-84 survey of Muslims in the United States also found that most parents surveyed did not want their children to go to an Islamic school because they feared it would isolate them from American society but a majority did favour weekend schools at the mosque for their children as long as they approved of the teaching there<sup>116</sup>. Perhaps a more recent development is that home education is now becoming increasingly popular for North American Muslim parents. A report at the Cambridge conference said that this was partly because religious leaders such as Hamza Yusuf had characterised secular schools as spaces of hostility to religion and had popularised Islamic de-schooling and pre-schooling literature.<sup>117</sup>

In the United Kingdom, where 2.8 per cent of the population is Muslim (1.559 million recorded in the 2001 census), the first school was started in 1983 in North West London by Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stephens), and today there is a primary school, a girls school and a boys school.<sup>118</sup> The Islamia Primary School currently (2009) has 340 students and was one

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<sup>114</sup> Roy points out that Muslims in the US belong to three main ethnic groups: Arabs, South Asians and African-Americans (each comprising about a quarter of the Muslim population), *Globalized Islam*, p. 207. The second half of Yvonne Haddad's *Muslims in the West* also covers the situation in North America with eight contributing chapters. She makes the point that the situation in the USA is complicated by the existence of Afro-American Islam as well as Muslims coming as migrants.

<sup>115</sup> Selby, 'The Islamic Schooling Movement in the United States', pp. 36-37.

<sup>116</sup> Y. Haddad and A. Lummis, *Islamic Values in the United States. A Comparative Study*, New York, 1987, p. 51.

<sup>117</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.33.

<sup>118</sup> The history of the school appears on their website

<http://www.radwan.cwc.net/islamia.html>, accessed 21 June 2006. The school was also the

of two of the first Muslim Schools to receive state funding. The two secondary schools are much smaller (100-120 students) and struggle financially as well as having a problem with space so they cannot accommodate a sixth form (Years 12-13). Brondesbury College for Boys is simply a former private house with additions. It has entrance exams and charges relatively high fees in order to pay state salaries to staff.<sup>119</sup> However it has received some financial assistance from the *Waqf* Al-Birr Educational Trust, established by Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) and the UK Islamic *Waqf*.<sup>120</sup>

Currently there are 127 Islamic schools in the United Kingdom, compared to less than 20 in 1990, and now there is an Association of Muslim Schools that is responsible for regulating Muslim Schools in Britain, working in conjunction with OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education). The Muslim Educational Trust was set up as early as 1966 to promote Islamic education in Britain and the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, established in 1973, has been a leader in producing children's reading materials<sup>121</sup>. According to the AMSS (Association of Muslim Social Scientists) report, 'Muslims on Education', five Muslim schools in the UK have maintained status, which the association feels is completely inequitable.<sup>122</sup> A report on the situation in Britain pointed out that one area there where Islamic and mainstream education were not incompatible was citizenship education, developed since the late 1990s as part of the national curriculum. A recent study on the success of the programme had found that pupils at Muslim schools had in general a clear idea about what constituted a good and bad citizen, because their education included emphasis on personal, social and moral duties.<sup>123</sup> Kepel makes the point that in England, the state emphasised community identification over individual integration, and by working through the Council of Mosques as community representatives, they lobbied to get the imams to urge their constituents to vote for them in return for the creation of all-girls'

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subject of an article by P. Kingston and Fazal Malik, 'Living in harmony', in *Guardian Education*, London, 21 January 1997, pp. 2-3.

<sup>119</sup> Visited on 23 January 2009.

<sup>120</sup> H. Ansari, *The Infidel Within: Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London, 2004, p. 368.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>122</sup> *Muslims on Education, A Position Paper*, The Association of Muslim Social Scientists, UK, 2004.

<sup>123</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.16

Islamic schools amongst other goods and services, as co-educational schools were seen as promoting licentiousness.<sup>124</sup>

In Sweden, where around 400,000 Muslims now live or four per cent of the population<sup>125</sup>, there are currently nine Islamic schools affiliated with SIS, an association of Muslim schools in Sweden. Two are in Stockholm. They are all controlled by the Swedish government and follow the national curriculum, lessons are in Swedish and there are no fees. The first one began in 1993. The Islamiska Skolan in Stockholm, which began in 1995, has 170 students and 36 staff but only goes up to Year 9.<sup>126</sup> The current new building is in a company area and rented for a period of ten years. The school has additional classes on Islam, Arabic and an hour for students to have in their own language as most students come from North Africa, Somalia and Iraq. As throughout Sweden, there is no school uniform, but modesty is practised as part of the overall Islamic dress code while the *hijab* is optional for girls. Berglund, in an article on Muslim schools in the Nordic countries<sup>127</sup>, says that in Denmark today there are around 20 Islamic schools, the first one dating back to 1978, while in Norway, there was one that closed after a couple of years owing to internal problems but two more were given permission to start in 2012.

In the Netherlands, with a Muslim population of almost one million or close to five per cent of the total population<sup>128</sup> and where there has been a strong wave of hostility to Muslims in recent years, there are over forty Islamic schools. Only two of these are secondary schools, one in Amsterdam and one in Rotterdam. All schools are controlled and paid for by the government. One response to the active hostility to Islam that has developed in the Netherlands has been 'reactive religiosity' whereby Muslims had not retreated from their faith but instead had advanced into it as a place to belong as a minority. Some parents

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<sup>124</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard, 2002, p. 198.

<sup>125</sup> [www.euro-islam.info/pages/sweden.html](http://www.euro-islam.info/pages/sweden.html), gives a figure of 300,000, viewed 4 April 2008, but Jenny Berglund, speaking in Amman, said it was more like 400,000 out of 9 million people in Sweden, *Muslim schools in Sweden try to 'fit in'*, *Jordan Times*, Amman, 25 May 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Visited on 26 January 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Berglund, 'Muslim schools in the Nordic countries', in Lauwers, G, de Groof J, and de Hert, P, *Islam (instruction) in State-Funded Schools*, Antwerp, 2012, pp. 35-49.

[http://sh.academia.edu/JennyBerglund/Papers/1615786/Muslim\\_schools\\_in\\_the\\_Nordic\\_countries](http://sh.academia.edu/JennyBerglund/Papers/1615786/Muslim_schools_in_the_Nordic_countries), accessed 14 May 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Euro-Islam.info.

however regarded religious schools as places that could instil discipline or nurture what they hoped would be better academic achievement.<sup>129</sup>

Al-Amien ('The Trustworthy') was one of the first Islamic schools in the Netherlands starting in 1992. Currently there are over 430 students in a well-designed new building in Osdorp, a residential area on the edge of Amsterdam, taking in students from Years 4 to 12. There are about thirty staff, with sixty per cent being Muslim. Most of the students come from a Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese background but all classes are in Dutch. If they need to learn Dutch first, they can go to a special school for two years beforehand. Originally enough parents had to petition the government for a school to be set up but in the current climate, the government is making it difficult to set up new schools.

In France, with more than four million Muslims, mostly French citizens, or more than six per cent of the total population<sup>130</sup> and where Muslim girls have been expelled from government schools for wearing the hijab<sup>131</sup>, there are now four Muslim schools. In Lille in 1994, nineteen girls were expelled from their public school for refusing to remove their hijab and the local mosque began educating them. The first Islamic school, Lycee Averroes, was finally established there on the third floor of the Al Imane mosque, following the election of the French Council of Muslims in April 2003, along the lines of councils for Protestant and Jewish groups that have already existed for a hundred years. Officially the school has to function for five years, funded by donors and fees, after which the school is eligible for state funding. It started with eight boys and six girls, with a principal, Mme. Sylvie Taleb, who is a French convert to Islam and who previously taught French at a local Catholic school.<sup>132</sup>

A third school, Al-Kindi, started at Decines near Lyons in 2007 after an eight month battle fought against it by the rector of the Academy of Lyons and The right wing Movement for France of Philippe de Villiers who demanded that a republican charter be established for the school and that no headscarfs be allowed. Al-Kindi is a Middle and High

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<sup>129</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.32

<sup>130</sup> Euro-Islam.info.

<sup>131</sup> This issue is explored in depth in Windle, 'Schooling, Symbolism and Social Power: The Hijab in Republican France'. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, vol.1, no. 1, April 2004, pp. 95-112.

<sup>132</sup> 'France's First Muslim School Raises Hopes – and Concern.' *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 October 2003. 'Challenge for govt. to stay out of religion while meeting demands of Muslim community.' <http://www.islamawareness.net/Europe/France/school.html> viewed 30 May 2008.

School with pupils from seventh through to tenth grade, aiming eventually to have 140 students and an annual tuition fee of 1200 euros.<sup>133</sup>

The other two schools are in Paris, the first in the northern suburb of Aubervilliers, and the latest one, opened in 2008, in the southern suburb of Vitererie. The Reussite School in Aubervilliers is housed in the building of the Association Reussite and originally started in 2001. There are only two classes (as of 2009) because of funding problems and the number of students was reduced from 125 to 88 in 2009 as a result of these financial difficulties.

The local Reussite Association pays all the costs and for a variety of reasons, the school has failed to obtain the state funding due to it after five years of functioning successfully, with excellent exam results. Parents help out financially, plus zakat contributions from the local Muslim community. Aubervilliers is the most heavily populated Muslim suburb in France, with most people of North African origin. Currently there are only two classes but the hijab is not compulsory and only about sixty percent of the girls wear it.<sup>134</sup>

There is enormous opposition to these schools stemming from the French secular tradition of separating church and state with vocal opponents arguing that such schools are an open invitation to ethnic separatism.

Overall, apart from Sweden, Islamic schools are becoming more of a desired option for Muslim parents in Europe but they are facing increasing controversy, although the attitude of governments to state funding varies considerably. While Islamic schools in Australia face controversy too, at least their funding situation is much more secure, and they do not face some of the conflicts that exist in Europe. Recently the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has stated that multiculturalism has failed in Germany<sup>135</sup>, while in France there is growing support for anti-Islamic parties like the right wing Front National. In the

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<sup>133</sup> Galliawatch. Sunday 11 March 2007. <http://galliawatch.blogspot.com/2007/03/al-kindi-opens-its-doors.html> accessed 17 September 2008.

Ecoles musulmanes en France. Sadot Philippe. <http://www.les4verites.com/Ecoles-musulmanes-en-France-1420.html> accessed 17 September 2008.

France's Third Muslim School Opens. IslamOnline.net. 5 March, 2007..

[http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article\\_C&cid=11](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=11) accessed 22 July 2008.

France's Third Muslim School Opens. [http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php3?id\\_article=321](http://www.euro-islam.info/spip/article.php3?id_article=321) accessed 30 May 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Visited on 30 January 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Speech in Potsdam reported on BBC News, 17 October 2010

Netherlands there has been a surge of support for Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) and anti-immigration nationalist parties have seen a growth of electoral support in Scandinavia: the Sweden Democrats (SD), the True Finns and the Danish People's Party.

### **Room for hope**

In that respect, Australia is more like Britain, where although there is a strong current of Islamophobia, the right wing parties have made little political headway in terms of the popular vote compared to countries on the mainland of Europe. Dunn and Forrest point out that according to their research<sup>136</sup>, despite popular ignorance about Islam in Australia, more than 85 per cent of Australians agree it is a good thing for our society to be made up of different cultures, adding that this indicates that Australian tolerance on issues like the wearing of the *hijab*, Australian tolerance is far greater than in much of West Europe.

However one of the biggest issues remains the tactics that Islamophobic individuals and groups can use to block planning applications for new schools. Finding land and being able to afford it are two major hurdles for proposed Islamic schools or the extension of existing ones, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney. In Melbourne, several new schools were established as a result of taking over previous schools closed by the Kennett government or as a result of taking up land on the edge of the conurbation and bussing most of the students in every day. This has not been possible in Sydney where new land has to be acquired and planning applications have been blocked on a number of occasions, the latest being the Malek Fahd extension at Hoxton Park in 2012. Although two new schools (Unity Grammar and Bellfield College) have been established a long way out in the western suburbs of Greater Sydney, the distances are too far for most students to travel every day from where they live. As a result, schools trying to expand have sometimes had to spend years battling planning objections in areas like Bankstown and these tactics are still being used by the opposition, though not always so blatantly displayed as in the Camden school struggle.

As for the issue of specifically Islamic schools, while there are interesting parallels with the situation in Australia affecting schools that are state funded, it varies from country to country, and clearly the vast majority of Muslim students in all countries, including Australia, attend public schools. Given the growth of these specifically Islamic schools, and

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<sup>136</sup> K. Dunn, 'Stereotypes no substitute for understanding', Opinion column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 2006.

the expectation of the parents sending their children to these schools rather than public schools, it is essential to start by looking at a definition of what constitutes an Islamic education, the subject of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### ISLAM AND EDUCATION

Given the diversity of Islam, there is considerable debate within the *Umma* (the global Islamic community) on the nature and direction of Islamic education, itself a problematic expression<sup>1</sup>. As Saeed notes<sup>2</sup>, a significant problem with the current debate on the reform of Islamic religious education is that it gives no clear definition of the term, although this does not prevent many Western commentators considering all Islamic religious educational systems and institutions as virtually identical.

Before considering what goes on in the Islamic schools in Australia, this thesis examines the nature of the debate within the Muslim community, as there is a great diversity of views. It is useful in this context, to examine the different views on the topic within a historical framework and then more specifically by looking at the issue in the context of predominantly Western secular societies where Muslims constitute a small minority.

#### The Early Years of Islam

According to Ibn al-Nadim, the sleeping *caliph* (al-Mamun) spotted a bald, light-skinned Aristotle sitting on his bed. Overcoming his initial shock at finding himself face-to-face with the great philosopher, al-Mamun asked him to define ‘that which is good.’ Aristotle replied that reason and revelation – that is, science and religion – were both good and in the public interest, a response the *caliph* took as confirmation that scientific scholarship was a religious duty. ‘The dream,’ Ibn al-Nadim concludes, ‘was one of the most definite reasons for the output of books.’<sup>3</sup>

The above story is a reference to the establishment of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad during the time of the Abbasid *caliphate* in the ninth century C.E. This Golden Age of Islam has been well documented although there is little mention of it in Australian

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<sup>1</sup>Buckley uses the word ‘Islamic schooling’ because he says that there has been some form of Islamic education around since the time of Adam and Eve. ‘Islamic Schooling in Australia,’ *Insight*, 1997. [www.ifew.com.insight/v12i03/schling.html](http://www.ifew.com.insight/v12i03/schling.html) accessed 20 February 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Saeed, ‘Islamic Religious Education and the debate on its reform post-September 11,’ in Akbarzadeh & Yasmeen (eds), *Islam and the West. Reflections from Australia*, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>J. Lyons, *The House of Wisdom. How the Arabs transformed Western Civilisation*, London, 2009, p.77.

SOSE textbooks<sup>4</sup>. However a number of books have appeared in recent years that describe in some depth Islam's contribution to learning. These include Lyons 'The House of Wisdom. How the Arabs transformed Western Civilization'<sup>5</sup>, Karabell's 'People of the Book. The Forgotten History of Islam and the West'<sup>6</sup> and al-Khalili's 'Pathfinders, the Golden Age of Arabic Science'.<sup>7</sup>

The debate on what constitutes an Islamic education goes right back to the time of the Prophet Mohammed (570-632), as Muslims are able to draw a great deal on what he said on the subject through matter contained in the *Sunnah*. They can also draw on an analysis of the nature of knowledge and learning from the time of the Rightly Guided *Caliphs* (632-661) through to the Golden Age of Islam.

At a historical level, as Saeed points out,<sup>8</sup>

In the early Islamic period, broadly speaking, there were three different strands of Islamic education. These were the juridical-theological, the philosophic-scientific, and the mystical-spiritual.

He indicates that before the establishment of foundations and state supported educational institutions in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, students used to move from one scholar (*alim*) to another in search of education<sup>9</sup>. Later he describes how 'the early Islamic age of great intellectual achievement began to wane in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with an increasing tendency to give priority to 'religious' disciplines over 'non-religious' disciplines.'<sup>10</sup> Following this decline in philosophical-scientific learning, Muslim thinkers took up the issue of educational reform from the middle of the nineteenth century and continued in almost all key Muslim communities in the twentieth century. The focus for many reformers was the distinction between religious and non-religious disciplines and a shift in teaching from the transmission of knowledge to facilitating critical discussion and exploring the link between an issue and

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<sup>4</sup> J. Windle, *The Muslim Middle Ages in Victorian classrooms; an analysis of junior humanities textbooks*.

<sup>5</sup> Lyons, *The House of Wisdom*.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Karabell, *People of the Book. The Forgotten History of Islam and the West*, London, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> J. Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders, The Golden Age of Arabic Science*, London, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Saeed in Akbarzadeh & Yasmeen (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Saeed, *Islam and the West*, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

its context. It is this approach that has led on to the idea of state-funded schools in which Islamic religious education is taught alongside secular subjects.<sup>11</sup>

Robinson stresses the importance of the oral tradition in the Islamic world for many centuries until the spread of the printed word. He asserts that the impact of the West on the Muslim world then transformed the context in which Islamic knowledge existed so that the questioning and in a sense, subversive presence of western knowledge, spread more widely and started to compete for a place in Muslim minds.”<sup>12</sup> He goes on to define three broad strands of response: reformism, modernism and Islamism, though beyond these broad strands there were many competing voices<sup>13</sup>, a debate that continues most forcefully in majority Islamic countries or where Saudi money competes against the inadequate resources of local education, as in Pakistan<sup>14</sup>.

Reformists, like the *Deobandis* in North India and *Muhamadiyya* in what was the Dutch East Indies, paid varying attention to what the new learning from Europe had to offer while modernism was concerned about facing up to the reality of western knowledge and western dominance, realising that the way of the *ulama* (scholars) was insufficient to meet the challenges of the time. For many modernists, modernism became secularism and the future was envisioned in secular states so that in their schools, western languages and some of the humanities were studied along with western science and technology.<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly, the reformists and modernists attracted criticism, in particular as Robinson suggests, because neither could produce satisfactory answers to the problem of what was appropriate knowledge for a Muslim society. Their thinkers included figures who have inspired so many Islamists today, men like Mawdudi in Pakistan, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, and organisations like the Jamaati-e-Islam of South Asia and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world. Robinson asserts that,

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>14</sup> In 2011, Pakistan allocated \$470 million to health and education, while the military budget was \$6 billion, according to *Dawn*, Lahore, 6 June 2011. Literacy is slowly improving but is still only just over 50% and far lower for women than men, [www.dawn.com/2011/06/04/health-sector-criminally-ignored-medical-experts.html](http://www.dawn.com/2011/06/04/health-sector-criminally-ignored-medical-experts.html)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

they have little desire to bring back into service the Islamic learning of the past but rather aim to place western learning in an Islamic mould and direct it to Islamic ends.<sup>16</sup>

The rapid spread of the printed word also posed a threat to the tradition of oral transmission and undermined the monopoly of the *ulama*. The Islamist approach has however been strengthened through the conservative puritanical agenda of *Wahhabism* combined with the wealth of the Saudi monarchy created from finding that the new state sat on fifty per cent of the world's cheap oil reserves. It is this money that has been used in recent years to found *madrassas* throughout the Muslim world and caused concern in Australia where the Federal Government moved to monitor all funding coming from Saudi Arabia after 2004. There was a subsequent controversy over Saudi funding sought for an Islamic Studies Centre at Griffith University in 2008<sup>17</sup>. It was noticeable that the critics did not ask themselves about other institutes of higher learning in Europe and the USA that seemed to have accepted Saudi funding without disastrous consequences<sup>18</sup>.

This issue of funding from the Middle East was an issue for some of the early Islamic schools in Australia that looked to the Gulf States for initial funding support, as critics alleged that the schools could become a conduit for *Wahhabism* and terrorism. However most of the fears expressed in the last decade have centred on funding for new mosques and prayer halls rather than the Islamic schools.

### **Defining Islamic Education today**

More recently, traditionalists and reformers have continued a discussion that started in the nineteenth century<sup>19</sup> and now extends not only to the nature of education in majority

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>17</sup> Several articles on this topic appeared in *The Australian* in late April 2008.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge and the Prince Alwaleed Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University, both supported by donations from the Alaweed Bin Talal Foundation. The Prince is a senior member of the Saudi royal family and a wealthy businessman.

<sup>19</sup> Saeed, 'Islamic religious education and the debate on its reform post-September 11' in Akbarzadeh & Yasmeeen (eds), *Islam and the West, Reflections from Australia*, p. 67.

Muslim countries but how to go forward in predominantly Western secular societies where about 3 per cent of the world's Muslims live.<sup>20</sup>

Hassan warns that in reaction to these developments, Islamists blame the absence of what they think is Islamic education on growing Westernisation and secularisation in Muslim societies, which then threatens their distinctive identity as Muslims.<sup>21</sup> He points out that this was the position taken by the participants in the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca in 1977, where the view was expressed that Muslims today were prone to a self-doubt that was threatening their religious identity. As they saw it, this was mainly the fault of the Western education system that was spreading in Muslim-majority countries in order to gain what was perceived as intellectual and material advancement. Consequently, a cultural duality developed in the Muslim world, as traditional Islamic education was viewed as supporting traditional Islamic groups whereas modern secular education produced secularists who did not care about Islamic values or just paid lip service to them.<sup>22</sup>

However the conference declaration did stress that Islamic education should not just be confined to theological education as it was for many centuries. Education had to be Islamic in character rather than mainly theological education but certainly not neutral, meaning secular. Thus the aim of Islamic education was perceived as producing not just a well-ordered society with morally responsible and well-informed citizens but a society which also involved the exploration of history and the universe through appropriate disciplines. Kelly reflecting on the deliberations of the conference summarised the situation by observing that Muslim intellectuals are grappling with the challenge of devising educational systems that address both modern sciences and Islamic practices.<sup>23</sup>

### **Ongoing discourse on Islamic education**

A considerable number of articles on Islamic education have appeared in recent years, reflecting this rethinking and debate, though most are framed within a majority Muslim society perspective. Halstead's article, 'Towards a Unified View of Islamic Education',<sup>24</sup> attempts to sketch an Islamic view of education in line with fundamental

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<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Centre Report, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population, Projections for 2010-2030*, Washington D.C., 2011, p.3

<sup>21</sup> R. Hassan, *Inside Muslim Minds*, Carlton, Victoria, 2008, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Kelly. 'Integrating Islam. A Muslim School in Montreal', unpublished thesis, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Halstead, in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1995

beliefs and values, hoping that the dialogue would continue.<sup>25</sup> He accepts that education in Muslim countries began to stagnate during the Middle Ages, and as a result it was easier for Western domination to take place, with the effects still evident today. He asserts that the three basic dimensions of Islamic education are individual development, social development and the transmission of knowledge. It is possible to take this into account in developing a modern Islamic education, particularly in ensuring that the ethos of an Islamic school is in harmony with fundamental Islamic principles.<sup>26</sup> These are that education must not be separated into two kinds – religious and secular, and that whatever Muslims study, must be in the spirit of Islam.

This means that religious education must be concerned with nurture in the faith, and that many subjects cannot be studied or organised as in the West. As examples, he refers to food technology, which must take account of Islamic laws on food; physical education, which must be conducted in such a way that the children do not contravene Islamic rules on modesty and decency; that sex education, if taught at all, must be grounded on Islamic principles, and that there are some subjects like dance and music which may have to be avoided altogether.<sup>27</sup>

His article explores the gap between education as teaching a set of religious beliefs whose truths cannot be established objectively, leaving it open to charges of indoctrination, and a more sophisticated approach that allows for an open, rational, critical approach to all beliefs, designed so that students will develop what he describes as ‘commitment to justified beliefs on appropriate grounds.’<sup>28</sup> It is by following this middle path that there is a way forward today.

Panjawani from the Aga Khan University, in assessing the Islamic dimension of education<sup>29</sup>, points out that there is a flaw in the argument often put forward because whatever the writers assume, there is no one Islamic position with regard to education. There is also a difference between those who argue for a common inter-faith religious framework and those who claim that the Islamic approach is superior to other faiths<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> F. Panjawani, ‘The ‘Islamic’ in Islamic Education: Assessing the Discourse’. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

At one point he quotes Ali from the Islamic Academy where the writer refers to undue emphasis on the secularist approach to life in the British education system<sup>31</sup>. With this situation goes permissiveness, declining intellectual standards, a lack of discipline amongst students, and the violence and peer pressure that exists within these systems. As a result, the education system can lead unintentionally perhaps to the loss of the sense of sacredness of life, arising from the impoverishment of the human spirit, although this argument might well be levied by any of the faith schools when justifying their existence outside the public education system.

In advocating a way forward, Panjwani welcomes the voices that have begun to question this dominant 'Islamic' approach and then go on to explore alternatives, calling for a new look at how Muslims in the past have dealt with the intellectual and educational issues of their times, and welcoming the approach whereby Muslims are able to work with people of other faiths to engage with the problems of their times.

A wider range of perspectives appears in 'Schooling Islam. The culture and politics of modern Muslim education'.<sup>32</sup> This publication resulted from the second of two working groups on the Muslim world, sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs at Boston University in 2004-2005. While it is therefore fairly up to date, the chapters only cover perspectives in parts of Asia and Africa, apart from Mandaville's chapter on 'Islamic Education in Britain'<sup>33</sup>.

Mandaville makes the point that Muslims now make up three per cent of Britain's total population, but while it has been as difficult as in Australia to get beyond ethnocentric divisions, rivalries and suspicions, an umbrella entity has been created to establish a nationally representative body for British Muslims, the Muslim Council of Britain, formed in 1997. While outlining the four types of Islamic schools that have emerged in the UK, reflecting the history of the British Muslim experience, he asserts that it is now possible to detect new hybrid models of Islamic education that combine elements of traditional Islamic sciences and liberal Islamic studies in the same curriculum. As in Australia, the schools started in the early 1980s, but none of them received public funding until 1998. Mandaville traces the development of these schools, including the *Dar ul-Ulooms* or *madrassas*, adding

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> Hefner & Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam, the culture and politics of modern Muslim education*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Mandaville, 'Islamic Education in Britain: approaches to Religious Knowledge in a Pluralistic Society,' pp. 224-241

that questions still persist about whether faith schools have a negative impact on social cohesion and interethnic tensions.

A more recent conference at Cambridge University in April 2011 attracted sixty participants from four continents, though not Australasia. The theme of the two day conference was *Reforms in Islamic Education* and in light of the controversy over Saudi funding in Australia, it is interesting to note that the conference was sponsored by the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies and Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World at the Universities of Cambridge and Edinburgh.<sup>34</sup> The goal of the conference was to consider the dynamics behind internal reforms, which were perceived as already taking place within the broad field of Islamic education. While some of the papers and discussion focussed on Muslim majority societies such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt and Turkey, there were contributions from Muslim-minority countries in Europe<sup>35</sup> and North America that also reflected the situation in Australia.<sup>36</sup>

A definition of what is specifically Islamic about Islamic education raised varying points of view. It could refer to the teaching of Muslim pupils or the teaching of Islamic sources in a confessional environment or the pursuit of knowledge with particular ethical attitudes and aims. The situation in Australia was reflected in the assertion that the aim of many Islamic educational institutions was to ‘integrate faith with learning.’<sup>37</sup>

Reflecting the different points of view in Muslim-minority societies, there was discussion on the different ways to organise the curriculum. It might mean adopting a secular national curriculum with a discrete Islamic studies component but some participants felt that this would make religion too mundane as it would compartmentalise faith away from the rest of the curriculum. Others sought to use the Qur’an as a dynamic framework for organising knowledge and research, though critics of this position felt that in the contemporary period, the focus should be on pursuing knowledge for the benefit of humanity, not creating an ‘Islamic system’ for its own sake.

Discussion on the formation of moral character and behaviour reflected the emphasis placed on this component of Islamic education in Australia, as did the issues that were raised around developing critical thinking and intellectual autonomy. There is a fine line

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<sup>34</sup> Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal is the nephew of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>35</sup> Specifically Germany, the Netherlands, UK, Sweden and Denmark.

<sup>36</sup> Cambridge conference report.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

here between a faith-based approach to scripture and encouraging critical thinking, another issue particularly relevant to Australia.<sup>38</sup> Given the tradition in Australia, the argument that the objective for Islamic schools should be to make Muslims autonomous human beings in their environment would probably be endorsed by most teachers here, a point specifically emphasised by a number of *imams* in discussion over the role of critical thinking in classes on Islamic Studies. Students also spoke of how much they appreciated *imams* who encouraged them to ask questions and did not avoid awkward issues.

The important distinction in Islamic education is between instruction (*ta'lim*) in the sense of transmitting knowledge, and education (*tarbiya*) in the sense of forming character.<sup>39</sup> This distinction is crucial in Australia in that although faith teaching is allocated to practising Muslims, many of the other teachers of the Islamic schools are not Muslims<sup>40</sup>. This is relevant to the question of whether or not this matters as some of the schools in Australia do have a policy of all-Muslim teachers in order to encourage a total Islamic ethos to permeate the whole curriculum. For other schools, it is less of an issue, though non-Muslim teachers in some of the Islamic schools, are encouraged to undertake Professional Development courses in order to better understand the ethos of the school.

Overall, the variety of case studies presented showed that institutions were able to succeed when they could appeal ' to the identities and aspirations of local communities, and by creatively negotiating the pressures that regulation or local and national politics present.'<sup>41</sup>

Contradicting some of the harsher allegations about intolerance and equality made against Muslims in Australia, al-Taftazani (an Egyptian academic) states that,

So an education that impresses on the minds of the children of the society the principles of monotheism, knowledge, labour, freedom of thought, equality between people, co-operation, justice and other Islamic principles, is what we may call an Islamic

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>40</sup> In Sydney, where half of the Islamic schools are, the figure is about 50% according to the Association of Independent Schools report on Islamic Schools in NSW, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.11.

education. But if any philosophy of education rejects any of these principles, it cannot, in our view, be called Islamic.<sup>42</sup>

Halstead<sup>43</sup> observes that Western readers may be surprised at how little has been written over the years on Islamic philosophy of education, as Islam has had a rich tradition of education going back some 1,300 years and Islamic scholarship led the world for hundreds of years in virtually every known academic discipline. He attributes the problem to the ambivalent attitude of Muslim scholars towards the term, because of the cultural baggage attached to it. During Islam's early history there was a debate between conservative scholars and those interested in learning what the ancient Greeks had to offer. This was because popular Muslim opinion tended to see little value in anything outside the study of the Qur'an and indeed could even perceive it as dangerous since the study of philosophy could lead believers astray from the true path.

He then goes on to outline the difficulties with translating the word 'education' from Arabic, as one term emphasises knowledge, another growth to maturity and the other the development of good manners. The meanings do overlap and boil down to the heart of the Muslim concept of education, which,

is the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behaviour and a strong knowledge of and commitment to the faith.<sup>44</sup>

The other problem is that independence of thought and personal autonomy 'do not enter into the Muslim thinking about education, which is more concerned with the progressive initiation of pupils into the received truths of the faith.' Halstead argues that this has led to the difficulties facing those who want to now set up Islamic schools and colleges in the West because

such schools have frequently been established in response to perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling and they have

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<sup>42</sup> A. al-Taftazani, 'Islamic Education; its principles and aims', *Muslim Education Quarterly*, vol 4, no 1, 1984, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> Halstead, 'An Islamic concept of education', *Comparative Education*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2004, p. 518.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

been happy to contribute to the preservation of Muslim identity and help children to take pride in their religion, without giving serious thought to the nature of the distinctive education they provide nor to the way they should deal with the philosophical and epistemological problems posed for Muslims by modern secular scientific knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

He goes on to pinpoint the difficulties faced by Muslim educators in the West, given that their ideal can only be a reality in a Muslim country. Where they are a minority, as in Australia, they seek to combine their consciousness of being a faith community with their desire to enjoy equal rights with their fellow citizens, as well as take on the same responsibilities. To do this, they have to put the religious values at the heart of the educational process but then build that into whatever they need in order to be a good citizen. He concludes that for a Muslim, religion must be at the heart of all education as it acts as the glue which holds the curriculum together into an integrated whole.

This, of course, raises the issues encountered in the schools in Australia, where food technology must take account of Islamic regulations on food, and sex education and sport cannot contravene their rules on modesty and decency. Halstead defines this process as not just grafting an Islamic component onto modern Western knowledge but reconstructing the whole discipline in accordance with Islamic principles. Certainly, the schools visited during my research emphasised his second point, the stress on teaching good manners and faith leading to virtuous action, but feedback from students interviewed, raised questions on his third assertion, the importance of teachers as a good example to their students.

Halstead does not feel that there is anything to prevent interactive learning methods and again this is evident in responses from both teachers and students who are acutely aware of the Australian tradition of robust debate and discussion. Students interviewed constantly stressed their respect for teachers who not only knew what they were talking about but also encouraged discussion. Likewise they had no time for the older teachers educated overseas who they felt did not understand their students or the Australian way of life. He concludes that reconciling Islamic educational principles with a western liberal perspective is fraught with difficulties. This is principally because of the split between the secular and the religious, and the desire of parents for their children to take advantage of the explosion of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 519.

western knowledge in order to grow up and take their place in a society which is radically different from the one they or their predecessors as migrants have come from. That is why it has been interesting to see how students interviewed have continued their education as young Muslims aware of their faith and yet eager to contribute to Australian society, bearing in mind why their parents sent them to Islamic schools rather than the state schools, and that the vast majority of young Muslims have not had that option.

Al-Khalili, who left Baghdad (the home of the original House of Wisdom) in 1979 when he was sixteen and is now professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Surrey, recently published a book on the Golden Age of Arabic Science<sup>46</sup> during the Abbasid *caliphate* (750-1258) and in his introduction reflects on the tension between science and religion in some parts of the Muslim world<sup>47</sup>. He makes the point that Arabic science throughout the Golden Age was inextricably linked to religion and that it was in a spirit of tolerance, that scientific enquiry was encouraged and could grow. He sees the problem today with many Muslims who see modern science as a secular Western construct because they have forgotten the many wonderful contributions made by Muslim scholars a thousand years ago<sup>48</sup>. While there seems to be no problem with the science curriculum in Islamic schools in Australia today, apart from the issue of creationism, there seems little awareness of what al-Khalili refers to as the contribution of Arabic Science, perhaps because many of the science teachers are non-Muslim and do not know about it.

Selby, focusing on Islamic education in the United States, had a frustrating experience, as her initial review of an extant definition of Islamic education yielded what she described 'as a fragmented view of what Islamic education should look like or even what an Islamic theory of education would entail.'<sup>49</sup> Her search between 1983 and 1989 revealed that thirty per cent of the articles were lesson plan articles, twenty-five percent were articles whose primary audience was other researchers, twenty-one percent were persuasive articles whose primary focus was to convince an audience of a point of view, and seven per cent were information technology articles whose primary audience was librarians. She concluded that the focus of these articles was on predominantly Muslim-Arab

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<sup>46</sup> Al-Khalili, p.xxvii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>49</sup> K. Selby, 'The Islamic Schooling Movement in the United States, p. 35.

countries<sup>50</sup> which she felt represented the stereotype that Muslims are predominantly Arab whereas only sixteen percent are ethnically Arab. She also observed that Islamic education was often defined as an isolated social studies topic without attention to the broader roots of Islam as a way of life practised around the world and as far as she was concerned, none of them discussed the Islamic educational movement as it was manifested in North America.

Douglass and Shaikh also focused on the United States in 'Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Application'.<sup>51</sup> They make the point that speculation and policy by community leaders have targeted 'Islamic education' as a possible 'cause' of so-called 'Islamic radicalism' or 'Islamic terrorism.' As a result, there have been various recommendations to reform Islamic education, not only in the United States but in other countries as well.<sup>52</sup>

They question the very term 'Islamic education' which can mean many things, pointing out, that, 'when historical phenomenon and cultural practice diverge from the faith's teachings, designating something as Islamic becomes very problematic.' If this is done it fits in with the popular misconception that Muslims are a monolithic and homogenous group who act only in religious terms.<sup>53</sup> However for the purpose of their article, they define Islamic education as referring to efforts by the Muslim community to educate its own by passing along their heritage of Islamic knowledge. Preferring the term 'Muslim education', they point out that the majority of Muslim schools are for primary age children but some high schools do exist. As in Australia, there is a standard curriculum to which is added *Qur'anic* recitation and memorisation, plus the teaching of basic Islamic beliefs and practices along with Arabic or sometimes Urdu or Farsi. However neither the curriculum nor the textbooks have been standardised, and achieving standardisation remains a challenge for them.

Syed, in a paper advocating home schooling for American Muslim children, gives a figure of 300 Islamic schools for the United States, but then launches a scathing attack on them. His long list of the problems they face, range from 'some boys and girls meet secretly in the basement' and 'Islamic schools are running without an Islamic curriculum, often

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<sup>50</sup> One such example was a speech on *The Goals of Islamic Education* by the Iranian Minister of Education, Muhammad Jawad Bahonar, later Prime Minister, before his death during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88).

<sup>51</sup> S. Douglass and M. Shaikh, 'Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications'. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, vol. 7, no 1, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

without a syllabus' to 'less school activities for girls' and 'School Boards rarely include women.' He makes a distinction between 'secular education' and 'those who have acquired *Deeni* or Islamic education' and defines the aim of Islamic education as 'Character building.' While emphasising the importance of education across a lifetime, he argues that parents faced with the challenge of picking the right school for their children should opt for home schooling, adding a long list of reasons why they are the best choice and why the public schools and Islamic schools are failing.<sup>54</sup>

In Canada, the issue of Islamic education has also been the subject of a number of articles. The number of Muslims in Canada has grown in recent decades with the 1991 census figure giving a total of 253,200, although the figure will have grown since then with refugee arrivals. However Kelly notes that only 2% of children in Montreal attend a Muslim school. She spent several months in 1996-97 as an observer in a Muslim school there<sup>55</sup> where the students studied in French. Most of the teachers originally came from Algeria with only five out of 27 teachers being non-Muslim. The religious textbooks came largely from Morocco. Kelly observed that while there are now a number of suitable children's books for Muslim children published in England, there is very little available in French. The school where she observed, had started in 1985 with 25 students and by 1997 when her thesis was presented, there were 250 students. Over two thirds of them were girls, though it was a mixed school, and by the final year they were all girls. A third of the students came from homes that one staff member told her were not very religious compared to very observant Muslim families who often sent their children to single sex schools or public schools.

Kelly said it was difficult to gain acceptance at first, as many Muslims in schools in North America have been distrustful of researchers coming in, because subsequent articles published were often negative.<sup>56</sup> One of her chapters was on the curriculum when she noted that only 9-18 per cent of the time was devoted to faith units, gradually reducing as the students moved up to their final year. The pattern was very similar to most of the schools in Australia with units on Arabic, Islamic Studies and *Qur'an*. Otherwise she noted that the curriculum was very much like a normal Canadian school, and the parents seemed happy with this, but just wanted their children to have an Islamic environment to study in. In

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<sup>54</sup> I. Syed, 'Education of Muslim Children – Challenges and Opportunities,' Muslim Home Education Network, 2000. [www.muslimhomeschool.net/has/edmuslimchildren.html](http://www.muslimhomeschool.net/has/edmuslimchildren.html), accessed 23 April 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Kelly, thesis, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16

another article, she notes, as in Britain (and for that matter Australia), upper middle-class Muslims sometimes favour Catholic-run single-sex schools, particularly for daughters, because they think ‘they offer high-quality education in an environment that emphasises propriety and respect for elders in addition to being segregated along gender, if not religious lines.’<sup>57</sup>

There is a curious paradox in that some of the Islamic schools in Australia use texts from the United States, while Douglass and Shaikh complain that in the United States, curriculum materials relating to the teaching of Islam are produced overseas. This is viewed as irrelevant and unsuited to the lives and culture of young Americans. The students also face the problem that in the teaching of the *Qur’an*, they are exposed to a greater range of opinion on details of Islamic practice and law, a contrast with Australia where the *Hanafi* school of law seems to be standard, apart from the two *Shi’a* schools in Sydney. However they do stress that in many US schools, there is increasing emphasis on students learning the meaning of passages in the *Qur’an* in translation rather than simply memorising the words and practices in Arabic without trying to understand it.<sup>58</sup>

There is now a considerable amount written on Islamic education in West Europe, where in recent years there has been an increasing backlash against Muslims who now number about 20 million there. In each country, the Muslim population originates from a mixture of different countries, though none have the enormous variety that Australia has.

Halstead has written a number of articles on Islamic education in Britain, where around 75 per cent of Muslims originate from the Indian sub-continent<sup>59</sup>. Meer refers to the debate in Britain between those who see Muslim schools as representing little more than an irrational source of social division and those who welcome them as an antidote to a prescriptive or coercive assimilation<sup>60</sup>. He goes to comment that despite the growing literature on Muslims in Britain and Muslim mobilisation for Muslim schools within and

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<sup>57</sup> Kelly, ‘Integration and identity in Muslim schools: Britain, United States and Montreal,’ *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1999, p. 214.

<sup>58</sup> Douglass and Shaikh, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Meer gives a detailed breakdown of 40% Pakistani, 20% Bangladeshi, plus Turkish and Turkish Cypriot; Middle Eastern; East-Asian; African-Caribbean (10%); Mixed race/heritage (4%); Indian or other South Asian (15%); plus white converts and Eastern Europeans (1%).

<sup>60</sup> Meer, ‘Identity articulations, mobilization, and autonomy in the movement for Muslim schools in Britain’. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol.12, no. 3, 2009, pp. 379-399.

across diverse Muslim communities, surprisingly little is known on what they are seeking and why Muslim schools are seen as important for them.<sup>61</sup>

In an interview with the head teacher of Islamia, the first Islamic school to get state funding in England<sup>62</sup>, he quotes him as saying that the school is about creating a British-Muslim culture where he is keen to partner the Muslim dimension with the British. Developing this theme, Meer then draws on his interview with Mears, director of the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS), who says that state schools do not handle the meaning of Muslim identity well for the children, where they are treated more as a marginal minority group which ought to integrate with the mainstream.

Meer concedes that there is no coherent view amongst Muslim parents on faith schools but realistically they recognise that it is the state schools that will have to change if their children are to understand their Muslim heritage, and there will be major opposition to this. He refers to the Association of Muslim Social Scientists who stress that the essence of incorporating faith-based principles into education is in order that the whole person can be educated in an Islamic environment. They draw on Steiner and Montessori approaches, as their objective is to encourage intellectual, spiritual and moral development within an Islamic ethos and framework. To this end, Muslim schools therefore incorporate faith-based principles into an integrated education system as opposed to a more straightforward approach of teaching genesis or religious history. Meer quotes Mears again to describe how a child's understanding of the interpretative traditions within Islam is akin to wielding a powerful educational tool that is simultaneously spiritual and educative.<sup>63</sup>

As in Australia, there is also a desire in Britain to provide facilities to train religious instructors rather than employ non-British *imams* who are unfamiliar with the particular contexts and experiential lives of Muslims in Britain. Another parallel with Australia is the desire for more accurate knowledge of Islamic civilisations, literature, language and arts. This is in order to see broader aspects of Islamic culture embedded within the teaching and ethos of school curricula, given that the Christian-European tradition is dominant in teaching material. Obviously parents seek social mobility for their children through education but one aspect of Islamic education that surfaces at this point, is the desire for single-sex education after puberty. This partly reflects a conservatism expressed by the Muslim Parents Association but also comes within the ambit of those who argue that

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<sup>61</sup> Note that 97% of Muslim children in Britain attend state schools. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>62</sup> Islamia is a primary school in North London, founded by Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386.

children can focus more on their studies in a single sex environment.<sup>64</sup> Where the school is mixed, it can therefore create separate teaching rooms, although not all Muslims feel this is necessary. The same argument surfaces in Australia but most of the schools here are not in a position to organise single sex facilities although some have separate classes for older high school students in certain subjects.

What is evidently different in Britain is this move to reconfigure what being a Muslim in the West means and part of this process is linked to the issue of schooling. It does however coincide with the push for citizenship education where the fear is that faith schools might curtail the child's autonomy. Meer however argues that, 'the need here is to insist that education for citizenship must necessarily proceed with attention to the social, through the reciprocal balance of rights and responsibilities, that confer upon its recipients a civic status that affords those pupils equal opportunity, dignity and confidence.'<sup>65</sup> He concludes from his interviews with Muslim educators that a synthesis between faith requirements and citizenship commitments is a first order priority. In addition, it is evident that this movement is seeking out a negotiated and reciprocal, British Muslim identity, and as such, 'the mobilization for Muslim schools marks an important shift in the movement for a self-constructed identity.'<sup>66</sup>

Obviously the situation in predominantly secular minority-Muslim societies like Australia and Britain, the concept of Islamic education takes on a different dimension from a traditional Muslim majority society. The controversial commentator, the Swiss-born Tariq Ramadan<sup>67</sup>, points to the difference between first generation migrants in Western Muslim communities and the second generation.<sup>68</sup> He argues that the first generation, often with only limited means, knew about their faith, but the second generation felt the need to move on from feeling this sense of God in their lives to real knowledge as well. He adds that the more educated migrants understood the need to put structures of Islamic education in place for the young, although there is a clear difference between the extra classes on Islam

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>67</sup> Kepel in *Jihad. The trail of Political Islam*, Harvard, 2002, outlines the different views on Ramadan (grandson of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) who he sees as trying to win acceptance for the active participation of Islamists in the democratic process by divesting it of all association with radical groups tainted by violence. Ramadan's critics are inclined to question his motives and the exact nature of the message he is giving to his audiences. p. 369.

<sup>68</sup> Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, p.126.

provided in the local mosque, characteristic of the time in Australia prior to 1983 though continuing today for students who are not attending Islamic schools, and the call for specifically Islamic schools which has developed since then in order to meet the demand from the growing Muslim community in Australia. These also need to be adapted to the societies they find themselves in.

Giles in her paper on Somali mothers' choice of education for their children in Perth gives an interesting list of reasons why parents choose an Islamic education<sup>69</sup>. These include their perception that there is no bullying in Islamic schools, the children are safe there, the schools have high moral standards and there is gender separation when appropriate, discipline is better there and the schools give parents the opportunity to find support within the Muslim community and to feel comfortable in a familiar environment that makes them feel at home. While it is true that this perception is accurate when it comes to a parent visiting the school and coming in to talk to someone at the entrance desk, invariably a Muslim woman wearing a *hijab*, the interviews with Perth staff and students would not back up the perception that discipline is necessarily better. However it is certainly true that the schools make an effort to mix with other non-Muslim students in the state and as such, acts to ensure a policy of inclusion in the wider community rather than exclusion. In addition, Giles mentions that the Somali mothers often move their children between public schools and Islamic schools, as interviews with students also bear out.

### **Conclusion**

Although there has been little theoretical discussion to date on defining Islamic Education in the Australian context, the different approaches are apparent in the various schools, reflecting the enormous diversity of the Muslim community in Australia. This reflects the priority of getting their schools up and going, given the problems they face in doing so. At the practical level, it means establishing competent school boards, then finding trained staff and principals, as well as developing relevant curriculum material, let alone finding suitable sites for new schools or expanding existing ones and then getting planning permission.

Three different approaches to Islamic education are apparent today. More orthodox Muslims put the emphasis on the *Qur'an* and Islam as the central component of the

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<sup>69</sup> Giles, 'Somali Narratives on Islam, Education and Perceptions of Difference,' in Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, p. 177.

curriculum, even to the exclusion of anything else. This approach is found in a number of countries in Asia and to a certain extent in some of the schools in England where there is a strong Deobandi influence. It does not appear to be an option for Australian Muslim families who want their children to get the same educational qualifications as other young Australians but to be able to study within an Islamic environment. The second approach seeks to not only teach faith units but then to introduce an Islamic ethos throughout the rest of the normal curriculum. This appears to be the ideal for the Islamic schools in Australia. However although the rhythm of school life is constructed around the daily practices of Islam and the Islamic calendar, the degree to which an Islamic ethos permeates the whole curriculum does vary. In addition, what the students are seeking differs too, as evidenced from many of the interviews, particularly as they get older and nearer their pre-tertiary examinations. The third approach is where the faith units are simply taught alongside the state curriculum as in many of the other faith schools in Australia, although the schools still like to emphasise their own special values in promotional literature. How Islamic education is being implemented in the Islamic schools in Australia forms the subject of the next two chapters.



## CHAPTER 5

### FAITH TEACHING IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

Central to the existence of Islamic schools and why parents send their children to them is the faith teaching that the students get which is missing from the state system<sup>1</sup>. Students attending non-Islamic schools either get faith teaching at home or by going to classes at the local mosque in the evening or at the weekend. However in a number of interviews, former students commented that quite a few of their fellow students were sent to their school by parents who were not practising Muslims, in the hope that their children would that way pick up on what they did not get at home. There are also some state schools with a large number of Muslim students, which allow visiting Muslims to come into the school for special sessions to teach about Islam. In Sydney, a few senior students from at least one Islamic school are allowed to perform this role as an extra-curricular activity and the Erebus International report refers to the Islamic Scripture Teaching Programme run by the Islamic Council of New South Wales that caters for thousands of Muslim students in approximately 200 public schools in the greater Sydney Metropolitan area<sup>2</sup>.

This chapter takes a detailed look at what exactly makes up the units on faith teaching in the Islamic schools. Essentially all the schools take the same approach, starting with two lessons a week of basic Arabic language starting from Year One and continuing with it up till Year Ten. At primary level, lessons are very simple, learning the Arabic alphabet and script. Usually the lessons are about simple words at first but in the end, the exercise is designed to enable them to read the *Qur'an*. However the big difference is between students who use Arabic as a first language at home and those who have never used it before. As a result, some schools run separate classes for Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers.

The second component is study of the *Qur'an* or *Quranic Studies*. The teacher, usually an *imam*, introduces the students to the different *suras* and they learn to recite them, starting with *Al Fatiha* (the Opening), the first sura of the *Qur'an* which is recited at prayer times. Each verse is accompanied by discussion about what it means.

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<sup>1</sup> A point made by Sanjakdar Noha in her thesis on *Why do Muslim parents choose King Khalid College of Victoria?*

<sup>2</sup> *Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education*, Erebus International Report, Sydney, 2006, p. 17.

The third component, Islamic Studies, involves the life of the Prophet Muhammad, stories about him and his Companions (the *Sahaba*), study of the *hadith*, and something about the history of Islam. In addition, the younger students learn how to pray and perform *wudu*, develop good manners, and learn about the significance of Ramadan and the festivals. With older students, there is a lot of discussion about Islamic beliefs and sometimes they look briefly at the other Abrahamic faiths – Judaism and Christianity.

It is this component of the schools that is at the heart of criticism of the schools with wild allegations of what is taught about Islam, in particular that students are taught intolerance of other faiths and instructed not to mix with Christians and that Muslim values are incompatible with ‘Australian values.’ A definition of this term varies but the critics often equate it with Judeo-Christian values or Christian values. As this is a controversial topic, it is considered in depth later on in this thesis.

There are however a number of issues raised by teachers and students connected with faith teaching that require examination, ranging from the qualifications of the teachers to the texts used, as well as the competency of the staff who teach these classes. Given the allegations made against the schools, it is important to inquire what exactly is taught in these faith units and what the students learn about Islam.

### **The faith-teaching units: Arabic, the *Qur’an* and Islamic Studies**

Almost nothing has been written about faith teaching in Islamic schools in Australia, apart from references to it as a reason why parents send their children to them. School websites refer to faith teaching as part of their curriculum and their yearbooks give some detail, often detailing *Quranic* recitation competitions that students take part in before an audience of appreciative parents. Some of the schools produce their own Australian faith teaching material now, especially at primary level, and sometimes it gets circulated to other schools. There was however a general comment in all interviews conducted with *imams* that this was an area that needed substantial improvement.

While the *imams* or *sheikhs* taught the units on the *Qur’an*, other Muslim teachers were sometimes allocated Islamic Studies while the Arabic teachers were usually native speakers who sometimes came in just to teach Arabic. These individuals were often not qualified as teachers, although schools are making attempts to improve this situation. However in the early days of the schools and sometimes even now, Islamic Studies teachers often teach other subjects too and are not always qualified to teach this subject, though they

may know about their faith as individuals. This concern is also raised by Ramadan when he warned of Islamic schools having unqualified teachers, especially in Arabic, as many of them have no pedagogic background.<sup>3</sup> On a visit to Brisbane in 2008, he also stressed that it was important for *imams* in Western countries to teach Islamic principles in the context of local cultures and laws, adding that *imams* who had not been trained in Australia could encourage divisions between Muslims and non-Muslim Australians.<sup>4</sup>

One issue that came up in a number of interviews was behaviour during these classes, partly reflecting the standard of teaching and at other times, the lack of interest shown by the students, especially as they got older. However more interested students spoke about getting their teacher to give them extra time for learning and discussion. Others said it gave them a stimulus that carried on to university where they could join Islamic Student Societies and continue learning about their faith.

Another issue was that when older students had not attended an Islamic school at primary level, some of them had caught up by attending weekend classes at the mosque so they did not feel left behind in Year 7 at high school. Others said they really struggled and got little or nothing out of attending Arabic or Islamic Studies, as they understood so little and just tried to stay in the background and keep quiet.

### **Teaching Arabic**

The teaching of Arabic is central to Islam because this is the language of the *Qur'an*. However there were a variety of responses as to how this is taught and some of the problems encountered. Teacher L encapsulated the issue,

Most students here, even if they speak Arabic at home, it's colloquial and varied so they are still beginners in classical Arabic and often stay that way for various reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> Ramadan. 2004. 'Towards a Reform of Islamic Education' in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, p 32

<sup>4</sup> Ramadan reported on ABC Radio News, 3 March 2008.

Student M described a fairly typical early approach to learning Arabic at his school, which he learned up to Year Eight when the focus moved to examination subjects and they stopped learning it,

Since Kindergarten we'd always have a separate Arabic lesson and an Islamic lesson so in Arabic lesson you'd learn Arabic so in Kindergarten up to Year Three you'd learn the letters and then you'd learn to put them into words and then you'd learn to put them into sentences and so on and that carried onto High School until Year Eight.

He added that not all the language teachers knew English very well but he had good memories of staff that could adapt to the thinking of teenagers,

So if they were learning how to fast, they would adapt to the thinking of a fifteen year old boy so you could say something that was quite funny and our *sheikh* was quite hilarious in the early years of high school.

Student M also said that his boys' class at sixteen appreciated a *sheikh* who could crack jokes and connect with the boys, even when they were discussing serious issues, and they felt they could discuss any problems or issues or questions with him.

It clearly made a huge difference whether or not students were familiar with Arabic beforehand and by high school, a number of schools were running separate streams for native Arabic speakers and those who were learning it as a second language. While some schools drew from an Australian-born market, others had a large intake of new migrants who often did not speak English, so the main emphasis was on ESL teaching. The proportion that spoke Arabic at home varied enormously as well, the main Arabic-speaking students coming from families with a Lebanese or Iraqi background.

Student F came into Islamic primary school in Year Four (his family had come from Lebanon) and admitted that he'd forgotten his Arabic though he knew a few words here and

there. He said that his teachers were very good so this allowed him to learn basic Arabic, the basic rules, the basic vocabulary.

Student K was one of a number of students who struggled with Arabic as she came from a non-Arabic speaking home where like many other students interviewed, only one parent was a Muslim. She went to state primary school and said that weekend classes at the mosque were very helpful but she was highly critical of her High School classes,

For Arabic *Quranic* classes in Year Seven, the *sheikh* would come in and whoever felt comfortable to read in front of him would read to him. I generally would go up once in a blue moon, I just sat back and did other work....

For her the problem was compounded in Years Eight to Ten where classes were for girls only and the woman teacher was not trained as far as she could recall.

I can't read Arabic, I didn't practice at home every day, my mother didn't teach me either so if you just had to leave it up to the teachers, they didn't really do a good job. My Arabic is really bad and when it comes to the *Qur'an*, I stopped learning when I went to the Muslim school.

Student A was also very critical of her Arabic teachers. She said they were quite shocking and there was no structure to the classes. It was particularly bad for students like her who didn't have Arabic as their first language. The teacher in high school, who was a native speaker, was not very good at speaking English, which made it worse. She felt she got through by just memorising everything in Arabic and felt what her school needed was teachers who were interested in seeing the students progress and learn and grow. Her economics teacher was also terrible but she thought it was better in other subjects. It had been particularly hard for her starting Arabic when she came to the school in Year 9.

Student M was also critical as he felt that his school put more emphasis on exam subjects than religion so,

I came out of it not knowing how to read the *Qur'an* or Arabic and I didn't feel pushed to learn Arabic language or the *Qur'an* as much as I was pushed to learn Maths or English or Science. I speak Arabic at home but when it comes to reading or writing, hopeless.

In contrast, Student H had a flying start because he spoke Arabic fluently at home and his mother was an Arabic teacher so he was at an advanced level. Another advantage was that he felt that his *sheikh* was well qualified, so 'I felt really good studying under him and he taught me how to read the *Qur'an* properly with elegance and with proper technique', adding that he also appreciated the teacher getting them into discussion. All the religion teachers at his school were qualified to teach from an Australian institution although they had also studied overseas at a theological level.

Student F at the same school from years Seven to Ten said that his teacher had studied overseas in Arabic but had then completed his tertiary education in Australia in teaching. He couldn't remember much from primary school but said it was more relaxed,

There were games, picture books, just the fundamental side of things. There were Arabic text books but with the *Qur'an* there was also the English translation and the science of it so when I got to high school it was more of a translation of the *Qur'an*, memorising it and then the sciences of the *Qur'an*, understanding it, in depth knowledge. With the Islamic Studies side of things they would teach us more jurisprudence of your religion, legal aspects.

Teacher A, who admitted she was unqualified at first when teaching Islamic Studies but then went back to university to gain a Grad. Dip. Ed. teaching qualification, was bitterly critical of the teaching of Arabic at one school where she taught, raising an issue common to a number of schools, and not just Islamic schools, where there is a large staff turnover,

They had Arabic lessons as a language. I found it very lacking in the Islamic school. Basically they just assessed the students and just asked them if they knew Arabic because we have many students from the Middle East, from Lebanon and Iraq. They already know

Arabic so they get put into the advanced class and the rest of them are in the beginners class. I found they had a textbook but they constantly changed teachers for them and every year they would be doing the first five lessons over and over again. Teachers I think were Arabic speaking but not trained or maybe back in their country but not according to Australian standards.

Arabic was also dropped once it was not a Year 11-12 exam subject though most students did not care about this unless Arabic was their first language. As far as they were concerned, they saw no point in keeping it up by then.

### **Quranic Studies**

The main purpose of teaching Arabic in the schools is to be able to read the *Qur'an*. Usually the *imam* takes Quranic Studies classes whereas Arabic and Islamic Studies often seem to be taken by other teachers, as a number of students were quick to point out.

The importance of learning the *Qur'an* seemed to vary, usually depending on the home situation. One *Imam* said that they couldn't expect students to memorise the whole *Qur'an* at school so parents who wanted their children to be a *hafiz* (someone who knows the whole *Qur'an* off by heart) either sent them to extra classes at the local mosque at the weekend or even pulled them out of school for six months or a year. He added that evening classes were difficult for girls though. How many students in Australia this situation applies to is another matter and difficult to ascertain. No students interviewed referred to this experience in their life.

Teacher H had been a student at her school then came back to teach there, a process now under way in a number of Islamic schools which have reached Year Twelve class levels,

Well, we did one hour of *Qur'an* a week, then we did one hour of Islamic Studies. We did Arabic as well, between one and two hours a week. However when I got to Year Eleven, I dropped it as an exam subject as I wasn't very strong in the language because we speak

English at home so it was very difficult for me to keep up with everything. Arabic was not offered at HSC level anyway.

She went on to describe how Islam was taught at her school,

All my teachers were qualified. In terms of Islamic Studies, it was taught in a practical manner so it was taught to us in a way whereby we could associate the teachings with our lives and we could incorporate what we were taught and just use that information to learn a more Islamic lifestyle. We were taught a certain way to read the *Qur'an* as there is special punctuation that you should be using when you read the *Qur'an*. We were taught the original way of reading the *Qur'an* so that was great. With Arabic, I don't remember too much because everything was all beyond me.

This emphasis on correct reading and the importance of punctuation, was also stressed by *Imam A*,

Someone else does Arabic, I do Islamic Studies, it is in two parts, *Qur'anic* Studies which is understanding the text and the background of the students who are mostly non-Arabic. Also there are the Arab students who don't always speak it properly and still do not understand the *Qur'an*, As a result, we focus on actual reading of the text because they need it for their daily prayers so we focus on pronunciation because otherwise it might change the meaning if they miss anything out.

Student H had good memories of a well-qualified *Qur'an* teacher, born in Australia,

I had Mr. B, he actually had 100% in his Arabic HSC while he was studying in Australia under a well qualified *sheikh*. I felt really good studying under him and he taught me how to read the *Qur'an* properly with elegance and with proper technique.

He also spoke highly of his Islamic Studies teacher who had come to Australia from Lebanon when he was thirteen so encouraged discussion while teaching the students how to do *wudu* and how to pray.

### **Islamic Studies**

The way Islamic Studies is taught clearly makes a huge difference, given the range of opinions expressed by students interviewed. Student H. had some critical reflection,

In Lower High School classes, Arabic was part of the whole Islamic Studies class. It was part of the programme that went along with the *hadith* stories and memorising the *suras* but in those classes from Years Eight to Ten no-one really paid attention and it was really sad because I've come away from the Muslim school not knowing how to read Arabic. I think it reflected more on the failure of structuring the classes in general in the school. We had some great teachers and students willing to learn, but the environment, not just in Islamic Studies, wasn't as structured as it should have been.

She added that like her friend,

The classes I attended from Years Eight to Ten were really made for anyone who was interested in learning Islamic Studies but we were teenagers. If they don't have structured classes then no-one is going to learn and I think a lot of the time some of the students would be catching up on other homework for other classes.

She made the point again by saying that it wasn't the subject that was the problem because if a really great *sheikh* came to town, everyone went to hear him and thought it was really inspiring, but the class structure was the real problem, adding that this was really ironic,

because most of our parents would send us for Islamic Studies to the Islamic School to come away with an Islamic education.

Texts from the *Qur'an* and stories from the *hadith* were also sometimes used to explain the concept of gender equality in Islam, contrary to some of the wilder allegations made against what Islamic schools teach their students on this issue,

One former student, turned teacher at the same school he attended, agreed that media misconceptions didn't help and blamed both Muslims as well as the media for this. He had taught students about the slave woman who contradicted *Caliph Omar* and referred to the text in the *Qur'an* that dealt with the issue of girl babies being buried alive, 'for what sin are you killing them?' He also referred to the well-known *hadith*, 'Paradise lies at the feet of your mother.'

Student D reflected on her experience of the competency of her Islamic Studies teachers, admitting that she did not know if they were qualified or not, as it had never occurred to her at the time. She said it was obvious that they knew Arabic but she also realised that one of her Arabic teachers was a qualified science teacher, though she was unsure if this person was also qualified to teach Arabic. At her school, a few of the Islamic Studies teachers also taught subjects such as English and History but again she did not know if they were trained to teach it or had just learned about in their childhood. Student I said he remembered that his teacher was qualified in engineering but taught religious studies and *Quranic* classes too.

Student A said that one of her Islamic Studies teachers was a British convert to Islam and was also her Chemistry teacher. Later on, she had another teacher who had a good handle on Islamic Studies but she thought that the class could have been structured better. She had wanted to learn more about Islamic history and had questions on topics such as what happened after the death of Prophet Mohammed, the Golden Age of Islam and the decline of Islamic civilisation. However they were allowed to vote on this and to her disgust, most of the students voted to learn more about marriage and what was *halal* and *haram*. Clearly they did not share her interest in learning more about the birth and evolution of Islamic civilisation. Another student was more negative,

My Islamic Studies teacher did Science. She came here from Pakistan and she didn't have enough knowledge or information about Islam.

This view was echoed by Student O who came into his school in Year Eight, though he acknowledged that his school now insisted on all staff getting qualified as teachers in Australia.

Some of our teachers were qualified overseas. I don't know where she came from, most likely the Middle East. Some of our teachers seemed to teach our class just using basic knowledge they had gained as children so they passed it on to us. Sometimes they used Islamic books, as we had no set textbook. We just had these books and stuff about whether the *hadith* was weak or not.

*Imam* H described his Islamic Studies curriculum to high school students as covering aspects of *Fiqh* (*Fiqh* refers to Islamic jurisprudence, understanding and interpreting shari'a), especially what is allowed and what is not allowed. Then we had the history of Islam with the lives of the prophets and what they taught, as well as the Cardinal Beliefs where he emphasised the importance of the concept of the oneness of God. He emphasised his own role within an Islamic context, by quoting the Prophet Muhammad, 'The scholars and teachers of my community, they are the descendants of the prophets.'

Student H identified disruptive behaviour in class as a problem in faith teaching units when the teacher came from overseas and was not qualified as a teacher, particularly when the students had different ideas on how they should be taught about Islam in Australia,

She would use an old teaching tool from Pakistan, which was to put up two fingers to wait till everyone was silent so everyone wondered what she was doing. Then when she got silence she would explain the system in Pakistan to us but it doesn't work so well here.

Classes in the early years of the first Islamic schools were clearly inadequate as interviews with alumni from the 1980s and 1990s period indicate. As in Europe, virtually all imams have gained their theological qualifications in Saudi Arabia, Egypt or South Africa with others coming from Syria, Iran, Pakistan or India. The problem was whether or not they had then qualified as teachers in Australia. Some schools now insist on all staff getting an

Australian teaching qualification too. One exception was where a convert was teaching but again they were not necessarily qualified as teachers even if they were Australian, or in one school, an American.

In some schools, the local *sheikh* would visit from a nearby mosque and if he was well qualified as a scholar, would be revered by the staff and students as well as the local Muslim community. Their reception by students, however, would vary depending on their command of English, and how well they could relate to the students as young Australians. Younger *imams* were more highly thought of by teenage students, and sometimes doubled up as counsellors on all manner of topics, especially when they were familiar with living in Australia and the issues that students raised with them.

A number of students and staff acknowledged that there could be a problem with teachers who had come from gaining qualifications overseas, like Student A,

They were quite careful, they used to bring a lot of stories over, also the students here were like this, 'you students are very disrespectful compared to there.' I think it's just different upbringings. All in all, if we didn't understand something, we just raised the issue or bring it to the principal or vice principal and say this is just not on.

Student H also raised the issue of well-qualified teachers,

At high school level, you need someone that is super qualified. Getting the knowledge across is very different. If it was more engaging, it would have been more valuable. A lot of teachers of Islamic Studies came from non-English speaking backgrounds. For young Muslims who grew up here, they teach Islam in the way that they were taught and perhaps we had different ideas.

A similar observation was made by another Student H who said there were a lot of problems in high school so 'Islamic Studies in Years 8-10 got sidelined to deal with teenage issues,' adding that 'Islamic Studies didn't translate into behaviour out of school.'

Student M who was at an Islamic school all the way through his education thought that he benefited from the wide variety of teachers he encountered,

It was a mixture. Throughout that time we had people educated here in Australia, we had people educated overseas, people from al-Azhar University (in Cairo), we had a whole mixed bag, so every encounter was a new learning experience. Speaking personally we probably got different things from different teachers and the different approaches and all of them were worthwhile experiences and this brought it all together. *Quranic* and Islamic Studies is such a diverse field and if you just see it from one perspective, you get a bit of a tunnel vision. If you get your education from a variety of sources, read a variety of texts, you sort of become a bit more broadminded and a bit more flexible in your understanding of religions so I think rather than a bad thing, it's probably a good thing just having that different population teaching us.

Another issue was how relevant Islamic Studies was considered by less religious students mainly interested in getting to university. Sometimes it was a contradiction in the schools with Year 11- 12 classes, because while they put a lot of emphasis on the faith units, they also stressed the need for hard work to get high scores for university entrance. Several students said that if they were not prepared to aim for high status university subjects like medicine or law, then they were encouraged to leave after Year 10, which a number did, continuing their studies elsewhere.

Student I observed of the classes she went to,

These lessons were not taken very seriously by students so unless you had that background, your marks weren't going to be very good because nobody put much effort into them, especially for Arabic and *Qur'an*.

She added that many of her fellow students came from non-practising homes so their parents sent them to the school hoping their kids would pick up some Arabic, some *Qur'an*, some Islamic Studies,

but the teachers who taught these subjects, as hard as they tried, they just couldn't capture the students attention and because the students always knew it wasn't going to count towards their VCE, they never took it seriously.

Faith teaching invariably tailed off in those schools where classes went up to Years Eleven and Twelve, unless students had the option of taking it at exam level. Many students said they had no faith teaching after Year Ten. The schools that go up to Year Twelve put great emphasis on exam results and are proud of their results, often displaying them on boards in the school or in their annual school magazine. Not surprisingly, especially given their age, most students felt that faith teaching was irrelevant by then. The exceptions were those who had the chance to take a course in Islam at examination level where it counted towards university entrance.

In Victoria, the VCE allowed the introduction of a Text and Traditions unit on Islam pioneered by one school where the teacher in charge said it resulted in an enormous increase in attendance once the students realised it counted towards their university entrance score.

However a student at another school in Victoria was critical of the focus at this level on the Abrahamic faiths and thought they should include other faiths, which she only learned about after leaving school and going to university. She commented,

Some Islamic scholars say that only 25 prophets are mentioned in the *Qur'an* and as there are thousands in total, scholars have suggested that the Buddha may have been one of them,

adding that learning about these other faiths was something her school could improve on.

Imam M also referred to the 25 prophets in his Year Eight classes when looking at the Books of God which involved consideration of Jewish and Christian beliefs, then in Year

Nine led discussion on Christian and Jewish views on the Judgement Day and eschatology. By Year Ten, the senior course looks at sources of guidance and revelation when he spends two or three weeks comparing seven faiths, Buddhism, Hinduism which he classified as popular and civilised Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Shintoism. As for the more specialised pre-tertiary Year 11-12 courses, he said that some years they did them, some years they didn't. It depended on the numbers.

One *imam* said that he taught Comparative Religion in Middle School because some of his students came from mixed homes, Muslim and non-Muslim, so he felt the need to emphasise respecting other faiths as a basic tenet of Islam that was very relevant to his students. Another school had invited a rabbi and a Catholic priest in to talk to the students and answer their questions.

In Western Australia, Religion and Life includes both the Abrahamic and Indic faiths, which the *sheikh* teaching the course said gave him the opportunity to discuss ethical issues like abortion where there are different views.

Many students said they had learned all they needed by Year Ten and anyway the schools concentrated on exam subjects after that. Student A was very negative in this respect,

From a student's perspective, you don't know what qualifications any teacher has. You just assume I guess. There is a lot of animosity towards the department, I mean when you are a kid you don't really want to learn about religious education, do you? So it was always an ongoing issue that Islamic Studies was meant to be at the forefront, meant to be this, meant to be that. We were always told that at assemblies but the main mentality of most students was, I don't care about this subject, this is not going to get me into university. Fair enough, I care about my religion, but it's sort of like an ancillary thing to me being in this environment.

Student M was at another school where exam results were emphasised and felt much the same,

I think my school was more about curriculum than Islam so I think it was much more focused on studies of Maths, English, Science, much more than Religion. I would rather it was called a private school than an Islamic school because I came out of it not knowing how to read the *Qur'an* or Arabic and I didn't feel pushed to learn Arabic language or the *Qur'an* as much as I was pushed to learn Maths or English or Science. I speak Arabic at home but when it comes to reading or writing, hopeless.

Student A from another school took a similar line,

Islamic Studies was more used as a sort of free period to catch up on other things because people were too bogged down trying to get a good TE mark to worry about something that was essentially not going to be assessed and not going to be marked and count towards their tertiary education.

Student H was sad about this as she only came to her Islamic school in Year Eleven and Twelve without any formal Islamic education but though she spoke highly of the *sheikh* at her school and said he was very engaging in the way he taught the subject, she had switched to Economics because she needed it as a TE subject.

Clearly this is an issue common to many of the K-12 schools, as while they stress the importance of faith teaching in the curriculum, they also put great importance on students doing well in their last year and going to university. The exception seems to be where there is a good Religion course as a TE option they can take. Students interviewed didn't seem to worry on the whole as they thought they had a good grounding in Islam when there were younger and many spoke of becoming involved in learning more about their faith through involvement in student Islamic Societies at university.

Teacher L who ran professional development sessions for Islamic Studies teachers and who had trained both overseas and in Australia, felt that for an Islamic Studies teacher, 'values are the most important part of the programme.' However he added that not all teachers would agree with this and that most teachers in his experience preferred an information-based approach, as most teachers did not like to change.

Another interesting aspect was raised by Teacher M.,

I am a member of Values Education. We are running the Faith or *Iman* Club. We started it just recently. We are encouraging the students how to become leaders who can accommodate the whole world in their heart and not be very narrow-minded. We meet once a week in lunchtime for half an hour especially to help new students who don't know how to pray. They come from a Muslim family but they don't practise as such so they are sent here to this school.

Another *Iman* Club was started by Student A at her school in Year 11 because she felt that the students were being pushed to just concentrate on their exam subjects and they were missing out on faith teaching which she thought was the point of the school. With four other girls, they found a teacher to take *Qur'an* classes at lunchtime and would prepare topics for discussion. She wondered if the Club was still going.

### **Primary school teaching**

Religion classes start from the beginning of primary school with basic Arabic and simple instructions on correct Islamic behaviour as well as stories about the *Sahaba* (Companions of the Prophet) and from the *hadith*. At this stage the emphasis is on rote learning while the children are still very young. However the obvious distinction here is between children who come from an Arabic speaking home and those who do not.

A lot seems to depend on the students' home background. *Imam* M said that many of his students had no knowledge, even when they came from Muslim homes, so he started with the basics, starting with how to pray then going on to the other main pillars of Islam, the Cardinal Beliefs, *Zakat*, going on *Hajj*, and introducing other Islamic terms. He said that there were no serious questions raised up to Year Six so he could concentrate on basic lessons for morals, character and prayer, which was enough to perfect your character (or *din*).

The approach to Religious Studies at primary level seemed fairly standard but certainly contrasted with the rote learning approach associated with large classes in Muslim countries in Asia and Africa where few, if any, learning materials are available. Fairly typical was *Imam* N who described his approach,

In Kindergarten they didn't speak Arabic so we start with pronunciation and some memorising and we try to give them a simple explanation, like the oneness of Allah, and we try to memorise nine or ten chapters a year. From Years Three to Six they should read *Qur'an*. We focus here on how a Muslim should behave and how to relate to non-Muslims. We want them to be nice and polite.

*Imam H* described his classes,

They learn morals and ethics, manners acceptable in Islam. Students in Primary they learn the basics like giving greetings to a Muslim or a non-Muslim, how to shake hands, mostly the right hand, etiquettes of eating, table manners, etiquettes of sleeping. For example, for every aspect there are do's and don'ts or sometimes acceptable or non-acceptable things. For example which way they have to spit, what part of the body they have to put water on by taking a shower so even the minute aspects of their public life and private life and family life, so as they grow up from grade to grade, their knowledge and their experience, that's one of the things that we are helping our students to learn.

This approach was also stressed by *Imam A* who referred to the *hadith*, 'I have been sent down to the people in order to perfect their character' (a well known saying of the Prophet recorded by Abu Hurayra, one of his Companions), that for him meant emulating the prophet when he invited the people to truthfulness, to be trustworthy, not to be selfish and always to be helpful and things like that.

Many teachers at primary level told stories from the early history of Islam and students often said that it was these stories that they remembered, sometimes adding that what impressed them most was the character of their teacher and their knowledge. Primary school children were also taught the importance of *hadith* that emphasised respect for their parents,

such as ‘If we disobey our parents, we will not enter paradise,’ which was displayed on one set of cards used for younger children.

Teachers also agreed that they have to acknowledge the diverse interpretations of Islam, as Teacher N commented on her ESL class of migrant children,

They come from all over the Middle East with different accents and dialects, which even she found hard to understand as a native speaker. You get children from different parts of the Middle East, every part understands Islam differently.... Some of them clash a little bit because different people understand their values in a different way.

Discussing this difference with her and other teachers provoked some interesting dialogue, particularly because I know the Middle East fairly well, apart from the Arabian Peninsula. I know about the differences between *Sunni* and *Shi’a*, as well as some of the smaller sects like the *Alawites*<sup>5</sup> in Syria or other different branches of *Shi’a* Islam. In addition, I was also well aware of how people from Morocco at one end of the Arab world could hardly understand people from Iraq at the other end of the Arab world. As a result, informal conversations revolved around some of the minutiae of detail involved in these differences, such as small differences in how to pray commented on by new arrivals coming from a *Shi’a* background, and trying to mediate in arguments between often younger students based on what they heard at home and then had to sort out at school, where differences were more accepted. Other differences were more cultural or over issues like whether Muslim women should shake hands with Australia men because it was the tradition here.

Islam also stresses the importance of moral character and behaviour (known as *tarbiya*) or good manners. Passing on the correct way to behave was central to teaching younger children at primary level. This not only applied to correct procedures for Muslims when worshipping but manners in general as well as ethical behaviour. This ranges from not dropping litter to conservation of water and respecting animals and the natural environment. As one speaker at a recent conference on Islamic Education at Cambridge University pointed

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<sup>5</sup> The ruling elite in Syria are almost all Alawites, representing only 13 per cent of the population and as a result, fearful of losing their power. The Alawites are a branch of *Shi’a* Islam, unique to Syria.

out, in the British context this fitted well into compulsory citizenship education as part of the national curriculum so not surprisingly, Muslim children thrive in this area.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the Australian values debate, the same could also apply in this country.

One major difference with the schools is whether or not they just cater for primary age students or run through from Year 1 to Year 12. This difference occurs mainly in Sydney where there are a number of such schools, and where the students then leave to attend for other non-Islamic schools after Year Six. Another significant group of students are those who went through the state primary system or in the case of several girls interviewed, attended a Catholic primary school, and then for various reasons were sent to an Islamic high school. A surprisingly high number of students seemed to move in and out of the Islamic schools and the public system or other private schools. This often affected how much they learned, though that depended on what years they attended the Islamic schools.

Teachers at schools that only taught up to Year Six said they felt it important that the children got a basic Islamic education and that this would carry over into high school and beyond. In most cases, these schools simply did not have the space to expand beyond primary level, especially if the school was originally a primary school that the sponsoring Islamic organisation had purchased. Other primary schools with room for expansion were planning to expand up through high school levels, adding another year group each year as time passed.

One problem for a number of the schools concerns those children who have just arrived in Australia as refugees, migrants or children of graduate students. They were attending ESL classes in addition to the classes in Arabic, *Quranic* Studies and Islamic Studies. Sometimes they brought entrenched attitudes with them that were difficult for teachers to deal with, especially with the younger children. An example of this behaviour was given by a non-Muslim, teacher G, who admitted she had problems with new arrivals from the Middle East. She talked about two boys in her class who treated her as a hired help because she was a woman. At first they would not even look her in the face. However she was fortunate to have a supportive principal and an imam who backed her up by getting the younger boys to sit next to girls as that was how it would be for them in the wider world, 'working together.' She tried to be fair but felt she had to be firm with these children, adding

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<sup>6</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.9.

that while some of the students would be moving back to their home countries before long, the ones who were going to stay here, ‘they have to realise that some of the things that are culturally acceptable to them, won’t wash here.’ The former situation was a reference to the children of diplomats and graduate students who only stayed a short time in Australia.

Another example of the problems they faced in the school came from Teacher N who taught classes where most of the children were ESL. For her, it was difficult with classes of 20-30 when the children needed one to one support. In addition, because many of the children were transient, they came into the school at all stages between Years One and Six. Like other teachers, she said it was hard to understand them at times, though she was a native Arabic speaker. On the other hand, the younger ones who came with no Arabic at all seemed to soak it up quickly.

Teaching assistant N taught Year 2 classes, also with children who mostly needed ESL, and with some who arrived speaking no English. She presented some of the challenges raised with classes of 20-30 small children, where most of them need one-to-one support,

Some of them clash a little bit because different people understand their values in a different way, though the clash is mainly in the community rather than the school, because little children do copy their parents or what they hear.

This view was echoed by the head teacher of Islamia Primary School in London who thought this was a positive factor as the children then came to see that there were Muslims from a different culture who had a different way of doing things, yet despite this there were strong common themes. She cited kids from North Africa who prayed in a different way from the kids from Iraq but felt it was very freeing as it stressed diversity within the framework of central themes.<sup>7</sup>

One school, where all the students were in ESL classes, was introducing Auslan as the school’s second language, so that very young children arriving with no English could

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<sup>7</sup> A. Trevathan as quoted by Meer, 2009, in ‘Identity articulations, mobilization and autonomy in the movement for Muslim schools in Britain’, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol.12, no. 3, p. 382.

communicate with staff and other children till they learned to communicate in English. One of the teachers told me this happened either with new arrivals or children who had been brought up at home where the parents spoke Arabic so they had not learned English. This was often because the family could not afford childcare in the early years before their child started at primary school.

In terms of the content taught to younger children, teacher A said that teaching values for young children was very important, it was a formative issue and lifelong and contributed to their character and development. Where she taught, usually all Islamic Studies started with memorisation at the beginning then more critical issues and arguments came gradually as they grew up. On the issue of dialects in Arabic, she commented that most students at her school, even if they spoke Arabic at home, it was colloquial and varied so they were still beginners in classical Arabic and often stayed that way for various reasons.

With the question on how well qualified their teachers were, most students interviewed could not remember much detail about their early years in primary school and not surprisingly were unaware of where their teachers qualified or whether or not they were qualified in the first place. One student commented,

I can't remember much in primary school. It was more relaxed. There were games, picture books, just the fundamental side of things.

*Imam M.* was trained to teach allowing for critical views, encouraging questions and discussion,

Arabic is part of their faith, reading is important. Teaching them to read is a religious duty. The classes for little ones have ninety minutes of Arabic a week. I use modern standard Arabic using repetition and flashcards in the classroom, the visual aspects, projects in their books like drawing the airport. I prefer direct interaction rather than rote learning.

### **Imams - and the possibility of training in Australia**

The *imams* I met came from a wide variety of countries, some having been here long enough to achieve resident status or citizenship, but all had received their theological training overseas. This range of origin reflects the diversity of the face of Islam in Australia today as *imams* interviewed came from places as far afield as Burma (but trained in Iran), East Turkestan (which the Chinese government refers to as Xinjiang), South Africa, Indonesia, Algeria, Ghana, Fiji and South India, as well as the Middle East and those born in Australia. One academic interviewed on this concern felt it had been a major weakness in the early days of the schools but thought the priority now was to train *imams* in Australia. Teacher W who had earlier been a student at his school when it started, said that back then religion was taught by people who had some ‘know-how’ as the schools had no money to hire anyone, while Arabic was usually taught by native speakers. He had taught himself to read Arabic while in Pakistan but the *sheikh* who taught Arabic when he attended his high school in Australia came from South Africa.

Teacher B, a non-Muslim and the dean at his school, had also noted this need. He said he had attended a conference at the local university on the theme of ‘Islam in Australia; challenges and opportunities,’ and had noted that

there was a comment by one of the speakers that there are no really home grown *imams* in Australia.

He went on to stress how important it was for the imams to fit into Australian society because he thought they often suffered from culture shock if they had recently arrived in Australia and often found it hard to adapt to teaching young Australians who were used to questioning and discussing things, especially as they got older. This could be a source of disillusion for them. He also felt that some of the religious teaching had to be put in a context that the students could understand, adding

I am not sure if that is always done because I have certainly found when I have had to cover one of those lessons that I have thrown some of the stories around, and the students responded to that and talked about those parts of the *Qur'an* that related to what they were discussing.

They needed to see how it could relate to modern life but he thought it was things like that which the Islamic Studies department had to come to terms with. He also mentioned the lack of resources in the area, adding that it would have to be a group of people to get an agreement on what should be taught and how and it would be different.

Students not surprisingly usually did not know how well qualified their teachers were, though like all students they could judge whether or not they thought they were competent. A major advantage was a religion teacher or *imam* who recited the Arabic of the Qur'an well and was a *hafiz* as this impressed the students, whether or not the teacher was qualified or not.

Student I spoke about the *imam* at her school who had come from overseas but grown up in Australia and in his opinion, was very knowledgeable. She said he inspired everyone when he preached at the Friday prayers so that even her brother and his friends, who used to drag their feet to prayer, really got excited if this *imam* was going to speak and recorded his sermons on their mobile phones.

### **Encouraging discussion – the Australian way**

*Imam* M at another school also spoke enthusiastically about encouraging critical discussion in his classes, despite being trained overseas,

I believe in teaching with critical views with questions and discussion, which means a very vibrant classroom, very interesting and lively. You find that the students are participating willingly and when they know they can debate and ask questions then they are more engaged in the subject so I find that this has impacted positively on my teaching and it has positive outcomes. Students are willing to explore ideas and debate so to me it is the best way of methodology and pedagogy teaching world religions, Arabic or Islamic Studies for that matter.

He went on to discuss how he taught the meaning of the text, stressing the importance of discussion, particularly because of the diversity of Muslim students at the school.

*Imam A.* who had been educated at a public school then gone to Medina for further training before returning to Australia to do teacher training and start his Ph.D. headed his school's Values Education committee, and took a similar line. Having grown up in Australia but also studied overseas, he saw that the Australian system of education was mainly through debate and discussions and questions while it was different overseas and that Australian students had 'opinions on everything.' He recognised that there was a diversity of Muslim students in his school and while he said that they taught *Hanafi* (one of the four schools of Law in Sunni Islam), the students used to ask questions about differences in festivals and what they did at the mosque with hand movements in prayers or how to wash so he used to explain the differences to them. He felt it was better to discuss these differences in the school itself.

*Sheikh B.* likewise tackled the different schools of thought in Islam by encouraging discussion,

There are two levels of discussion in class. One is the Islamic level of discussion because we have got students from various different backgrounds so as in a discussion on *Shi'ism* and *Sunnism*. Within the *Sunni* sect there are four different schools of thought so that is a debating issue in the class. By and large those coming from the sub-continent, China, Turkey, even part of Egypt, they are *Hanafi*, then you have the students from South East Asia, then the Middle East and North Africa where there are other schools. The foundation is all one but we have healthy discussions, as it can be confusing.

*Imam H* said his school had a lot of *Sunni* and *Shi'a* kids but thought it wasn't an issue because of the way the school operated at this level.

Most students are *Sunni* like the majority but a large number are *Shi'ites*, from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, but they have no difficulty in mixing with rest of students and teachers, especially in Islamic subjects. We have students from all four schools of acceptable thought. Most in Australia follow *Hanafi* as in most of the rest of

Australian schools and mosques so we follow that here. It is to avoid other problems because the schools accept each other, for example in the prayers, there are a little bit of differences, so the kids know that, they are more tolerant, they know there are others.

There is ongoing discussion in the community about training *imams* in Australia. A recommendation in favour of creating such an institution came out of Federal Government consultations with religious leaders in 2005 and there were some hopes that the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies would fulfil this role, but for various reasons it did not evolve like that<sup>8</sup>.

What has changed more recently is that staff are now being encouraged to undertake teacher training in Australia in addition to their theological qualifications gained overseas, and a number of students stated that while they revere those teachers with a good grasp of classical Arabic and a deep knowledge of the *Qur'an*, they prefer younger teachers who grew up in Australia and understand where they come from, especially if the teacher still does not speak good English.

This view reflects the opinion voiced by a speaker from Germany at the Cambridge conference who said it was important to bear in mind when training *imams* to communicate that the Muslim community's needs changed with each generation, especially following migration. As he saw it, second generation migrants tended to seek a deculturalised Islamic discourse due to deep differences with the culture of their parents while the third generation tended to identify more with their native country. In Germany, as in Australia, this meant taking into account some of the dominant values such as consumerism, competitiveness and material success.

This point was certainly raised in discussion I had with imams in Australia and reflected in articles in Muslim publications<sup>9</sup>, while the goal of achieving material success is common to

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<sup>8</sup> The topic was discussed on 'The Religion Report' in October 2005 when David Rutledge talked about it with Ameer Ali from AFIC and Kuranda Seyit from the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations, [www.abc.net.au/radionational/full-transcript/3361628](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/full-transcript/3361628), accessed 3 May 2012.

<sup>9</sup> For example, no author, 'Are We Teaching Children To Be Materialistic?' *Australian Islamic Review*, vol. 4, no. 8, 1999, p. 7.

almost all refugee families. Students interviewed often referred to the pressure on them to aim at professions like medicine, sometimes with pressure to leave school on those who had other inclinations. There were bigger conflicts for girls who were often pressured into early marriages, reflecting the culture of their parents, but at one school, former students enthused over their *imam* who more or less ordered the girls to insist on finishing university before agreeing to get married.

However in terms of interviews with students who have more recently graduated from Islamic schools and those who were there in the earlier years, there has been a marked improvement in the standard of teaching. Typical of some of the comments from the earlier period comes from one of the alumni who left his school in 2000, and observed,

From my brief experience, I would say that the teaching of Islam is traditional. Although we are in Australia, a lot of teachers of Islamic Studies in Islamic schools teach Islam in a manner that is taught in the Middle East and South East Asia or even South Asia. Most of my teachers, their mother tongue was Arabic, very few had good English and they struggled for the most part to communicate with many of their students especially those who did really want to learn about their faith because of a range of different reasons, more a teenage issue really. In terms of qualifications many of them were not very highly qualified, many teachers taught because they had a bit of a, I would say above average knowledge of Islam. However in terms of any formal tertiary qualification in the field of education, very few had that and this really showed in how they taught and in terms of the Islamic knowledge that they had.

This student observed that as he looked back at all his years of studying Islam and reflecting on his teachers, he did not think that they were very highly qualified. As far as he could make out, few were qualified from any major Islamic institution. Many of them had just studied in study circles in the Middle East and some were self-taught, so very few had any university qualifications.

Student A was one of a number of students to comment on a preference for teachers, who communicated well in English,

So in terms of the way they taught, I much preferred somebody who spoke clear English because learning about a religion it is really important that you understand what they are trying to portray and if you have someone from overseas it's great because you get a different perspective but it is a bit harder to understand where they are coming from because we were not brought up in that country they came from and a lot of the time they bring culture in as well which is a big problem.

However she added that,

They were quite careful what they taught us because children go home and if they are bringing foreign information the parents would have something to say about that.

Students who had attended early Islamic schools also tended to have negative memories of what they were taught but there has been a marked change in recent years with students feeling much more positive. Student E attended one of the first schools and having stayed involved in education, agreed that the situation was now much better though it still needed improvement,

Another student who had started at high school after going to a state primary school, gave a typical point of view from a decade ago when the teaching standard was improving,

We had two classes in Arabic, advanced and beginners. I knew how to read *Qur'an* so I knew the basic Arabic but not much. I was in the beginner's class, we learned the alphabet, the rules and the nouns and that kind of thing, it was interesting. I did learn a lot from Years Seven to Eleven. I didn't take it any further as I wasn't very good at it. I think most of the teachers did come from overseas so their English language wasn't of good standard but they did get

across what they were trying to teach. They were competent but it would have been better for us to understand with better English speaking.

The key role of teachers was also stressed by a more recent graduate, commenting on how he came from state primary school to start in Year Four,

I think it's more just because I was still young, especially since I started in Grade Four. It was more about the core values, the core beliefs, it spread from there, we didn't go into detail in anything. At the moment, I have probably forgotten my Arabic, I just know a few words here and there. It was very difficult, but we had some really good teachers which allowed me to learn basic Arabic, the basic rules, the basic vocabulary.

Not surprisingly, a charismatic teacher, as in any school classroom, could have a big personal impact, as stressed by student A,

Well, when I first came to the school, I was in Year Eight. I didn't really have any expectations of an Islamic Studies programme. I thought it might resemble something similar to what I had undertaken at the mosque on the weekends. I remember the Islamic Studies teacher we had, he was a *sheikh* from Fiji, he was quite a character and it was just more of these stories and lectures so we'd sit down in the class, it was co-ed, the boys would act up, the girls would sit quietly or very shyly and he'd tell us about the *Sahaba* or we'd go through an Islamic text book.

She was such a keen student that she would go to the mosque to practice Qur'an reading with another imam and when another girl said she was having extra tuition at school with the head of the Islamic department, she joined her, though critical about what her school offered otherwise,

Oh, can I come along with you too because I really want to learn more about Islam and I want to brush up my Arabic reading and so on, so she said, 'Come along and meet him,' and he was the imam who would be reciting all the *du'as* and the songs during the morning assembly so I was quite interested to meet

him. That started off my personal tuition programme with that imam for over one year and a bit so I would go every single recess and sometimes lunch and I don't actually remember doing much work with him and we would basically chat about things and he acted like my counsellor and we would talk about philosophical things.

Teacher F had herself been to an Islamic school from Years Seven to Nine after attending two Catholic primary schools and being baptised to qualify for entry but said she wasn't very interested in Islam at that age and left to go to a state college after Year Nine. However she had been impressed with the spiritual depth of one of her *Quranic* women teachers who was trying to teach a 'tough class' who did not want to learn and this had laid the groundwork which gave her a thirst for knowledge that was developed later on, so she had now come back to teach young children in another primary school.

Young Australian students are taught to be assertive and this certainly extended to one school where female students took things into their own hands, although this was the only example of such behaviour that I came across,

In Grade Nine, we had this teacher, she was quite a character, and it was a girls only class but it was just about story telling. There was no structure at all, and that happened for about half a year until we, the students, started getting frustrated that we weren't learning anything. As a result, we decided to complain, so we went to the principal and we asked him to change our Islamic Studies teacher. We said we weren't learning anything though the teacher was very nice so they asked us who we wanted and we told him.

This suggestion proved problematic as the man concerned, though he taught at the weekend school at the mosque, was not a qualified teacher in Australia although he had qualified overseas and was a *hafiz*. However the school allowed him in once a week, which made the students happy, although it was difficult when he didn't know how to mark with regard to set outcomes and assessment. The girls were even happier when on Tuesdays they had another sheikh, who was also very charismatic,

Very popular with the girls, we all had crushes on him and he recited *Qur'an* like an angel, that was part of his charm and I just thought that time was great.

Another reaction to bad teaching came from a female student, who recalled,

Basically we would have one class a day, every single day, so that would be five times a week of Islamic Studies and what I can remember most from my experience was that we would just come to class and the sheikh would just sometimes make people read the *Qur'an* but usually we would just leave half way through and go out and play sports.

However she went on to girls only classes in Years 7 to 9 and had a female teacher 'who was very good' so she agreed that she learned most from those classes.

Another female student had a similar experience with unqualified women teachers,

In Primary School we had regular daily Islamic classes, which consisted of reading *suras* from the *Qur'an* and memorising them and reciting them back to the *sheikh*. And then we had a bit of *hadith* story time. In High School we had the same sort of arrangement but it was with women teachers but it wasn't enforced so much because they were not *sheikhs*. It wasn't so strictly run and we didn't really do anything. There were not any obligations to recite certain *suras* back or there was no progression chart or anything like that. The teacher had no formal qualifications and came from overseas. So a lot of the time the girls would just read magazines and talk about social stuff. The girls who were interested in the stories would tell the other girls to be quiet and listen. It was a kind of independent learning class.

In contrast, Student A had positive memories as a result of having a well- respected teacher,

The Arabic teacher was different but we had the same teacher for the *Qur'an* and Islamic Studies. I was here for five years from Years Eight to Twelve. The teacher was Australian but I can't recall his background. He was very highly advanced and well known for his

*Qur'anic* recitations. We were very privileged to have him. We enjoyed his lessons. He was a *hafiz*. It made you want to read the *Qur'an* more and more. I'm not sure if he was a qualified teacher but he may have qualified overseas.

Another inspiring teacher provided a memorable experience for student R as he taught her about *Tajweed*, which she described as another layer to reading Arabic and how it flowed like music. She said he was trained in Egypt but a later teacher, also memorable, trained as a *hafiz* in South Africa. He was very relaxed with her girls' class because he was sensitive to their moods and if he saw they were not in a learning frame of mind, he would take them outside to play soccer. Unfortunately he had moved to the other side of the country so they then had a student teacher, originally trained in an Arab country but not in Australia, who was so hopeless that the students rebelled and refused to have her as their teacher.

The Dean at one school, a non-Muslim, said that he felt there was a problem that none of the *imams* came from Australia and as a result suffered from culture shock when they came here. He thought there was a need to contextualise some of the religion teachings, and commented that he occasionally had to supervise classes on Islamic Studies and these were the classes that had the most discipline problems, especially with boys. He saw a paradox in this as a lot of the boys then left the school after Year Ten but because they were spoiled at home, they wanted to be doctors and lawyers, which was unrealistic. His school had set up a Student Council and he worked closely with the *imams* on discipline issues as well as with parents, adding that the school needed a Qualified Guidance Counsellor.

### ***Sunni and Shi'a***

Critics of the schools argue that they teach hatred of other faiths like Judaism and Christianity but an equally controversial point for Muslims in Australia, particularly with current tensions in South and South West Asia, is how the schools deal with the division between Sunni and Shi'a. This is particularly important for students who have come as refugees from a country where they were persecuted because of their minority status.

While older students looked at various aspects of *Fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence which raised interesting issues for differences between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* approaches, their teachers

explained that in Australia these differences were not emphasised in the community. In Sydney there are two Islamic primary schools that cater for *Shi'a* students, but planning to build up to high school level. Only one school said *Shi'a* students prayed separately from the Sunni students.

Teachers interviewed on this topic said they often had to explain and acknowledge the differences to new arrivals but very few students referred to any conflict over this with fellow students. If there was any conflict, it was over ethnicity, though only students from one school referred to this as a source of tension.

*Sheikh B* had a real mixture of students at his school and thought they came from 35 different countries, so he used to explain the four different schools of law for *Sunnis* and then go on to talk about the different approach for *Shi'a* students,

The foundation is all one but we have healthy discussions, as it can be confusing.

While it is true that there have been isolated reported incidents of intolerance arising in three or four Islamic schools, only one former student interviewed mentioned teachers at her school teaching hatred of *Shi'a* Muslims 'who will go to hell'. This student with very negative memories of her school (she left after Year 10) said that her Islamic Studies teacher was actually a Science teacher who had trained overseas and was not qualified. She tried to talk to the teacher as her father said that non-Muslim people did not go straight to hell nor did girls who showed their hair. She said that other Islamic Studies teachers at her school told them the same thing but coming originally from Iran as a *Shi'a* family in trouble with the regime there, it was not surprising that she objected.

Questions to teachers about attitudes to *Sufism* in Islam were not surprisingly met with varied responses, with more orthodox *imams* taking a critical stance while some teachers said they themselves were *Sufis*. However no students interviewed ever mentioned this strain of Islamic mysticism as having been raised in class.

### **The problem of teaching materials**

A key issue in the teaching of Islamic Studies, which all teachers referred to in interviews, was the absence of Australian textbooks. It is clearly a priority for the schools to address though initial efforts to put together Australian material are being made, particularly at primary school level, and some of these get passed on to other schools to use.

Staff and students interviewed were asked where their textbooks came from, with a variety of responses, though many students not surprisingly had no idea or could not remember.

Islamic Studies teacher A was very critical,

There are some basics in the Islamic Studies programme. It must include *Quranic suras*, basics in belief and rituals like the Articles of Faith and the Five Pillars of Islam, there are shortcomings like the text books which come from different places, mostly from South Africa or Malaysia. The government here spends millions on textbooks but there is no funding for Islamic Studies books. Teachers discuss why it is so boring and agree it's the way it is presented to students. It's hard to teach this 24 hours a week. This is unrealistic. Teachers are under a lot of pressure and so the material is inadequate.

Teacher A in another city was even more critical,

very I was first of all just given a textbook to teach, the text from South Africa, I had a look at the textbook. I did not find it suitable for my students. In terms of the structure, I found a lot of repetition in the textbooks and in terms of the English language, I found at times there were many obscure words being used that the children could not relate to. Basically the language in these books was not attractive to the children and also the way the content was presented was not interesting for teenagers.

She felt so strongly about this that she prepared her own curriculum materials and assignments, then tested them on her own children. According to her, this approach worked as students then wanted to attend her classes and when she went back to the school some years later, they were still using her material.

Student H was also very critical of her textbooks,

The textbooks weren't the most interesting, they were South African, and there were a few debates we had in class between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* girls, if we read the history, and the girls would put their hands up, the *Shi'a* girls, hold up a minute. Textbook base is not the most motivating which is ironic because most of our parents would send us for Islamic Studies to the Islamic school to come away with an Islamic education.

Where Australian material was being used, it was clearly more relevant and interesting to the students, both at primary and high school level. Teacher S said that at his school, material came from Singapore and the United States but hoped he would one day get time to write something in Australia.

One innovative set of materials developed by one primary school to use at different levels for understanding *Ramadan* was based on photocopied sheets but incorporated drawings and calligraphy to colour in, crosswords, word games, as well as reflective writing for older students.

Water was often emphasised to younger students in an Australian context, starting with the importance of washing and personal cleanliness in Islam, as well as how to perform *wudu* correctly. This was then linked to the environment in an Australian context, even if the students lived in cities and had not seen Australia's Desert Centre. Islam was a faith that came from a desert environment so it was a practical reflection to make for a student growing up in the driest inhabited continent. In some schools, the historical desert link was made with the importance of the Afghan cameleers in Australia's past.

The *sheikh* in one school linked the concern of the Prophet Muhammad for the environment to getting involved in Clean Up Australia Day activities as well as some

argument about cutting down trees in the school grounds. This was because Prophet Muhammad had said that trees should not be chopped down as they give shade, that birds nest in them and insects feed from them.

Concern for animals appeals to primary school students so gets put in an Islamic context with various *hadith*, such as the one about the man getting water for a thirsty dog by going down a well and filling his shoe with the precious liquid. One primary school teacher took care to point out to her class that caring for animals was not unique just to Muslims.

Another primary school teacher linked Islam's concern for saving water to ways her students could save water at home, based on the *hadith* that said, 'a man did a *wudu* with just a cup of water.'

Textbooks and worksheets obviously covered the life of the Prophet and his Companions, stories of earlier prophets, and calligraphy exercises around the name of Allah, so there was no problem in this area, but interpreting the *Sunna* or stories from the *hadith* needed an Australian context, which overseas texts obviously lacked.

Many schools displayed pictures on their walls of famous mosques around the world while Islamic Studies texts ranged from pointing out the functions of a *masjid* to colouring in exercises for younger students.

### **The Third Pillar: *Zakat* – or for students, *Sadaqah*, collecting for charity**

All schools emphasised the importance of giving to charity and involved the students in fundraising, linking it to the concept of *Zakat*, although obviously at that age they did not deduct it from their capital, as their parents hopefully would. For Muslims, this approach is referred to as *Sadaqah* as it is a voluntary action rather than an obligatory one like *Zakat*. Projects the students funded ranged from supporting the reconstruction of mosques and schools in war ravaged countries like Afghanistan or sponsoring an orphan or orphanage (\$1 a week for Primary school students in Ramadan) to more local responses to the Victoria bushfire appeal or the Tsunami disaster in 2004. The Fred Hollows Foundation also seemed popular as a cause to support financially by several schools. One school had older students

and staff giving blood as part of the Red Cross Drive, another was collecting money to build wells in Bangladesh.

Kath Engebretson visited the Australian International Academy in Melbourne as part of a mission to discover what Islamic schools did to promote intercultural harmony as part of a follow up in relation to the government's consultation with religious leaders, and reported that all students at the Academy complete 50 hours of community service a year.<sup>10</sup> That year the Year 9 and 10 students had raised \$800 for Challenge, which cares for children suffering from cancer.

One primary school had a Student Representative Council that students voted for and they organise a multicultural food day with the most recent collection proceeds going to Muslim Aid. Tree planting was also encouraged by some schools, linked to Islamic teaching and the prophet's words on the importance of trees.

Another school raised around \$20,000 at the time of the *Eid el-Fitr* (the three day festival celebrated at the end of Ramadan) in 2010 and then another \$29,000 for the Pakistani Relief Fund after the devastating floods there in the same year. In another city, the Islamic School raised over \$50,000 for the Muslim Charitable Fund to distribute for the same cause after organising a dinner in October 2010, a substantial sum given that Muslim students generally do not come from wealthy homes like some of Australia's well known independent faith schools.

### **Communal worship.**

Faith teaching was also supplemented by prayer time, assemblies and the integration of the Islamic calendar and practices into daily life in the schools, ranging from the *halal* canteens in all the schools to how they integrated the month of *Ramadan* into the teaching day and celebrated Islamic festivals.

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<sup>10</sup> Kath Engebretson, 'A Sketch of the promotion of Inter Faith harmony at an Australian Islamic College: challenges for Islamic schools', *Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 54, no.3, 2006, pp.72-74.

Primary schools were obviously different from high schools in this regard while school assemblies varied depending on how much space was available. A few schools had their own mosques but most gathered in some sort of hall, a few would go to a nearby mosque and some had to meet outside, weather permitting. Usually the assembly started the day but sometimes it was built around the *zuhr* prayers.

The *sheikh* at one school outlined a fairly common approach for the Friday assembly,

Friday, we have a large congregation for the noon prayer, it starts with a sermon, we get time to address the common issues, the students feel they are one every day they meet here at noon.

Another *imam* utilised technology in his presentations to the assembled students,

so what I normally do, I prepare something like power point presentations or audio-visuals of about five to ten minutes maximum and I present it to the general assembly for the whole school and I also address values through what we call the sermon of Friday prayers...

Several schools with senior classes involved both male and female students in assembly presentations or even allowed the boys to lead the prayers. The Islamic Studies teacher at one school told me,

There is prayer every day in the mosque, the *Zuhr* prayer. There is a day for boys (Tuesday) and a day for girls (Thursday) to give presentations on topics they are given to choose from or themes. We call it the *Da'wah* training programme. It teaches them public speaking. We also have the Friday sermon when we choose topics that are very relevant to the students and the curriculum.

Not surprisingly, student reaction to the assemblies varies. Some felt that involving the students was a good move, others complained that it was only certain students who were chosen. As in any school, there were complaints if assemblies were used as an excuse for lengthy lectures by the principal.

Student A reflected on her mixed experiences,

So I am very ambivalent about my experience at a Muslim school, I didn't enjoy it but there is something undeniable about every day going to assembly and you have the *Qur'an* being recited and you have to recite the 99 names of Allah and you do *du'as*. It sort of gets to your blood, it becomes part of the rhythm of your life so that when you are taken away from that environment you feel a bit weaker in that sense and it doesn't have such a strong presence in your life any more and you forget how that feels. It does get a bit tiresome to go to assemblies every morning, no-one would complain if it was shorter, just the *du'as*, but when you add the long speeches by the imams, it just goes on and on.

One school had developed a *Haj* camp where for two days the students simulate the *Haj* in the school grounds and extend an invitation to other students to join them, culminating in the *Eid ul Adha* holiday. As a *Shi'a* school, they had also developed a special commemoration for *Ashura* although it had so far fallen in the summer holidays but they were working out how to commemorate it in term time as the Islamic calendar moves forward every year.

### **The schools and the ninth month – *Ramadan***

A major focus for Muslim students is obviously fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, which presents problems in Australia because of seasonal variations in the length of the day. Understanding the significance and importance of *Sawm* or fasting was central to Islamic Studies classes and almost all schools adjusted their daily timetable to either start early or more usually finish earlier. Some did not give homework during that time while others were proud of the fact that they still did. Students who took their final exams a few years ago when *Ramadan* was in November made a point of stressing that they did not complain or ask for special consideration.

Primary schools were flexible but several staff said that younger students were often eager to fast but they made allowances like getting parents to provide emergency lunch

packets for K-3 or 4 students if they could not get through the whole day without something to eat or drink.

One Muslim primary school teacher said that 95 per cent of her Year Four class fast in *Ramadan* but,

a couple of years ago when I had Year Three, most of them fasted. I encourage them but I let the parents decide. The children ask for a sticker to say if they fast all day or all month but that's hard on the others who can't.

Physical education teachers said that students often played sport during *Ramadan* even in hot weather when they could not have a drink, as it did not seem to worry them. PE teacher M. commented, 'In *Ramadan* the kids never stop.'

Almost all schools had non-Muslim staff who did not have to fast but ate or had tea and coffee discretely in the staff room, though one non-Muslim primary school teacher said she tried to fast for a few days with her students as an act of solidarity but found it impossible to last very long.

### **Conclusion**

Based on these findings, those who fear what is being taught about Islam in the Islamic schools have nothing to fear. There is almost no evidence for some of the wilder allegations that have been made, although there have been occasional reports in the media about incidents alleging hatred and intolerance. In my interviews, I only came across one such allegation in all of the schools visited. However, as a non-Muslim researcher, I am well aware of the fact that this is not a topic that is easily broached and it would take someone more acquainted in-depth with a local Muslim community or school to be aware of where this could have happened or has become a problem.

As far as Muslims are concerned, it is impossible to generalise about levels of satisfaction with faith teaching. Though high school students were prepared to be critical, it was usually about the competency of their teachers or whether they found the classes

stimulating. Parents may have sent their children to the schools to learn about Islam but what they got out of it, clearly varied. Many students were more interested in their academic subjects as their aim was to get good marks for university entrance. Others said that learning about Islam strengthened their faith and gave them confidence about their identity for when they left school.

*Imams* were frustrated by the lack of adequate Australian teaching materials and some conceded that it was hard to interest the students at times, although a number of schools in recent years have been making their own material, some of which I had a chance to examine on school visits, especially in primary schools. Saeed also mentions this problem in his chapter on Islamic Schools in *Islam in Australia*<sup>11</sup>, referring to the findings of the International Board of Educational Research and Resources. This identifies some of the shortcomings of the Islamic studies materials ‘as a lack of colour and design, unsuitable grading out of reach of the psychological world of children and lack of activities and effective exercises.’<sup>12</sup>

One major issue remains the teaching of *imams* in Australia, given the failure of the first attempt, and a significant number of people interviewed saw this as a priority, along with the development of Australian teaching materials on Islam. However one major change in recent years has been the presence in the schools of a new generation of younger *imams* educated in Australia who can identify with this new generation of young Australians but also gain their respect by knowing about their faith and being able to relate to them, especially as teenagers.

As in any school, students relate best to and respect teachers who they feel know their subject and convey it to them at a level they can understand. With faith teaching this is even more crucial, as the rationale for Islamic schools is largely the faith teaching units carried out in an overall Muslim ethos. The role of the *imams* is also central to a school’s direction, because of the significant status they have. This ranges from leading assemblies to being consulted on curriculum materials and appropriate Islamic practices, in addition to teaching the faith units. Given the frank comments of former students interviewed, this is an area

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<sup>11</sup> Saeed, ‘Islamic Schools’ in *Islam in Australia*, pp 149-156

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p 154

where, although the situation has clearly improved since the early days, there is still some way to go.

As other researchers such as Donohue Clyne<sup>13</sup> have noted, Islamic education is more than just a few units of faith teaching a week, so the next chapter examines whether or not an Islamic ethos pervades the whole curriculum and not just the religion component of the syllabus.

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<sup>13</sup> Donohue Clyne, ‘but without an Islamically-focused curriculum the schools cannot ensure an Islamic identity.’ *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic Schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*. Undated conference paper, p. 17.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM – FORMING AN ISLAMIC IDENTITY

Much of the argument over faith schools in Australia centres on the allegation that they place religious instruction or knowledge in front of academic learning. While this is not true of the Islamic schools, the schools emphasise that they exist not only for their students to do well in pre-tertiary examinations but also to learn about their faith in an Islamic environment. For Muslims, as with other faiths, values are considered to permeate the whole of life, as all books and articles on Islamic education point out. In Noha Sanjakdar's words,

Parents are looking for a school that will immerse their children in an Islamic environment and study a curriculum underpinned with Islamic values and beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

Many schools in Australia today advertise themselves as operating within a framework of specific values, in addition to promoting academic excellence. There is often a Values statement that forms part of their literature, particularly if a religious foundation is involved. It is this distinctive flavour to classroom life that forms what Philip Jackson – who coined the term - refers to as the 'hidden curriculum.' These demands may be contrasted with the academic demands or the official curriculum of the school<sup>2</sup>. The concept of education as a social function, had originally been developed by John Dewey in the United States,

Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional modes of education<sup>3</sup>.

He went on to define schools as 'the typical instances of environments framed with express references to influencing the mental and moral disposition of their members<sup>4</sup>,' although he was not referring specifically to faith education at this point in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Noha Sanjakdar, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Philip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms*, New York, 1968, p. 33-34

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York, 1916, p.10

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22

In his monograph on the subject, Hewitson identifies the essential features of the hidden curriculum as a process that is mainly inferred by the students rather than coming about as a result of deliberate efforts by the learners, where they perceive it as the natural order of things. For society, 'the source of the hidden curriculum lies in the way the school system is structured and resourced to achieve the functions for which it is established and maintained.' He goes on to point out that the hidden curriculum is learned through structures and rules in addition to attitudes and values espoused by school staff, the textbooks and the student peer group<sup>5</sup>. While Hewitson's monograph covers the wider role of the hidden curriculum in the Australian education system from colonial days until the time of writing, he does refer specifically to schools that operate within a particular religious framework, and how, like all schools, they promote those school values through the hidden curriculum as both 'authoritative and right'<sup>6</sup>. These are defined, for example, in terms of what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what texts may be banned by the school authorities, two criteria that are certainly integral to Islamic schools, along with what counts as valid knowledge<sup>7</sup>.

It is this issue of the hidden curriculum that raises a number of concerns regarding the extent to which Islamic schools in Australia are just teaching the normal academic curriculum with a faith component tacked on or whether an Islamic ethos pervades the entire life of the school, as well as the rhythm of the school year. In addition, there is the issue of what the parents are hoping for when they save to pay the fees to send their children to an Islamic school rather than a public school. Students too may be more interested in getting good exam results to further their academic career, particularly when they get to Years 11 and 12, so the Islamic content of their education may be of less concern by then.

Giles argues that 'Islamic education prepares the child for the 'outside', laying the foundations in terms of good values and educational achievement<sup>8</sup>. It is this nexus of building character within an Islamic framework and at the same time, providing a good academic education that seems to be at the centre of what parents are seeking when they opt for an Islamic education in Australia. However they do not seek an education that is

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<sup>5</sup> Mal Hewitson, *The Hidden Curriculum*, Brisbane, 1982, pp.1-2

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

<sup>8</sup> Giles, 'Somali Narratives on Islam, Education and Perceptions of Difference,' in Yasmineen (ed), *Muslims in Australia, The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, p. 180.

exclusive, given the effort made by almost all the schools to encourage involvement in extra-curricular and dialogue activities beyond their own school. The Assistant Principal of Minaret College in Melbourne made this explicit in an article in the college magazine<sup>9</sup> in 2001 when she described how her school invited an Islamic scholar from Sydney to spend a week with the students, counselling them on the fundamental message of Islam as a religion of peace after ‘the sad events of the 11<sup>th</sup> September in the U.S.A. and the media’s bitter attacks on Muslims everywhere.’ She added that as a follow up, they initiated a programme for non-Islamic schools, both religious and secular, to visit Minaret College and talk to student from Years 8 to 11.

However one fairly common feature identified through interviewing former students is the number of students whose parents have moved their children between the public system, other private schools and the Islamic schools, sometimes switching them to an Islamic high school after primary school, at other times, starting them at an Islamic primary school and then opting for the state system. These students were able to offer a variety of opinions on the relative merits of their Islamic schools in contrast to their other schools, some positive, some negative, but it is certainly an area worthy of further research to find out more about why they do this and how they perceive the different merits of the schools they send their children to as young Muslims growing up in a predominantly secular society.

This was the case with one of the Somali mothers interviewed by Giles, who sent her five children to Islamic school for their primary education but then enrolled them in the public system for high school. ‘She explained that the children could get a better understanding of Australian values from their teachers and peers by enrolling in the public high school system. At the same time, it was an opportunity for the children to discuss their values and beliefs with mainstream children<sup>10</sup>.’ However Giles also mentions that one of the reasons other parents send their children to an Islamic school is so that they are not bullied or teased by non-Muslim children, so obviously a great deal depends on the resilience of the child and the school concerned<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Susie Hassan, *The Advantages of growing up in an Islamic School’s Environment*, Al-Manarah School Magazine 2000-2001, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

For Muslims, the question is whether this satisfies their understanding of what constitutes an Islamic education, while for the critics, do these Islamic values run counter to what they understand to be Australian values? Manar El Chelebi, who represented ACIES at a faith based schools (Christian, Jewish and Muslim) symposium in Sydney in February 2006<sup>12</sup>, noted that there was a marked similarity in the curriculum in all faith-based schools. She added that Australian values are reflected in all faith-based schools and that faith based values and Australian values are identical,

The faith based schools guide children to become good Australian Muslims, Australian Jews and Australian Christian citizens, contributing positively to Australian society.<sup>13</sup>

While the schools themselves have constantly stressed Values education in their promotional material and annual reports, little research has been carried out on the content of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in Islamic schools, apart from stressing the importance of creating an Islamic space through dress codes, provision of halal food, observation of Muslim holidays and the fasting month of *Ramadan*, and limited gender segregation after puberty. In addition, fundraising activities would not include any form of gambling, such as raffles, a form of raising extra money practised by many other Australian schools, but *haram* for Muslims. Some detail comes through in school yearbooks, with reference to school camps, visiting speakers, and service programmes, but as the research interviews make clear, how an Islamic ethos permeates the rest of the curriculum varies enormously.

Striepe and Clarke also emphasise that the nature of the curriculum is one of three key issues that have become intrinsic to the debate over faith schools in Australia<sup>14</sup>. In this respect, it is important to consider whether or not these doubts apply to the curriculum in Islamic schools and how they deal with some of the more contentious issues. Many of the schools have a Director of Curriculum so they are very conscious of the importance of what is taught, while at the same time taking great pride in their pre-tertiary exam results.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Choice, engagement and service – what we offer to Australian society’, Sydney University, 26-27 February 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Manar El Chelebi, *Reflections of the Faith Based Schools Symposium*, ACIES Newsletter, 1, 2006, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Striepe & Clarke, ‘Faith based schools in Australia’, p. 113.

### Ongoing discourse in Europe on controversial aspects of the curriculum

Little has been written in Australia on some of the more controversial aspects of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in Islamic schools such as physical education, health education, science and the arts, apart from early research carried out by Donohue Clyne. She concluded ‘that some Islamic schools are ignoring the need to develop an Islamic curriculum but without an Islamically-focused curriculum the schools cannot ensure an Islamic identity.’ In that respect, she felt that Islamic schools were not significantly different from the government schools<sup>15</sup>.

More has been written overseas and in the British context, Kay conducted in-depth interviews with seven young (aged 14-19) Muslim women from six families with regard to family influences on their participation in sport. She found that while they were keen to be involved, they were also mindful of family religious and cultural requirements and what they described as ‘acceptable behaviour’.<sup>16</sup> While Muslim women holding a modernist position were somewhat more flexible, the young women interviewed came from traditional families, so had tried to avoid compulsory school-based physical education in a mixed setting. They were however eager to be involved in sport where there were gender-segregated activities as part of a special programme, Widening Access Through Sport. This was designed to encourage young women to participate in sport in an exercise which at the same time would combat social exclusion by offering them what they needed to get involved.

While there are no problems for Muslims taking part in physical education, given the number of *hadith* referring to the Prophet Muhammad’s approval of such activities<sup>17</sup>, sex education is a more contentious issue. An American Muslim professor of medicine, Athar,

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<sup>15</sup> Donohue Clyne, *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic Schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*, undated paper, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> T. Kay, ‘Daughters of Islam. Family influences on Muslim Young Women’s Participation in Sport,’ *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 41, no. 3-4, 2006, pp. 357-373. Also by the same author, ‘Daughters of Islam, Sisters in Sport’ in *Geographies of Muslim Identities*, Aldershot, 2007, pp. 125-140.

<sup>17</sup> A. Abdul-Halim quotes the Prophet Muhammad: “Teach your children to run, swim, ride and throw the javelin.” *Meeting needs of Muslim students in the Australian education system*, Sydney, 1989, p 16.

author of 'Sex Education: An Islamic Perspective'<sup>18</sup>, starts by pointing out that Muhammad discussed many aspects of sexual life, including sexual positions, with his Companions and that people in his day were never too shy to ask him questions on their private lives. He argues that Muslim parents do not or cannot discuss sex education with their children for cultural reasons, not because of any religious training. He distinguishes between teaching children about the act of reproduction and areas of morality associated with sex and marriage. He argues that Islamic sex education should be taught at home, starting at an early age, and if the parent is unwilling to do this, then men should teach boys and women teach girls at the Islamic Sunday school. Sex education at school should be grounded in Islamic teachings.

Abdul-Halim makes the same point, stating that it is not the content of the courses taught in Australia that is the problem, 'it is the way that sex education is imparted and presented.' She says that the problem is in the way certain aspects are presented by some teachers, because it is divorced from moral values and ethics.<sup>19</sup>

Hawe argues that Muslim girls are more feminist in Muslim schools as a result of her research in Nottingham involving Muslim girls at a private Muslim girls' school and at a single-sex state school with a high proportion of Muslim girls<sup>20</sup>. She concludes that it is at the former institution where 'the Muslim students are comfortable in their differences and where there is a discursive flexibility available to them that the processes of exploration and questioning and challenging from within an Islamic framework can begin. This means that they are then freed and encouraged to concentrate on their academic achievement which is in turn an anti-sexist practice in itself'. She finishes by asserting that 'it is thus easier for these girls to be poststructural feminists, because in this school the ways of 'dancing' with the discourses of 'race' and gender are more readily available.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> S. Athar, 'Sex Education: An Islamic Perspective', Chicago, 1995, with excerpts published on-line in [www.islamfortoday.com/athar19.htm](http://www.islamfortoday.com/athar19.htm), accessed 21 June 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Abdul-Halim, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> K. Hawe, 'Why Muslim girls are more feminist in Muslim schools,' in M. Griffiths and B. Troyna, *Antiracism, Culture and Social Justice in Education*, Stoke on Trent, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

### *Islam and Art*

While there are a lot of publications and exhibitions on Islamic Art<sup>22</sup>, it still remains a contentious subject for Islamic schools (as well as Orthodox Jewish schools for the same reason), especially when it comes to depicting the human form. Foltz has written about ‘Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures’, pointing out that animal figures appear in the work of Muslim artists going back to the *Umayyad* period (661-750) but generally speaking, the representational kind of arts that often feature animals, are more common in the Iranian-influenced eastern parts of the Muslim world than in the Arab west.<sup>23</sup>

Ansari<sup>24</sup>, writing in a British context, also acknowledges that there is no consensus on the kind of art allowed by Islam, nor is it clear what constitutes Islamic art. He points out that there has been a renaissance among Muslim artists in Britain and observes that their range of artistic production is impressive, mentioning the institution of Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts in London as an inspiring resource for students. Once again, Muslim responses vary, and he describes three distinct groups emerging, with one innovative group associated with the Al Furqwan Centre, seeking to develop a synthesis of Islamic and western traditions.

### *Islam and Music*

Halstead has made similar observations about Muslim attitudes to music when it comes to teaching it in schools in England. He starts off by noting that though there are rich traditions of music in all parts of the Muslim world, there is also the widely held belief that music is forbidden in Islam, and refers to a number of articles on Middle Eastern music that explore this ambivalence. This ambivalence extends to Muslim minorities in the West, as a number of school principals acknowledged when interviewed. In England, Halstead notes that most of the 27 or so independent Muslim schools do not include music of any kind in their curriculum but at least one such school does, entering its students for national exam

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<sup>22</sup> A recent art exhibition ‘Love and Devotion: From Persia and Beyond’ opened at the State Library of Victoria on 9 March 2012 and was attracting a thousand visitors a day. [www.love-and-devotion.com](http://www.love-and-devotion.com) Visited 16 March 2012.

<sup>23</sup> R. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford, 2006, p.82.

<sup>24</sup> H. Ansari, ‘*The Infidel Within*’. *Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London, 2004, pp. 222-223.

level music right up to Year 12. The Muslim Educational Trust acknowledges these varying opinions, but while lobbying for the right of Muslim parents to withdraw their children from music lessons or non-Muslim faith singing activities like Christmas carols or hymns in general, they also acknowledge that many other parents have no concerns at all on their children studying music.

Halstead notes the debate on music in the wider Muslim community<sup>25</sup> but observes that there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the question of teaching music to Muslim children in English schools. In Islamic terms, music cannot be described as *haram* in any legal sense, with added confusion because there is no precise equivalent in the Arabic language for the word ‘music.’ When it comes to the *hadith*, the argument focuses on how sound they are, particularly when it comes to allegations about what the Prophet thought about various forms of musical activities in seventh century Arabia. The debate today is more concerned with considerations such as the potential of music to lead believers away from the true path or the place of entertainment and sensual enjoyment in the lives of the faithful. In this respect, conservative Christians would find common ground with more conservative Muslims, as they both denounce certain forms of music that they feel encourages sensual or sexual arousal and the taking of drugs. Halstead himself feels that this view lies at the heart of the debate: that music ‘tends to be associated with the passions and viewed as hostile to reason, and thus may be seen as fundamentally opposed to Islamic principles.’<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, there is agreement on the use of certain instruments as part of the tradition of religious singing or chanting.

Ansari<sup>27</sup> also writes about how young Muslims in Britain have inevitably been drawn in a variety of ways towards music, which is now a central component of British youth culture. This does create tension with the older religious establishment but many young Muslims have become involved in the performing arts through bands like *Asian Dub Foundation* and *Fun-Da-Mental*. He concedes that while the view that Islam frowns upon most forms of music remains widespread, these young Muslims have nonetheless tried to meet the objections of their elders. While they might reject music that is simply about sex,

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<sup>25</sup> Halstead, ‘Muslim Attitudes to Music in Schools’, *British Journal of Music Education*, vol.11, 2006, pp. 143-156.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p.146.

<sup>27</sup> Ansari, pp. 220-221.

drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, they argue that there is a tradition of Muslim classical music as a form of *zikir* (the remembrance of the names of Allah through repetitive chanting of the divine names or religious verses). Ansari quotes *Fun-Da-Mental’s* lead singer, Aki Nawaz, who sees music as an effective means of questioning established norms and ideas.

Within Islam, there are diverse views on what is acceptable music. Hourani<sup>28</sup> makes the point that poetry and music are not forbidden in themselves but according to circumstances, usually a reference to unacceptable obscene songs or blasphemy, but also excluding pipes and stringed instruments which are associated with drunkards.

A well-illustrated publication on ‘Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam’<sup>29</sup> was brought out for the World of Islam Festival in London in 1976. This involved a display of instruments, recordings, and concerts where some of the outstanding musicians in the Islamic world performed as well as delivered lectures. The scope ranged not only from the Middle East but all of Islamic Africa, China and South-east Asia, and Europe. It made the point that classical Arab music was born in the seventh and eighth centuries at the courts of the *khalifs* in Al-Medina, Damascus and Baghdad<sup>30</sup>. The book also made the point that the golden age of Islam was considered the golden age of classical Arab music but a dark age followed the Mongol capture of Baghdad in 1258 and the withdrawal from Al-Andalus (Spain)<sup>31</sup>. Somehow classical music survived and the twentieth century saw a renaissance of the great ancient traditions, although the publication does not mention the more recent orthodox opposition to music that has caused such a headache for the Islamic schools in Australia – and elsewhere.

### ***Evolution and creationism***

On the issue of creationism teaching, Bouchier<sup>32</sup> makes the point that Islamic creationists are in step with their Christian counterparts, although the *Qur’an* is less specific

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<sup>28</sup> Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, pp. 197-199.

<sup>29</sup> Jean Jenkins & Poul Roving Olsen, *Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam*, London, 1976.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> D. Bouchier, ‘Assault on the secular’, *The Australian Literary Review*, Sydney, 6 April 2011, p.14.

than the Book of Genesis about exactly how and when the world was created. For this reason, Islam has long seen itself as compatible with science and rationality, but although many Islamic scholars can accept that the world is 4.5 billion years old and began with the Big Bang, they do share the Christian creationist view that all living things were created by God at the same time and in their final form. Bouchier has written about the influence of Adnan Oktar (who uses the pen name Harun Yahya) and the Islamic creationist movement that has swept the Muslim world in the last decade and aims to displace the teaching of evolution from all schools in the Muslim world. In Turkey, creationism has become a tool for Islamic intellectuals to attack secularism, and copies of Oktar's 'Atlas of Creation' have been distributed to libraries around the world.

Saeed, writing about the issue in Australia, points out that Islam is not so much concerned with how the process of creation happened, but rather with the idea that it is God who brought it into being. He agrees that there is no universal view on evolution amongst Muslims but points out that 'the polarised nature of the debate on evolution and creation in certain quarters in Christian circles is not a characteristic of the debate among Muslims in Australia'.<sup>33</sup>

### **Does an Islamic ethos permeate non-faith teaching units of the school curriculum?**

Obviously, the curriculum in the Islamic schools involves more than studying the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna*, but there are issues on how Islamic values can adapt to co-existing with a broadly Western secular society while not creating 'Muslims in Australia' as opposed to 'Australian Muslims'. There are extremists at both ends of the religious spectrum who will never be satisfied but the vast majority of Australians, both Muslim and non-Muslim, clearly seek to find a curriculum that respects the beliefs of Muslim students while allowing them to remain part of Australian society. Some of these differences have surfaced before, such as appropriate teaching on health education, or 'sex and drugs' as students often refer to it. Another issue, equally contentious in some quarters, is the argument over teaching creation science. The right of Muslims to take their values and beliefs into account in the

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<sup>33</sup> Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, pp. 41-42.

overall curriculum is nothing new in education and will continue to be debated, both amongst Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia.

While the *Qur'an* and a number of the *hadith* stress the importance of acquiring knowledge, there is little else about how this should be done, particularly because Islam initially developed in a society based on oral tradition. One of the most important things about the *Qur'an* is the role it played in establishing classical Arabic in written form, but oral learning remains a tradition in Muslim societies where so many people are still illiterate and many never get the chance of a formal education. In some more conservative rural societies, there is still the feeling that all girls need is a very basic and simple acquaintance with the *Qur'an*, although this attitude is beginning to change as more young women are getting the chance for higher education in countries like Iran.

This tradition of oral learning and the reverence accorded to a *hafiz*, means that there remains a tension between an education system based simply on the teaching of the *Qur'an* and classes where students simply learn by rote, as in many *madrassas* overseas, and the current system of education in a country like Australia with all the educational resources now available and a tradition of questioning and critical thinking.

Given the broad diversity of Islam in Australia, no different from the other mainstream faiths in the Abrahamic (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Indic (Hinduism, Buddhism) traditions, the question here is to consider how the Islamic schools are addressing educational concerns for the next generation in their own community or are they, as alleged by some critics, cutting themselves off from the broader Australian community because of fundamental and incompatible differences?

### **Gender issues in the schools**

Another criticism made of Islam in Australia is that it allegedly teaches that men and women are not equal, running counter to the Australian value of equality. As far as Muslims are concerned, however, this is a misrepresentation of Islamic teaching. Nonetheless there are some cultural differences regarding gender issues, which are not just unique to the Muslim community. The *Qur'an* clearly states that men and women are spiritually equal in Islam, but traditionally they have different roles in everyday life, with men as the prime

income earners and women as the homemakers and carers. In conservative, patriarchal societies, this can be interpreted to mean that women cannot work outside of the home or become political leaders. Depending where Muslim families have come from in the first generation, there will be different interpretations on appropriate attitudes towards female roles in the family and in society. Sometimes this will create tensions when compared to the way that the majority of Australians treat gender differences today, though not always so in the past. Muslim women however point out that the life of the Prophet gives numerous examples of his support for women, starting with his first wife, Khadija, who ran a successful business. Another wife, Aisha, led troops into battle and the Prophet himself took a strong stand against female infanticide and wives being divorced with no financial support offered. Australia is not Taliban controlled Afghanistan where girls' schools are attacked or forced underground, nor does anyone believe that girls should only know how to read a few parts of the *Qur'an*, that being the end of their education.

With regard to gender concerns, apart from the preference by a number of parents for single sex education for their daughters if this were possible<sup>34</sup>, the issue for Islamic schools in Australia is more about correct dress for boys and girls as well as staff, and whether or not boys and girls should be segregated in class, particularly once they reach puberty. There is also the related issue of what non-Muslim staff should wear at work, given that most of the schools have non-Muslim staff and a few have or have had non-Muslim principals. Suitable clothing reflects the teaching of the *Qur'an* that men and women should dress modestly. For boys, this usually means not exposing their bodies between the knees and the upper torso. For girls after puberty, it refers to varying degrees of cover in public, including their hair, and not wearing clothing that emphasises their physical form. Less clear is Islamic teaching on the wearing of perfume and make-up, an issue for female staff rather than students. As a concern it was raised in some of my interviews, depending on how conservative the views of the participants were, rather than any theological arguments.

All the Islamic schools visited had a school uniform. The boys looked like any other male students in Australia, though none wore 'short shorts', but girls would wear a scarf or *hijab* and long skirt or pants as part of their uniform. At primary level there were differences, with a few schools expecting the younger girls to wear a scarf but most of them

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<sup>34</sup>Abdel-Halim, p. 13.

not worrying about it until around Year Four or even Year Six. When this was optional, it was left to the parents to decide when their daughters wore a scarf, usually depending on the nature of the school and whoever ran it, though girls were expected to wear one at prayer time. Many girls said that while they wore them as part of their uniform, they didn't wear a scarf outside of school, though others said that they started wearing one as they got a bit older to demonstrate that they were proud of their identity and felt it was appropriate.

Teacher L, who teaches Year Four class and is a Muslim, said,

Uniform kicks in around Year Six. This school treats it as optional as long as you wear a scarf to prayer.

Given the diversity of Australia's Muslim community, where students come from also affects their attitude to dress. Teacher M. said that at her school, dress rules vary,

A lot of Indonesian and Malay families are quite liberal so the girls won't wear headscarfs and have short sleeves.

She added that a lot of her Australian students have mixed parentage so they tend to be more liberal but the more strict ones can send their children to a more conservative primary school in the same city, where dress rules for girls are more orthodox.

Female staff dressed in keeping with normal Islamic standards of modesty, but not surprisingly, given the variety of views on the subject for Muslims, there were sometimes contradictions. One teacher interviewed was very critical of the standards at one school where she used to teach:

I feel that if you really want to transmit Islamic values then you should lead by example and I felt that here we are being taught that a Muslim woman should dress in a particular way and should not wear a lot of make up or wear perfume, all these *hadith* that the Prophet Mohammed has said about women and so on, and then you look at the teachers and you'd see full make up and lots of perfume and one teacher ended up marrying her student.

For non-Muslim staff, the conditions varied. Women interviewed (or merely those I observed while visiting the schools) said they were asked to dress modestly but this rarely involved covering their heads. A typical example was teacher M, a Christian, who said,

This school is a lot more liberal and I do not need to wear a headscarf. I just need to cover my wrists and ankles.

Most of the schools visited said they would prefer boys and girls to be segregated, but it was not a major issue and their priority was to get land to expand or build more schools rather than create a separate campus for boys and girls. The one exception was a school in Perth where they had used two earlier premises to set up schools with classes for girls in Years Eight to Ten, once the main campus was set up on more space. Segregation by gender is a cultural practice, based on the fear that if boys and girls mix too freely in adolescence, then they will be tempted to break other Muslim social conventions or even commit forbidden (*haram*) acts. This is a fear mentioned frequently by Muslim parents as they observe or hear about what other young Australians get up to, both in and out of school. Many hope that going to an Islamic school will protect their children, even when the schools cannot offer complete segregation after puberty. Wealthy parents have the option of sending their daughters to single sex girls' schools and can then teach their children about their faith either at home or at the mosque. Many diplomatic families in Canberra choose this option of sending their daughters to St Clare's College, a Catholic girls high school, particularly as there is as yet no Islamic high school in the city.<sup>35</sup>

Home schooling may be an option for parents concerned about gender issues, although that is not always the reason given. The Muslim Home Schooling network gives overall figures for home schooling in each state in Australia though conceding that the real figures are much higher but there are no figures for specifically Muslim families. Their website<sup>36</sup> details the advantages of home schooling for Muslim children and includes two testimonies from an Australian girl and boy, but many of their listed readings in support of home schooling are from the United States or other overseas sources.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Student H from Canberra whose sister attends the school.

<sup>36</sup> [www.muslimhomeschool.net](http://www.muslimhomeschool.net)

As for the other option of sending your son or daughter to Asia, again we are not sure why parents do this, but gender segregation after puberty might be one reason. Student H, who attended a girl's school in Saudi Arabia from Years 7-10, said it was a common arrangement with families from Western countries where the parents could go there with them. She said the families felt that their children would benefit from growing up in a Muslim majority country but added that in her experience, the students were just as rebellious as in Australia, 'because they were teenagers'. Her experience of switching between countries and three education systems – Islamic primary school in Australia, Saudi Arabia for high school and public college in another Australian city for Years 11 and 12 - also left her a little confused when trying to work out her own ideas though in other ways she thought she benefited from it. The difficulty remains that in the end their children cannot avoid mixing with the wider Australian society unless they get married straight after school and never really leave their home.

At primary school, separation of boys and girls was much less of a concern, especially where there was limited space. What was normal practice was for boys and girls to sit on opposite sides of the classroom or stand on separate sides at assembly or prayer time. In one school that had a mosque, the girls had a separate gallery upstairs.

However in schools that had classes for Year Eleven and Twelve students, the classes were smaller and mixed, as they simply could not find the space for separate classes, let alone different staff. At two schools, the teachers interviewed made the point that young men and women were going to mix at tertiary educational level or in the workplace so it really made little sense to segregate them in school where they were more interested in concentrating on good exam results by then.

In this respect, Islamic schools are a step ahead of many other private faith schools in Australia where there are traditionally separate schools for boys and girls, although in recent years a lot of Catholic schools have gone co-educational, usually for financial reasons. The other issue is of course the argument for girls being educated separately from boys on the grounds that they perform better but this issue was never raised at the schools visited where they seemed more concerned about social mixing.

Abdel-Halim<sup>37</sup> states that co-educational schooling for high school adolescents is a major issue confronting Muslim parents as it goes against the teaching of Islam, citing the 1985 Commonwealth Schools' Commission report, *Girls and Tomorrow: The Challenge for Schools*. This presents the argument that many girls feared being successful in the mixed and highly competitive environment of a co-educational school, and this could be important in traditionally male disciplines and subject areas such as mathematics and the physical sciences. This reflects the belief that girls are sometimes reluctant to perform better than the boys in class and that they score better when at a girls school and unconcerned about what the boys might think. This argument is by no means unique just in the Muslim community but Abdel-Halim goes on to state that,

It should be recognised that in Australia there is a well-meaning and silent section even of Muslim parents who would, surely, favour a single-sex school education for their children if there was a free choice and provision of such schools. As far as Muslim parents are concerned, they would all prefer such an arrangement. It is not infrequent to hear of cases of girls being sent back to their country of origin or kept at home in Australia because of their lack of facilities for single-sex education.<sup>38</sup>

As this publication was written in 1989, the argument may not be so strong now that there are a lot more Islamic schools in existence, despite the fact that they are almost all co-educational, though strictly supervised at high school level in terms of social mixing.

From my own observations, there was little social mixing between male and female students in school and some students interviewed said they found it hard at university as a result. Student H said she would encourage out of school activities with other schools because there was a need to expose students to non-Muslims at a younger age 'rather than going to university and having the shock of their life and being exposed to all that.' She thought the difference was between those who had been sheltered and those who mixed during their school years. Student I felt that going to his school had helped him to be an ambassador for his faith, but socially he was still wrestling with it.

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<sup>37</sup> Abdel-Halim, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

I didn't fully 100 per cent recover and there will always be that part of me that thinks what if I had taken the plunge and gone to a different school, how different it would have been.

Student K felt the same as she found her time at her school 'really isolating,' and that it stunted her social growth. When she left her school, she went to a nearby college to repeat Year 12 although that was partly to study subjects that her school did not offer her. Student F, on the other hand, said that other non-Islamic schools were gender segregated too, but his mixed Islamic school had taught him to respect the qualities of the opposite sex as part of his faith so he was prepared for the world after Year Twelve.

A number of staff and students made the point that girls sometimes got married as soon as they left school, although there are no figures for this. Several female students interviewed had got married quite young and then gone to university after having children, or planned to return later.

### **The wider curriculum**

The question of whether or not specifically Islamic values were integrated into other subjects in the timetable varied enormously. This often depended on whether the teacher was a Muslim or non-Muslim, though one school did in-service professional development classes on Islam for non-Muslim teachers once a term. The curriculum development teacher at the school had circulated a form on how the teachers integrated an Islamic perspective into the secular subjects curriculum.

Commenting on this, one Islamic Studies teacher said:

It depends very much on who is teaching the subject. If a Muslim teacher is teaching the subject, he is able to incorporate a lot of these values in his teaching. I mean again in the real world is there a difference between Islamic and non-Islamic? I think that would be another topic to deal with but generally I sense and I feel that when a Muslim is teaching a SOSE subject or a Science subject, I know

because they ask me sometimes for resources that incorporate values in Islamic teaching in their method. As well, it is more difficult for a non-Muslim. Though non-Muslim teachers who have been here a long time are able to easily adapt these in their courses, newer teachers feel more uncomfortable because they are not sure where these Islamic values are coming from so they'd rather not deal with them.

Asked whether they ever talked to students about Islam's historic contribution to Mathematics, the response of Maths teachers varied enormously, as the interviews with them demonstrated. Most did not touch on it, though perhaps this was often because they were not Muslim. Teacher A, who taught Maths and Arabic, said,

No, I don't teach about Islam's input into the development of Mathematics but when I am teaching Arabic, for example, if there is a reason to mention it, I will talk about this historic connection. However I try to keep the two subjects separate.

Another Maths teacher, who had been a student before at the same school, said they didn't really mention the Arab contribution to Mathematics but they did bring it into Science. Teacher H, a Maths teacher who became a convert after marrying a Muslim, said that there was a very superficial input on the history of Maths when he taught Years 8 to 11, but he did mention the origins of algebra and the concept of zero. Teacher G, a Catholic and Maths teacher, said he followed the school syllabus he was given which came from South Africa, so that he could incorporate Islamic values into the course.

We follow what is written, for example, when we talk about a straight line, we equate it with the *hadith* that says in the *Qur'an* that you need to take the straight path. When we talk about infinity, which is a huge concept, we talk about the Creator.

He added, as many other non-Muslim teachers did, that if he needed to clarify anything, he consulted the *sheikhs* at the school.

One exception was a student who said how thrilled he and his class were to learn from their teacher about Islam's contribution to mathematics. However, although there are now a number of books in print on this topic, such as, 'The House of Wisdom: how the Arabs transformed Western Civilization',<sup>39</sup> books like this do not seem to be used very much in conjunction with the teaching of maths.

Teacher M taught Maths and Science and said she taught her classes some of the facts that were mentioned in the Qur'an, then gave later examples of early scientists during the Golden Age of Islam. She thought it important to give her students confidence in a subtle way about the contribution of Muslim scholars in geometry, trigonometry and algebra. She was currently preparing a science unit about Light and would include the contribution of Muslim and Arab scholars. She felt that this was a way of getting her students to maintain their self respect 'because if they can respect themselves, they can respect others', as it goes both ways.

### **Is there an Islamic approach to science and creationism?**

The same issue comes up in science teaching, a more contentious area as in the conservative Christian and Orthodox Jewish schools because of differences over creationism and evolution, as Teacher M pointed out to me. It was one of the issues raised by Michael Bachelard in his special investigation on faith-based schools in *The Age* in 2008, when he observed that critics of the schools were often perplexed 'by how some of these schools approach the teaching of science, especially evolution, and worry that strong increases in enrolments mean that many students are not being taught evolutionary theory.'<sup>40</sup> It was also the subject of an SBS *Insight* programme<sup>41</sup> where teachers and students from Jewish, conservative Christian and Islamic schools were interviewed on the subject of how evolution was taught at their school. One Muslim academic interviewed on the subject said it was not a big issue in most of their schools but some Muslims felt very strongly about it. Students interviewed varied in their response, with some saying they just followed the state syllabus and learned about what Islam had to say on the subject in Islamic

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<sup>39</sup> Lyons, *The House of Wisdom*.

<sup>40</sup> Striepe & Clarke, 'Faith-based schools', p.114.

<sup>41</sup> *In Good Faith*, 2008, television programme, SBS Insight, 27 May.

Studies, while others said their teachers pointed out that there were different theories and they should learn about them all.

One school visited dealt with the issue by following the state syllabus. However an Islamic Studies coordinator then came as a guest speaker to give an Islamic perspective on evolution because the text book only gave the Darwinian view ‘which is not an Islamic perspective.’

Teacher K, a non-Muslim, said she took her classes out on excursions and one recent trip to the Australian Museum had been to look at the Woolly Mammoth exhibition, while another excursion to a Science Centre brought up discussion on the Big Bang Theory.

Student M now training as a doctor, thought his school took a progressive stance on the issue,

In science and creation theory, it is being able to give both sides of the opinion and explaining the pros and cons of both sides and leaving it up to the person. There was never any pressure or any force in terms of delivering one side of the message. If we studied Islamic Studies we got one point of view, if we studied science we got both points of view. I think being able to understand and appreciate both sides of the argument and coming to a conclusion of your own is an important thought process that helps throughout your own life.

Another student, Student M, was more critical of his school’s approach and in Year Twelve said he remembered asking his father why they didn’t teach students about Islamic History and Islamic Science. He could remember recently reading a quote at his university from a well-known scientist that said, ‘If it wasn’t for Islam, there would be no science.’ He added, ‘So when I think about that, I think why we were not taught this because it would have brought us some pride? He did however feel that this knowledge was now spreading as a result of the Internet but thought it had not been projected well in his school ‘considering it was an Islamic school.’

The curriculum coordinator at one school admitted he did not know what happened in Science over the creation versus evolution debate, but said the students should know where Islam is different because it includes the idea of a Creator with creation.

Teacher S was a non-Muslim science teacher who liked to use the creation of the Earth as a discussion issue with senior students and everyone could share in the discussion. He found the Book of Genesis a good starting point as he could refer to the Christian fundamentalist point of view and then the contradictions, seeing this as a great way to get the story rolling. On the Big Bang theory, he felt that he could explain or justify the creation of the universe by God and this could still be reconciled with the Big Bang concept, although it was harder to make a connection between humans and apes in evolution theory.

Student H laughed at her memories of the creationism debate because she said her teacher was a Zoroastrian from India who did not believe in creationism. although she knew her view was not the same as the Islamic view so ‘we glossed over it.’

An examination of Science library books was interesting as quite a few overseas texts took a strident line against evolution but it is impossible to assess how many students read them or accept their line of argument.

Teacher P said that at his high school, they teach that evolution is still basically a theory. They try to tell the students what the holy books say and then what research says and what scientists talk about at scientific gatherings. They feel that their students need to know what scientists think, especially if they go on to study Science at university. However none of the students interviewed, who were doing science subjects at university, seemed to worry about this approach. Again this is a position adopted by university science students from the other monotheistic faiths, though it infuriates those scientists who feel creationism is total nonsense and who have written and spoken widely on this position.

Teacher S, a non-Muslim science teacher, said he had discussed creation and evolution with the *imam* at his school. The *imam* told him what the *Qur'an* had to say on the subject. As a result he could tell his students, when discussing the end of the universe for example, that there are three possible theories. One of them is consistent with what it says in the *Qur'an* but none of us knows what is going to happen. As most science teachers are not

Muslims, they sometimes adopt this approach or just do not mention it and leave it to the Islamic Studies teacher to tell students about what Islam has to say on the subject.

Another teacher, who had originally come to Australia from Afghanistan through Pakistan, was now teaching maths and science. On this issue, he considered he saw no difficulty as in his view Muslims accept both the Biblical and *Qur'anic* story of how God created Man as this did not go against the notion of evolution. To back up this assertion, he quoted a text from the *Qur'an*, which said 'from water we made every living thing.'

Another interesting perspective came from a teacher who had been as a student to two Islamic schools and was now teaching at the second one. She said that in science, high school assignments were developed that asked questions on how you could interlink Islamic views with biology when covering the circulatory system. This was connected with praying five times a day and how the exercise involved increased your blood circulation throughout the whole body five times a day. This could be connected with texts in the *Qur'an* on the different veins in the human body, such as the biggest one, the aorta. They also referred to the joints and balancing your back so as not to damage your spine when performing the *rakahs* (physical movements involved in the five daily prayers).

Another issue that comes up in science lessons is human biology. Teacher P, a Christian, taught reproduction in science but realised this was a very sensitive subject. As a result, in science classes they had men teaching the boys and a female teacher taking the girls, so they did not get into contradictions with Islamic teaching in this area.

In yet another area of sensitivity, teacher D at a Muslim primary school said she was teaching about the respiratory system and the body to Year Three, and she also took the class for library lessons. She noticed one little girl who got hold of a book on the human body that had 'some pretty graphic stuff for a Year 3 student'. She took it to the principal who said it was a great book and just glued together the pages that were inappropriate for the little girl who was quite happy about it.

Teacher S raised the question of how to teach about alcohol in chemistry. As he was not a Muslim, his students would ask him what beer tasted like and ask him what he drank. He pointed out to them that alcohol was first made by Arabs and was a word derived from

Arabic. He went on to tell them that they would be using it in medical things and said that nobody had ever told him that they could not do this as they could not touch alcohol.

Although al-Khalili, writing from England, acknowledges the ongoing tension between science and religion in some parts of the Muslim world<sup>42</sup>, there does not seem to be a problem with science teaching in the Australian Islamic schools, where many senior students are attracted to science subjects and a substantial number hope to study medicine at university. From discussion with science teachers as well as students, the issue seems more to be that either the non-Muslim teachers just saw their job as teaching the state curriculum in science or that reference to Arab Science's contribution to learning a thousand years ago was seen as peripheral or irrelevant. On the other hand, some students did mention the pride they felt when they were taught about this and realised that not all scientific advances came from the West.

### **Teaching the Humanities.**

The question of whether an Islamic perspective could be introduced into the English syllabus produced a wide range of responses. English was another subject where the majority of teachers were non-Muslims but it was a key subject for students to do well in, especially at a pre-tertiary level. Teachers were however aware of the difficulties in teaching English as their students were often likely to be speaking another language at home in addition to learning Arabic to read the *Qur'an*. Several schools also had a high ESL intake, while others said that all their students were fluent in English.

For an Islamic school, one difference is inevitably the topics covered in literature, though once again this is not an issue unique to Islamic schools in Australia. Teacher G, a Muslim English teacher of long standing at his high school, said that a lot of recommended texts were very unsuitable. He felt that Islam does not shy away from sensitive topics but they had to be in the correct context, so he wouldn't use a text that was explicit on issues such as sex and drugs. He prepares texts well beforehand and takes an Islamic perspective into account but uses discussion for his students to develop their own personal faith and belief system. When he comes across an interesting or challenging topic like abortion or

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<sup>42</sup> Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders. The Golden Age of Arabic Science*, p. 246.

homosexuality, he asks them to take it to their Islamic Studies class to talk about it with their Islamic teachers then come back with the correct Islamic point of view. As an example, he spoke about one text that involved a soldier murdering someone's father and then having an affair with the soldier's wife, but he said that despite some explicit scenes in the book, it had been vetted by the school and he was allowed to use it as a text. Like several other English teachers who were interviewed, 'Looking for Alibrandi' was a popular text as he said the students could identify with the story. He added that at his school they had a teacher who introduced students to Persian literature, which went down very well.

Another teacher using 'Looking for Alibrandi'<sup>43</sup> said it gave him the chance to focus a bit more on multiculturalism and also the migration gap between families still at home and how the students here relate to those sorts of things. He felt more comfortable using older classic texts like 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and 'Animal Farm' as he felt that contemporary texts had too many issues in them that the school was not comfortable with. Many recent books for young people include a lot of emphasis on pre-marital sexual relationships, drugs and alcohol, gambling and homosexuality, which are *haram* for Muslims so it was easier just to avoid them. Teacher R with a Year Four class, said she felt she had to avoid any texts that promoted alcohol or films that showed kissing scenes, mentioning one occasion when a story involved the word 'wine goblet' which another teacher had pointed out to her.

Student I recalled that at her school none of her English teachers were Muslim but she felt that they respected her religion,

They wouldn't pick 'Romeo and Juliet' or show us that film. We did the 'Merchant of Venice', we did 'Macbeth'. When there was a kissing scene the teacher would fast forward it or cover the TV with a pencil case.

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<sup>43</sup> M. Marchetta, *Looking for Alibrandi*, Camberwell, Victoria, 1990. The book is written for teenagers and is about Josephine Alibrandi, a third generation Italian Australian in her last year at high school in Sydney. She learns to combat the racism she has to deal with in nasty comments from other girls and gains pride in her heritage. Two powerful women are the role models in her life, her mother and grandmother. The book is written in first person as Josephine reflects on her last year at school. A film has been made of the book.

She added that at her school, although it was an Islamic school, teachers were very respectful of the state curriculum so there wasn't any Islamic interference in everything.

Teacher D also had to skate around a lot of unsuitable texts in English,

In English, we use ordinary texts, because of our religion and values, there are certain texts we would not use. We find that if the material is too graphic, especially in DVDs, we might only play a bit of it. The principal screens every DVD shown to the students.

Teacher L, a Muslim, said that she used 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' with a Year Four class because the values and stories are based on the Islamic text book she uses and the idea of sacrifice is common to both faiths. Another teacher at the same school said that with Year Two it was hard to get a book related to the curriculum's English topics so she told her own stories. A Year Five teacher there said she also tried to keep her stories neutral without going into anything. However as a non-Muslim, she tried to steer clear of religious things as she was nervous that if she talked about different religions, people might think she was trying to change their religion.

A slightly different approach was presented by the head of English in one high school who had been there for many years and was a non-Muslim,

In English I try and find texts, which reflect not so much the Islamic perspective but migrant viewpoints. There is not a lot available but in the school library we have 'Does my head look big in this?'<sup>44</sup> In terms of what we do in English, I might incorporate some poems of Omar Khayyam<sup>45</sup> and there is a female poet from a similar period but there are not a lot of resources for these things in Australia. Occasionally I will be asked to cover an Islamic Studies lesson myself and there is a book in the library called 'The Companions of the Prophet'. It is sort of allegorical stories and the children enjoy reading

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<sup>44</sup> Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Does my head look big in this?* Sydney, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Famous Persian poet and mathematician, c. 1050- c.1123, author of the *Rubaiyat* or quatrains that were translated and brought to the West by Edward Fitzgerald in 1859.

these and you can speak about them, not from a religious viewpoint, because I think that's something that is often at the core of their religion teaching and they are interested in that and the way they are experiencing life today.

Questions to English teachers specifically asked if they used Australian texts written by new Muslim authors and several schools spoke highly of using 'Does my head look big in this?' as the girls could identify with the issues raised in the story,

A lot of issues came up when we were teaching that text because it's about a girl who's not covered and she suddenly feels she needs to cover and we found that many of our students are put in the same situation. Not all of them are covered, but firstly they need to fit in at school but then to fit in with the rest of society, so it is a big decision for them to make. This is because when they are not covered, they are not really noticed or looked at so much, so some of them when they decide to cover, it can transform their whole lives which happened one year....

Teacher E says they don't choose books that are specifically Islamic or have anything to do with the religion because they feel that the students need to broaden their cultural awareness and perspectives and just see outside a bit. Sometimes though they do try to get them to compare their own perspectives as a Muslim on what they identify with to what they have learned. She said the students were also cautious about discussing some things in class, giving the Israel/Palestine conflict as an example. She herself was trying to be sensitive about wider issues like sexuality that she then sought to avoid. However she was fortunate enough to get Randa Abdel-Fattah to come and talk about her book, 'Where the streets had a name'<sup>46</sup>, though she said it was tricky,

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<sup>46</sup> Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Where the streets had a name*, Sydney, 2008.

because it's really important for them to have that other side of the thing and know what's going on because a lot of the time they just repeat information they hear but don't understand.

While she did not use Randa Abdel-Fattah's other books, she said the kids read them and liked them, but she herself was trying to use a range that included indigenous texts like 'Sally's Story' when she had brought in a couple of Aboriginal speakers to talk about their culture and their Land. This was important, she stressed, because it was

really interesting for the kids because they have no idea about it and our kids are very sheltered and you have to push them to think outside their culture.

Linked to English in many schools in Australia is the teaching of Drama but few schools seemed to include this as an option. Sometimes staff felt it was for cultural reasons as students were too shy or lacked self-confidence. In other cases, it was a problem finding a suitable production, or simply because they never had an opportunity to rehearse. This was because students caught their fleet of school buses home as soon as school ended and it was impractical to come in at weekends to rehearse.

One primary school non-Muslim teacher said that while her school didn't do music, they did drama because,

I think that is very important for self-confidence to start with and also getting the students to understand that basically our body language movement, doing these sorts of things, it all tells a story. I find as well that a lot of kids here are ESL so writing something can be a real struggle but acting something out they can do fairly easily and it still shows me that they have the same understanding of a particular topic.

Given that teaching of the humanities, especially history, is still tailored very much to a Euro-Centric view of the world, plus some Australian content, it was a point of interest to enquire whether Islamic Schools taught anything about Islam's contribution to world

history and indeed, Australia's history. The answers varied widely and again this was a subject where a high proportion of the teachers were non-Muslim.

One teacher pointed out that if you were following the state curriculum in SOSE then it was hard to integrate an Islamic perspective into the content and even harder for non-Muslim teachers who were unlikely to know anything themselves. In Victoria, there has been research on this in relation to SOSE textbooks, and Windle gave a paper on his research at the NCEIS conference at the University of Melbourne in December 2008<sup>47</sup>. Research is continuing at Monash on how Islam is represented in Victorian textbooks.

Another teacher agreed that you would not find material on Islamic history in textbooks but there were resources in the school library, and the school gave in-service professional development courses for non-Muslim teachers.

Students said it was rare that they learned anything about Islam's contribution to world history. Student F commented that at his school,

In SOSE, it was more the White history, we didn't intertwine it with Islamic history.

Student S was lucky because she said that though they had Australian textbooks, their teacher would add an Islamic perspective so she had learned some Islamic history and about Islam in the West. This was because most of her teachers were Muslims so they had the background knowledge.

One school was a marked exception where they had made a conscious decision in 2009 to include Islamic perspectives in the way history was taught. Teacher B, a non-Muslim, explained,

so an example of this would be the Semester One unit for Year Ten students which follows history from the end of the Classical Age to the end of the Enlightenment, sort of the 1800's. The focus of Islamic

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<sup>47</sup> Windle, *The Muslim Middle Ages in Victorian classrooms: an analysis of junior humanities textbooks*.

perspectives included studying the changes under the *Caliphates* in the Middle East around the year 1600 and how a lot of things they did with regard to jurisprudence and developing a legal system predated the Magna Carta. As well as that, we looked at Islam's contribution to the technical advances in Western societies, particularly Muslim societies and mathematicians. We had a specialist from the university and he came and gave a seminar to the students looking at some of the advances in science, arts and humanities in the Islamic world, how these were built on by Western civilisations. In particular, he highlighted the fact that if it was not for Islamic scientists translating the texts of the Ancient Greeks, much of that knowledge from the Classical Age would have been lost.

He added that,

The kids were quite interested in that and many of them said when they reflected on the unit, they often felt a sense of inferiority when looking at some of their cultures and countries they came from in comparison to the way that a lot of Western nations progressed and they still feel they haven't advanced very much.

Asked about what texts they used, he referred to one national SOSE textbook where basically the only mention of Islam was in the Crusades,

And there are some things there that are probably religiously insensitive, the way they have interpreted some of the teachings of the *Qur'an*. We supplemented that with notes from the university speaker's seminar, extracts from a book called 'The History of Islam' that is in the school library. Not being a Muslim myself, I have to closely follow the guidance of *imams* and always ask their advice before I speak about these things in the classroom, but I particularly focused on Western philosophers like Voltaire who wrote a treatise on

tolerance in 1763.<sup>48</sup> It spoke about the concept of deism and belief in one God and similarities between the major religions of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. This enables me to point out that these concepts of respect and understanding are not new ones, they've been worked on by Western nations as well for several centuries, though we are not yet there entirely. This way I feel that I am opening up a broader view of history, which incorporates and acknowledges the contribution of Muslims, something we started doing this year.

A primary school Muslim teacher took yet another approach,

With regard to history, we look at the curriculum, which is about Aboriginal Studies and indigenous culture. Islam comes in when we look at empathy and causes of displacement. We look at how the kids can reflect as students.

Teacher K, a long serving non-Muslim teacher, pointed out that the SOSE curriculum was mandated by the state syllabus but they used their own textbooks,

When I was in charge of Humanities, I did insist that we change one of the history units in Year 11-12 and one of the options for one of the semesters was the Middle East so I insisted we did it. I also thought the kids needed a balanced point of view.

As the SOSE curriculum included an economics unit, he had to cover the subject of credit in Year Nine so as part of the students' research, he gave them an assignment to put together a leaflet explaining the Islamic system of credit as well as discussing Islamic banking and mortgages.

From discussion with former students, it was fairly evident that they had had little opportunity to learn about Islam's role in world history, let alone Australia. However as staff pointed out, in sticking to their state curriculum and text books, there wasn't much they

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<sup>48</sup> F. M. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique; a Treatise on Toleration*, 1763.

could do about this, apart from adding a few perspectives of their own when relevant. One recent exception has been the travelling exhibition put together by the South Australian Museum in Adelaide which covers the contribution of the Afghan cameleers to nineteenth century Australia and at least one school had taken their students to visit it when it came to their city.<sup>49</sup>

In some schools, SOSE incorporates units on citizenship and civics, which are at the heart of the values debate and allegations by hostile critics of the Islamic schools that they are taught intolerance and gender inequality. A number of schools are able to draw on the experience of their own students in civics because they can look at issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers which has happened to them too so they can understand and appreciate the plight that new arrivals are in, as teacher D explained to me. Like other teachers, she found the textbooks frustrating,

History is about being an informed student so you can make decisions, so the kids can use material in debates about current issues like the Indonesian fishing boats. The problem is with the text books which mention it in only one sentence.

Looking at SOSE textbooks and in discussion with teachers, I found very few references to the Macassars and their connections with Aboriginal people in Northern Australia that may well have pre-dated the arrival of European sailors. Some teachers themselves did not even know about this early Australian contact with the Muslim world.

### **Music and Art – areas of contention**

Two grey areas for Muslim schools are the teaching of music and art that are of course a normal part of the curriculum in many other schools in Australia. Faith schools obviously censor some forms of modern music and Ultra Orthodox Jewish schools share the same reservations about depicting the human form as the more conservative Islamic schools.

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<sup>49</sup> Visited in Melbourne on June 10, 2010. See also Jones & Kenny for guide to the exhibition.

Questions on the teaching of music and art elicited a wide variety of responses.<sup>50</sup> Many schools simply did not touch music, as they knew there were conservative parents who would object, although there is no universal agreement amongst Muslims on this issue and there is nothing in the *Quran* on the use of music. Music was supposed to have been played at Mohammed's wedding and the Prophet is reputed to have had singing girls playing instruments to entertain his troops before the conquest of Mecca in 630. Poetry was highly regarded by the desert Arabs, going back well before the time of the Prophet, and someone who could recite poetry was highly valued in Bedouin culture. One of the key differences between the *Deobandi* school and the *Barelvis* in the Indian subcontinent is their attitude to music as the former are strictly opposed to it while the latter encourage certain traditional Islamic forms of music. A number of the Islamic schools in Australia do allow the chanting of appropriate Islamic songs and poetry as part of their school assembly while others allowed the use of the traditional *oudh* as an instrument. One school used the playing of *Quranic* verses on a CD and in Queensland they sponsor an interstate *Quranic* Recitation competition every year.

One interesting perspective on the teaching of music in an Islamic context came from a paper presented at the Cambridge University conference on Reforms in Islamic Education where the speaker reflected on the Swedish experience.<sup>51</sup> The presenter said that the religious education there often made use of music, song or poetry in teaching. The songs included *nashid* and *madih*. One of the teachers she met had defined *nashid* as songs that dealt with God's creation and gratitude towards God. As such it could include modern genres such as halal hip-hop. *Madih* was a type of poetry that was chanted during worship. Her report noted that Muslim attitudes towards the use of music and song varied, from outright banishment to the enthusiastic use of *halal* hip-hop. She went on to describe the clash of views that this provoked, describing *halal* pop as a contemporary Western style music that incorporated Islamic themes such as good conduct and spiritually minded lyrics. The teachers who favoured this genre argued that it was an idiom that helped sustain Islam's reverence to contemporary youth culture. Predictably some pupils had declared it to be

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<sup>50</sup> Some of the different views on Art and Music in the Sydney schools were outlined in a series in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Linda Morris, 'God in the classroom', June 25, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Cambridge conference report, p.36.

*haram* but the teachers had argued that it was the message or intention behind the lyrics that really mattered.

In Australia, teacher M, who was a non-Muslim, commented that at her school the use of music was limited and she had to ask first. She added that the school was quite liberal and she was only using it with Years Three and Four. A Muslim teacher with a wide experience of different Islamic schools said that,

Music was a very debateable subject as a lot of schools believe that stringed instruments are not acceptable so we stayed away from that. We stuck to *nasheeds* or just a bit of singing. We learned Islamic songs. In the morning we sang the school anthem in Arabic then the National Anthem.

Teacher G, another non-Muslim, said that at his school on the morning I was there, an Islamic Studies lady had addressed their senior assembly on Study Skills and shown a short video which had background music. This had upset a couple of the boys who had got up and left so he was aware of the fact that the school had to be sensitive about this issue so as not to upset people.

Student F had noticed that they never taught music at his high school but did not know why, while Teacher A said that it was simply because music and dance were not quite Islamic to some parents so it was easier not to do it. Student M, who hoped to become a journalist one day, said his school taught some music and art.

Our music teacher taught us the piano, how to sing in tune and create our own piano pieces. We had an art teacher who taught us how to paint and different styles of painting so you could follow that career if you wanted to.

Student S said her school didn't have music either ' but we had a song we sang every morning at school.' Teacher S at another school said that music was OK at her primary school where she used a CD that the children could sing along to, adding that for her Islamic songs were fine but Lady Gaga was not!

The AFIC schools did not seem to worry so much about music as an issue and at one of their schools had staff teaching music and singing to primary classes as well as teaching the recorder in Year Four, but no schools had an orchestra or choir, nor full time music teachers. Malek Fahd Primary School has a spacious and well-equipped music room with a specialist music and dance teacher, where students play instruments ranging from percussion and flutes to classical pianos. They put on an annual concert during *Ramadan*. AFIC has also joined with Human Appeal International in support of Sounds of Light concerts to raise money for orphans since 2007 with a big turnout of support in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, and a cast of performers from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey presenting their message of Islam to thousands of spectators.

If music came into a drama production, it had to be checked out first by the principal and *imams*. However some of the schools did put together a choir for involvement in Harmony Day celebrations and many schools sing the National Anthem at assemblies or on special occasions. Malek Fahd College has its own school song written by Shah Abdul Hadi Shah Idil in 2002,

Malek Fahd, our dear own School,  
Our voices we join in praise of you,  
So widely known, we gladly own,  
With pride and joy to all is shown,  
In you we learn to work and play,  
Leading us in the blessed way,  
God we serve and then our land,  
These are the loves for which we stand.

Another AFIC school did not have any music but did do drama because as Teacher S explained,

We do drama because I think that's very important for self-confidence to start with and also getting the students to understand that basically our body language movement, doing these sorts of things, it all tells a story and I find as well that a lot of kids here are

ESL so writing something can be a real struggle but acting something out they can do fairly easily and it still shows me that they have the same understanding of a particular topic.

Not surprisingly, when asked if students listened to contemporary music on their i-pods, alumni interviewed laughed and said that of course they did, but the more orthodox students did discriminate about what they listened to, following their own guidelines on what was un-Islamic. Student H observed that in April 2012, younger teenage Muslim girls had got as hysterical about the British boy band, *One Direction*<sup>52</sup> as other young Australians, though in their case this was particularly because one of the boys, Zayn Malik, was a Muslim. Another discussion with several women students focused on why Yusuf Islam, formally Cat Stevens, had given up his music when he converted to Islam in 1978, but had then studied Islam's views on music and decided to return to it.<sup>53</sup> The students involved in this discussion then gave me a list of musicians they loved to listen to and considered acceptable.

Student I, when asked about music at her school, commented,

I was at school before earphones and all that were really common. However though we did not do music, we were never explicitly told that Islam did not approve of music or we were not allowed to listen to music. Students had their Walkmans and Discmans on the bus home and teachers were aware of it.

Art was encouraged at primary schools but what the students were allowed to draw was circumscribed by various rules. Arabic calligraphy was of course universally practised as an art form and all the schools had framed Islamic calligraphy on display, often in the entrance hall.

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<sup>52</sup> The band played to packed out audiences in three cities in Australia. Zayn Malik comes from a Pakistani family background in Bradford, Yorkshire.

<sup>53</sup> Cat Stevens said he originally gave up his music career because he thought the music industry was incompatible with Islam and he believed that Islam did not approve of music. Later he realised that Islam's attitude to music was far more complex than he initially thought and encouraged by other Muslims and his son, decided to return to his musical career after 2005.

Islamic Art has come back onto the international agenda since 2001 and the National Gallery in Canberra hosted a display on Islamic Art and Civilisation in Southeast Asia in 2006 while the world's largest private collection of Islamic Art, *The Arts of Islam*, was on display at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the winter of 2007. The collector, Nasser Khalili, an Iranian-born Jew, made the point that whereas 95 per cent of Christian art is religious, Islamic art is at least 90 per cent secular, so most of the objects on display had no religious connotations. The display included 40 *Qur'ans* as calligraphy and the written word as a special art form in Islam spanning the period from the seventh to the twentieth century. While the display highlighted the differences between Christian and Islamic Art, it was designed to help bridge the gap between the Judeo-Christian and Muslim worlds and promote understanding.<sup>54</sup>

Not surprisingly the emphasis on art in Islamic schools reflects this particular perspective though staff and students interviewed varied on what art was taught in their schools, if it was taught at all. Part of the reason was, of course, the need for special facilities and trained teachers, which was not always a priority for many schools where the emphasis tended to be on getting good results in academic subjects and pride in doing well in the NAPLAN tests and Year 12 state result charts. Art was more often taught in primary schools where class teachers sometimes included art lessons, and Student A spoke fondly of her principal who used to do lots of amazing things with her class like clay work and screen printing, while at her high school, they never did art.

Student A said while her school did not do music, they did art right through high school and she loved it, especially the Expressionists like Van Gogh. As in most other schools, where there was an art teacher, she was not a Muslim. Another student A, said of her school years,

With art, meaning painting, there is controversy too, over drawing animals and people, so we didn't do that. My art teacher was very fashion conscious so most of our classes were drawing or designing dresses, which was perfect for me. We did a lot of material work, no

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<sup>54</sup> Special Advertising Report, *Weekend Australian*, June 23, 2007, p.1.

face drawing or people drawing, a little bit of calligraphy, lots of drawing scenery.

Her friend, student S, had a slightly different experience,

In art we did normal graphics but we also learned Arabic calligraphy. We did have a phase where our teacher would not let us draw humans but most of our art teachers were actually non-Muslim so we did a lot of drawings. Most were not about people.

Student Y said that at her school, art was mainstream from Years 7 to 10 as one of four elective subjects, then in Years 11 and 12, you could pick up Studio Arts and Visual Arts as an option. She said her art teacher was a lovely woman who was Albanian-Australian. They all drew animals but she could not draw people although others did. Students did some calligraphy in Year 8. The school had a gallery display every year for Year 11-12 student work where displays included facial form and the human form, though obviously clothed.

Teacher S, a non-Muslim, said that as she felt creativity was important for children, she had checked on her school outcomes statement to see what it had to say on art. As Arabic art was covered in Islamic Studies, she taught her Year 5 students about Aboriginal Art. In contrast, Student K was very creative and complained bitterly saying her school gave you a narrow choice if you liked art, drama or music. She commented that there is musicality in the *Qur'an* and a deep history of art in Islam, so when she left the school, she went to a state college to repeat Year Twelve and now studies architecture at university, adding that because of this attitude she hated her school. Before high school she had been to a public primary school where because of her strong sense of Muslim identity, she felt unable to be part of the Christmas play but was happy to help make the costumes and what she described as 'arty things.'

In Adelaide, an Islamic Spectrum exhibition was opened in 2009 and the following year, Year 9 and 10 Creative Arts students from the local Islamic school were invited to display their work on Still Life drawing, Impressionism and Urban Landscapes.

### **Sport and physical education**

Sport and physical education including swimming, are a contentious issue because of Islamic dress codes and sometimes cultural issues for girls. On the other hand, a lot of the constraints are due to limited grounds, like so many other schools in Australia, and use where possible is made of other public facilities near the schools. Physical education has improved enormously since the days of the early schools, when alumni interviewed said it simply did not exist. Now all the schools have P.E. teachers for boys and girls but the sports they play vary enormously. In Sydney and Melbourne there are now Islamic Schools leagues to play each other while for other schools, the chance to play in inter-school leagues, gives students a welcome chance to mix with students from non-Islamic schools. A number of students commented on this when asked about mixing with other school students. Only one school said it did not play with other schools because the principal said that the local leagues excluded them.

Head of health and P.E. teacher M said that,

Islam and the Qur'an encourages people to be fit, to be eating healthy, to work together Islamically in sports and health. We teach them about smoking, drugs, alcohol, sex education, First Aid. Each year is different. For example in Year Nine, we have teachers with segregated classes.

His school teaches swimming and soccer in first term, volleyball and tennis in second term, and basketball and badminton in third term. They have a swimming pool, which boys use in the morning and girls in the afternoon, though alumni of the school said in interviews that the pool was hardly used and they had never been in it. For the boys coming from 35 different cultures, soccer and basketball were very popular, so they had introduced AFL in primary school and the kids had come to love it. They brought coaches and players from a local AFL team, and the sport particularly appealed to the tall, fit Somali boys. He added that boys from India and Sri Lanka preferred cricket so they had just started that too. The gym had machines for weightlifters but they had to use the school bus to take students to the local playing fields, as they didn't have enough space for that. However they were hoping to get new facilities with government money if it came through. The female

teachers worked with girls in the school gym and the girls loved badminton and volleyball, though some liked soccer and basketball. Girls did not play cricket though.

Teacher B at a primary school said that at her school they played T-ball and there was a Muslim Schools League for tennis, soccer, Oz-tag, softball and netball. They had taken the students to watch Rugby League but not many played it. Student M said he had a teacher who taught them Rugby Union and if you had talent, you got put in teams. This was fairly typical, as so many schools seemed to depend on the interests and skills of particular teachers who were prepared to introduce new ball games. Consequently they varied enormously.

Raising the Islamic dress code issue, Teacher A said that the biggest extra curriculum thing that her school's students did was probably to play sports,

We find sometimes, they have to change the dress code for them, even the boys. You might have the uniform has to be really short shorts to play in and we can't do that so you will find that we need to change to make sure it conforms with the Islamic way so the shorts must be longer. All our girls are covered and so for example, playing something like netball, they can't wear mini-skirts, they need to wear the pants and the long tops.

Obviously, young Muslim women are now breaking through into the world of traditional Australian sport, though there are undoubtedly parents who would forbid their daughters to be involved. In Sydney, Muslim girls are playing in a new team, the Auburn Tigers, made up primarily of Muslim women. Their spokeswoman, Amna Karra-Hassan, said that they played in headscarves and with covered limbs, and had strategies for when they lost a headscarf in a tackle. They had a female coach and the male team was asked to keep away on training nights and game days. Amna added that it took a while for her parents to become comfortable with the idea of her playing AFL as her Dad did not know what it was, 'but if he saw me get tackled, I would be in so much trouble.' The team grew out of encouragement from the urging of the NSW AFL multicultural staff though Amna agreed that there were still cultural barriers, 'Girls do not play sport is the big one.' As with the experience of Islamic schools, having a role model has also been important. In this case,

they refer to Israel Folau, a rugby league convert, who plays with the Greater Western Sydney Giants.<sup>55</sup> Other Muslim sporting role models include Bachar Houli who plays AFL for Richmond<sup>56</sup>, Hazem el Masri who played Rugby League for Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs until 2009, and cricketer, Usman Khawaja, who plays for New South Wales.

Obviously social and cultural barriers are the main block for girls, though where a school allows girls to play ball games, there does not seem to be any problem, even with Islamic female dress codes. Student S said that at her school they played soccer but they wore the traditional clothes, ‘we wore pants.’ Student K said that at her school, the only chance for girls to play sport was in Islamic classes, so in Beliefs and Values the girls had played soccer in the gym with a South African *sheikh* and they thought it was great fun. Encouragingly, Student N, who had gone back to teach at her old school, said that more girls were doing sport these days and enjoying it. Some were doing cross-country running and tae-kwon-do, which they had not done in her day.

Teacher D said that,

Self-defence gets the kids very excited, we have to remind them that Islamically it has to be emphasised as self-defence as the kids get very hyped over it and want to use it.

Another student said that her school even had horse riding for boys and girls at one stage but she did not think that they did it any more. Student Y said they did horse riding at her school with their religion teacher, although the principal apparently thought it was not suitable for girls ‘because you could lose your virginity on a horse.’ She said that the sports he approved of were those that the Prophet Mohammed is reputed to have encouraged, including archery.

Involvement in athletics depended on access to a running track with the other normal facilities. At primary level, the dress code seemed to vary, and at one athletics carnival I

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<sup>55</sup> P. Lalor, ‘Muslim women find a new goal’, *Australian*, 28 May 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Unity Grammar School in Western Sydney were very proud of the fact that he came and spoke to their students. He also spoke to the students at the Australian International Academy in Melbourne in May 2012.

went to, when the girls threw off their *hijabs* in a race, the principal just smiled and said it didn't matter. Female students interviewed said they usually did not take part in athletics, either because they didn't like it or because the dress code made it awkward, but participation seems to have improved in recent years, with students taking part in local carnivals with no difficulties.

Whether the schools teach swimming, seems to depend on whether they have access to a pool, as very few schools have their own pool. While this is not a problem for the boys, the girls are required to have access to a pool when there is a time for only females to be in the pool, and in some places, this has raised the hackles of local residents who object to their exclusion at these times. Aslan refers to the opposition created by right wing shock jock Alan Jones on 2GB when Noor al Houda school wanted to hire the Auburn pool for girls only sessions so the idea had to be dropped<sup>57</sup>. Another school was fortunate enough to have access to the pool of a local girl's school with an understanding principal. One school visited said it was very hard for their students to get access to a pool where they could take the boys and then the girls so they encouraged parents to take their children to vacation swimming classes. Several female alumni interviewed said that at inter-faith dialogue events they were involved in, students at the non-Islamic schools invariably asked them if they went to the beach.

The recent arrival of what is sometimes referred to as the *burqini* has made a big difference for girls learning to swim, both in pools and in the sea. Students who attended Islamic schools in the early days commented wistfully on how they never went swimming but now their younger siblings get the opportunity. As almost all the Islamic schools in Australia are relatively near the sea, it was interesting to visit one school where Year Four students had taken part in an initiative with a local Council and Surf Lifesaving Australia to get involved in the 'On The Same Wave' programme. This taught the children to understand and identify rips and associated dangers in the ocean and the lifeguards taught them about beach relays and surfing. Teacher D said swimming was still a problem for high school girls, because there was a

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<sup>57</sup> Aslan, *Islamophobia*, pp. 139-140.

problem with cameras in pools, clothing can weigh them down, but new fashion designs for girls has opened the doors for kids. Islam is not there as a barrier.

### **Health education – a difficult subject for the schools**

Associated with health and wellbeing alongside physical education, is the vexed question of a subject that comes under various names, such as personal and social development. In a secular society, state schools use these classes for educating students on sexuality, plus covering drug and alcohol issues. For faith schools with a strict moral code, this presents a number of problems, where Islamic schools line up more with the Orthodox Jewish, conservative Christian and Catholic schools, than their secular state counterparts. They all teach sexual abstinence before marriage and oppose teaching about homosexuality though differing on alcohol and abortion rights<sup>58</sup>. In addition, the fear in the wider community is that if these issues are raised in the classroom, then students will be encouraged to experiment, despite the lack of evidence for this presumption. The general opinion in the Islamic schools is that all these matters are best left to the home though privately they acknowledge that this often does not happen and Muslim students are left in a vacuum when confronting some of these issues. Some imams double up as counsellors, as do some younger teachers.

Fida Sanjakdar's research on finding an appropriate sexual health education curriculum for Islamic schools was tried out at one of the schools working in conjunction with a small group of teachers there<sup>59</sup>. She makes the point that the teaching and learning of sexual health is not only desirable in Islam but obligatory, while acknowledging the failure of the schools to respond to this challenge<sup>60</sup>. Sanjakdar uses a paper by Halstead to identify three main aspects of contemporary practice in school sexual health education that

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<sup>58</sup> Hussain, *Islamic Laws and Society*, has a helpful section outlining Islam's position on abortion though as usual there is no one view, Sydney, 1999, pp. 122-126.

<sup>59</sup> Fida Sanjakdar. 'The critical role of schools and teachers in developing a sexual health education curriculum for Muslim students' and 'Teachers' struggle for an Islamically appropriate sexual health education curriculum at their school', Melbourne, 2004 and 2005.

<sup>60</sup> See also L. Morris, 'Going by the book, Islamic schools can't offer sex education', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June 2003.

contravene Islamic teachings so have been used by critics to oppose its introduction in schools. Halstead's points are:

Some sexual health education material offends the Islamic principle of decency and modesty;

Sexual health education tends to present certain behaviours as acceptable, which Muslims consider sinful;

Sexual health education is perceived as undermining the Islamic concept of family life.<sup>61</sup>

In regard to the controversy over teaching about homosexuality in schools, Halstead with Lewicka, writing in a British context, explores the Islamic view on gender and identity, making clear the distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts<sup>62</sup>. They argue in favour of alternative approaches to teaching about homosexuality in secondary schools which minority faiths like Islam are likely to find more helpful, perhaps teaching the topic as a controversial issue. In their view, this approach may be acceptable to Muslim parents as long as their children have been adequately initiated into Muslim beliefs and values during primary socialisation. Their position is strongly opposed by an American academic, Merry, who feels that adopting this line merely serves to encourage certain groups to exercise a tremendous power over Muslim young people by uncritically initiating children into what he describes as a highly intolerant religious value system. However he does echo Halstead in making the point that both Muslims and homosexuals suffer from unflattering stereotypes in the popular media and suffer discrimination.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Halstead, 'Muslims and Sex education', *Muslim Education Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1997, p. 319.

<sup>62</sup> Halstead and K. Lewicka, 'Should Homosexuality be Taught as an Acceptable Alternative Lifestyle? A Muslim perspective', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> M. Merry, 'Should educators accommodate intolerance? Mark Halstead, homosexuality, and the Islamic case', *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 34, no. 1, March 2005.

### **Co-curricular activities**

As in other schools, there were other co-curricular activities than sport that offered students a chance to mix with students from other schools, in particular debating and public speaking. Those students who had been involved in these activities spoke very positively about the experience, though the opportunities for social mixing were limited by time. One major disadvantage for many of the Islamic schools that staff referred to, was that up to 90 per cent of students come to school by bus, often travelling for over an hour each way every day, so this constrains their involvement in extra-curricular activities. This is particularly the case as all the Islamic schools are in big cities with well over a million people, apart from Canberra, where the one school there only goes up to Year 7 at the moment (2011). One student, who had to travel by bus for over an hour to get to his school, did however note that he had been to other schools in Australia and it was the same there, so this wasn't an issue just for Islamic schools. One related issue for Muslim students involved in debates with other schools was the expectation that they should stop for prayers if it was the appropriate time, but this didn't seem to stop them, as it was so much part of their daily school life if they were observant.

Teacher V said his school had gradually tried to encourage students to speak out and had recently organised an Awards Night where the students could present their speeches to parents and families. One of his students had daringly spoken about euthanasia, which was a controversial topic for Muslims. Though her speech had upset some people, she had introduced it front of the parents by saying it was not her own belief but she had challenged herself to research in favour of 'shouldn't people have a choice' as an option. The girl had come second while the winner had made an entertaining speech on Generation Y, putting all the blame on Generation X, which she then found she had to present to a Generation X audience of parents. Younger students had varied between topics on travel overseas or Islamic topics to health and dieting issues or how the world was so boring that we have now devolved to sitting on the couch and watching television. Teacher V felt this was important because a lot of the students did not speak English at home so he was trying to give the opportunity to speak English in different contexts and in front of a larger group.

One of the Perth schools, which organised debating and public speaking with other schools, were very proud of one of their girls who was selected by Rotary to go to Sydney for a national competition where she came second.

Several Islamic schools encourage their students to take part in state Youth Parliaments, despite some allegations that Muslims do not believe in democracy<sup>64</sup>.<sup>65</sup> A primary school in Sydney was featured on an ABC television programme<sup>66</sup> when the class organised a parliamentary debate of its own, focusing on what sort of a playground they wanted in response to teacher concerns about their request.

Teacher F had checked with her School Board before starting to teach her Year Four primary school class to play chess to improve their cognitive skills. This had followed some research she had done herself and then the usual community debate about whether or not playing chess was permitted in Islam, as in some more orthodox circles it is regarded as *haram*.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously there is considerable variation in what is taught in the Islamic schools in Australia, partly depending on the policies of the particular school and partly on whether or not it has the relevant staff available or the facilities. Muslim teachers are in a better position to promote an Islamic perspective in their particular subject but most of the schools rely on non-Muslim teachers who cannot be expected to have the same level of awareness, unless it is passed on through Professional Development opportunities.

The related issue is reliance on Australian textbooks that are not likely to include a Muslim perspective but as yet the schools are not in position to remedy this situation, even at the level of faith teaching. At primary level, work sheets and simple publications can be

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<sup>64</sup> This fits in with the findings in Queensland that 74 per cent of Muslims surveyed rejected the statement that ‘democracy is a Western form of government and is not compatible with Islam’, reported by H. Rane et al. in ‘Towards understanding what Australia’s Muslims really think,’ *Journal of Sociology*, March 2011, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> There is an interesting contrast here with the Brethren schools as members of this sect are forbidden to vote.

<sup>66</sup> *Compass: A Muslim Education*, ABC television, 7 September 2008.

easily put together but high school classes will tend to rely on the normal Australian school textbooks available, particularly with the implementation of the national curriculum.

More contentious subjects like art and music bring up awkward issues because they reflect different opinions within the Muslim community so principals tend to find it easier just to let the matter drop rather than upsetting more conservative parents. Hopefully in the future, some of these issues will be debated within educational circles, much as this discussion is under way in Europe and North America.

With regard to health education, hopefully Fida Sanjakdar's innovative work will also bear fruit, but given the obstacles of conservative tradition and deeply embedded cultural restraints, only time will tell how long this will take.

Clearly there remain a number of contentious issues, both for the students and the educators, struggling to respond to the diverse views of their school community. While the schools certainly offer an Islamic framework when it comes to dress rules, provision of *halal* food, observation of festivals and *Ramadan* as well as Friday prayers, it will be impossible to please everybody when it comes to the divisive issues like appropriate teaching of health education, art and music. The area of the curriculum offers a number of opportunities for further research, some of which has already been started in areas like the teaching of history and health education. As the schools are so different, such research needs to cover a cross-section of both primary and secondary institutions, involving both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers. One particular area of investigation that would be useful is the textbooks used in the schools in order to encourage the publication of more Australian based material. A number of teachers referred to this need, though conceding that the time necessary to work on this is currently non-existent, so research on the current situation could act as a useful stimulus for raising the profile of developing such publications.

The next chapters move on to examine the related issues of whether the schools teach intolerance, as some critics allege, and do they promote 'Muslim values' that are somehow different from 'Australian values'.

## CHAPTER 7

### DO THE SCHOOLS PROMOTE INTOLERANCE?

One of the major charges laid against Islamic schools has been that they teach intolerance of other faiths<sup>1</sup>. There has been substantial research on this already carried out in selected schools by organisations such as Erebus International<sup>2</sup> but both staff and alumni at all high schools visited across Australia as part of this research reported that many senior students did have the opportunity to visit other schools as part of a programme of inter-faith dialogue or other schools came to visit them. This outreach has also increased since 2001 and as more of the Islamic schools build up to Year 12, this will be likely to increase as most of the outreach involves senior students rather than the younger ones who are less confident and know less about their faith. On the whole, the exchanges were with Catholic schools and other independent schools, while exchanges with Jewish schools were limited to Sydney, Melbourne and Perth as there were no Jewish secondary schools in other cities. Given that most Australian students, and certainly those in the public system and outside the capital cities, do not have such an opportunity, it is worth noting that in this respect, Muslim students involved in such dialogue are probably more aware of other faiths than their own, compared to the majority of other Australian students.

It is also important in light of findings that intolerance of Islam is linked to ignorance about the faith, as such encounters help to dispel many of the myths about Muslims. Obviously dialogue does take place at other levels of society, such as the community outreach programme in Melbourne during *Ramadan* and the group of women there who take their Islamic fashion parade around Victoria<sup>3</sup>. However these interfaith dialogue programmes involving high school students are important in reaching out to young people before entrenched attitudes set in on both sides. Dunn's research (2006)<sup>4</sup> on what Australians knew about Islam, concluded that those with the least knowledge and personal contact with Muslims were the most likely to feel threatened by Islam, adding that contact

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<sup>1</sup> This was the essence of Brendan Nelson's letter to State Education Ministers around Australia in March 2003. The Religion Report, ABC Radio National, 2 April 2003. [www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2003/822514.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2003/822514.htm), viewed 15 September 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Erebus International. Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> *Islam on Parade*, ABC Compass, 16 October 2005.

<sup>4</sup> K. Dunn, 'Australian Public Knowledge of Islam.'



Building Bridges in Melbourne<sup>9</sup>, and Project Abraham in Adelaide. Students who had taken part in these programmes spoke positively about the opportunity to mix with students of other faiths but were sometimes critical of the format and the way that students were selected for the meetings.

Dahlia, a graduate of an Islamic school in Melbourne, described a three day intensive course organised by the Australian Multicultural Foundation for 16 young Muslims from around Australia which included learning about interfaith discussions ‘which bridged gaps and created a community connection<sup>10</sup>.’

Kath Engebretson, on her visit to the Australian International Academy in Melbourne in 2006, reported on the college’s participation in the Building Bridges two year programme<sup>11</sup> that involved Year 9 and 10 students meeting with their Jewish and Christian counterparts in other schools four or five times a year. At the end of year presentation, parents were invited to listen to their reflections, although she concluded that the most important thing the students gained was a sense of the common humanity of all.

The Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding (IIU) Pilot Project Review, involving three Islamic schools in Sydney as well as other schools, referred to a decreased sense of isolation that came from meeting other students, particularly in the case for Islamic schools. It reported a change in the attitudes of non-Muslim students whom they saw. In the safe environment of inter-school functions they could move beyond a view of Muslims as terrorists, and said that a comment from one student interviewed was common,

It’s good to discover that they don’t look at us as different – like we’re terrorists or something.<sup>12</sup>

As one of the investigative questions for this thesis was specifically about involvement in dialogue outreach, the student responses form an important part of the research. They cover a range of views, with some students enthusiastic about their participation, others critical of the selection process, and others just admitting that they were

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<sup>9</sup> Conservative Christian and Muslim students involved in Building Bridges were interviewed about their encounter at The Australian International Academy in *In Good Faith*, the SBS Insight programme, on 27 May 2008

<sup>10</sup> *Reflections from an Islamic school graduate*, ACIES Newsletter, 2008, p.6

<sup>11</sup> K. Engebretson, A Sketch of the promotion of Inter Faith harmony at an Australian Islamic College: challenges for Islamic schools, *Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 54, no.3, 2006, pp. 72-74.

<sup>12</sup> IIU Pilot Project Review, Sydney, 2008, pp. 23-24.

too shy. Some students who took part felt that there was too much emphasis on the presentation and not enough opportunities to interact with the other participants which they felt was the best part of it. What was clear is that there had been more emphasis on dialogue outreach since the events of 2001 and students involved felt it had been a worthwhile exercise.

Student R had gone to one of the early Islamic schools and took part in some of the first dialogue sessions with Catholic and Jewish schools. She commented that there was a big difference before and after 2001 and today there was a lot more dialogue as well as xenophobia, adding that ‘there is an effective narrative but the media ignores it.’

At a constructively critical level, Student D said she regularly took part in inter-faith dialogue meetings with other schools but they were very much focused on the Abrahamic faiths and she didn’t learn anything about the Baha’i’s or Indic faiths till after she left school.

A more critical view was expressed by Student D who reported a negative experience at her school where she said that one particular *imam* taught her class that Christians, Jews and Baha’i’s were all wrong and they shouldn’t be friends with them. However she added that the school now organised dialogue sessions with other schools. She felt that the intolerance came from those teachers who originally came from Pakistan, whereas her family came from Iran and were far more tolerant. Apart from this student, no-one else interviewed talked about intolerance between Muslims, though one Muslim academic outside the school system said in conversation that she felt that the differences between *Sunni* and *Shi’a* had become accentuated in recent years but no-one was going to admit to it.

Student A from the same school said that in his experience the school tried to teach *Sunni-Shi’a* differences from a balanced perspective though he was aware of the differences and ‘kept it in the back of his mind’ when he was reading. Commenting on the selection process, he said he had taken part in dialogue sessions but felt it was always,

the select group that were keen and took the leadership role to do it. It was essentially that if a school was to visit, they would sit down in our staff room and have a big massive lecture from our director about what Islam is then have food or whatever after and that was it. There wasn’t an opportunity to really talk with students.

On balance, students who had taken part in dialogue sessions were usually more positive about the experience while the others who did not, were more critical, reiterating the point that the school always chose a select group of students to take part and left out anyone else. However another student from this school had a more positive experience once she was allowed to interact in small groups with the students from other schools,

A lot of them would ask why do you wear the *hijab* or why do you cover your face because at that time I was covering my face so they would ask what's the difference between the two. So I would explain and they would ask all sorts of question such as can you have boy friends, do you go to the beach, do you shower in that, do you use shampoo, can you drive, do you have to listen to your husband? Sometimes we would get attacked on women's rights. I'd be there trying to respond the best way possible.

Student S said that he took part in inter-faith dialogue,

We talked about our faith and they came to our school and talked about their faith. It was more like a building bridges kind of thing.

Student H, who had been to a mixture of schools, also enjoyed his experience at an Islamic school,

We had inter-faith programmes and I took part in everything. It was a very good experience for me and with this I could discuss religion with non-Muslims. This Catholic school visited our classes and we visited them and we had a school from the country, which came for three days and stayed near here, we showed them the city. I loved the way the school did this, not many Muslim schools do this.

Student A was very effusive over her participation,

My school had a big inter-faith programme with Islamic, Jewish and Christian schools. They had a huge emphasis on interfaith learning. I went and did lots of talks. I loved it. I still talk about my religion in the laboratory at university where I now study. I love it.

Another student had a similar positive experience from taking part in a student conference,

From Year Ten, I was part of the Inter Faith Dialogue that we had. It was between six schools altogether. We met up once a week at one school and discussed our beliefs and there was one big camp at the end. Tim Costello came and attended it and he thought it was a great idea. I was able to learn about different people.

Student A, who only came to her school in Year 9, said they had Inter Faith workshops where the students all got together and did a task, like making up a play. She also went out to other schools to talk about Islam though she thought what she knew had really been learned from her grandmother when she was a child rather than at her school.

One teacher as part of the Beliefs and Values course, took her students to PLC where student A reported,

She made us visit a non-Muslim school. The girls there were good and I enjoyed my time there.

Her friend, student R, from another year, had the same experience, which she valued because she had no non-Muslim friends apart from on the Internet,

We had fun at PLC and we took photos of each other and we got along well, which surprised our teacher and we made fun of our school. We went to a state public school in a small town too. The students were very friendly but they were quite apprehensive as

well because of the way we dressed and they didn't quite know what to expect so we tried to play it cool.

The time factor was mentioned by the dean at one school, a non-Muslim, who said there was no regular calendar for interfaith dialogue at his school as,

it depended on particular teachers interests and motivation and time to be able to organise these things but certainly it goes on and the school doesn't exist in a bubble. We often get approached by other schools for an interfaith visit but it sort of happens on an informal basis. Something I've organised myself is a yearly trip to a state high school out of the city as there is not much of an Islamic community up there so while there are a lot of Muslims visible around this part of the city, there are not many up there. Because of this, it is a really worthwhile experience to go and visit each other on an alternate basis. The students are involved in coordinating activities for the day and some develop ongoing friendships that they have struck up out from these exchanges. We usually focus on the Year 11 and 12 students.

Other forms of dialogue outreach involved visiting speakers. *Sheikh M* said he had invited a Nigerian pastor and an *imam* who had made an alliance for peace, based on the conflict in Northern Nigeria, and his students had the chance to ask them questions. This was in an open forum when they were touring Australia, at the invitation of an organisation he was in touch with called Initiative for Change. He added,

It was very stimulating for the kids to be directly involved with personalities who are opposed to each other and the sense of spirit of peace and harmony has left an indelible mark on the students.

My own Year 11-12 Religion class from Hobart had the chance to visit an Islamic school in Melbourne in 2011 where they joined the senior students to listen to an Australian convert explain why he had become a Muslim, then mixed with each other informally after

a welcome from the principal. This school hosts frequent visits from other schools and takes part in interfaith dialogue sessions organised in the city.

Teacher K, who had come back to her old school, said they had a unit called Place and Space where she not only learned about Indonesia, but were taught that,

Islamic values emphasise respect to your neighbours and other countries. We learn how the Prophet Muhammad respected, supported and protected the Jews in Mecca and Medina as a minority often abused there.

One school visited had a Youth Camping programme with a local Jewish school and a public school where they organised interactive activities when they explained what they believed and how they lived as Muslims.

The *imam* at another school said that his school encouraged students to graduate at university then return to the school to discuss the value of what they learned, raising the concern about what ideas they might have encountered in the wider Muslim community as young adults,

We see some of them after they graduated from here and they come back and take part in discussion with us about what they have studied. We talk about how we helped them to understand others because you may find some people who are very extreme and they don't understand the others. Islam doesn't allow such people to do this, we understand that in our Islam there is no compulsion in religion so you have to understand the others.

One well established school had a long running inter-faith programme which so impressed John Howard when he heard about it, that he invited the school to present at the Federal Parliament in 2006 when the values debate was at its height. One student who spoke said it was almost all adults present and asking questions but she had still enjoyed the visit.

### **Harmony Day activities**

Like many other staff and students at Islamic schools around Australia, the student who made this comment about her involvement in the presentation had taken part in Harmony Day programmes. However she had not taken the Beliefs and Values unit in Year 11-12 which taught comparative religion. Teacher V, a non-Muslim, also said that Harmony Day provided outreach opportunities for his students,

On Harmony Day we were invited to other schools, Catholic schools mainly, and they would like to hear about Australian Muslims and young Australian Muslims. We have invited the schools here and the most recent one, the school came because they've just started a unit on Islam. It was an Anglican independent school and they came here and the students put on a bit of a slide show for them about the Five Pillars of Islam, a bit of the history, a bit on the prophet. We always finish off with a bit of cultural food, so we get the mums to make things like baklava. I've been involved in quite a few of these visits and I think the good thing is when the formalities are over, the students very quickly mix in each with other, they talk, and they make friends and swap e-mails with each other.

At another school, teacher M said when he was in charge of Harmony Day,

We used to take students from here and go and spend a day say in a Christian or Jewish school, and then they would come and spend a day here as well. Last year we had eight to twelve visits by schools that came and spent a day with us here.

Harmony Day seems to have involved many of the Islamic schools who saw it as important outreach and a chance to emphasise their involvement in the wider community. Many reported their participation in their school magazines.

Apart from interfaith dialogue, most schools also provided a mixture of other opportunities for their students to meet students from other schools, though the social contact is inevitably superficial. Many schools take part in debating and public speaking as well as local competitions organised by clubs such as Rotary. These activities were always emphasised in school annual reports and magazines.

### **Conclusion**

Overall there is very little evidence of teaching intolerance but there are obvious limitations with regard to the existing dialogue outreach programmes. With only a small number of Islamic schools able to participate, there are also problems in selecting older students confident enough to take part in these activities. In addition there is the reality that by Year 11 and 12, the students own priorities are studying for exams to get into university. While the feedback is that these exercises are valuable, there remains the criticism that the process is often highly selective.

The other issue arising is that while the focus of comparative religion teaching is on the three main Abrahamic faiths<sup>13</sup>, few students said they had the opportunity to learn about other faiths when at school. To qualify this, it appears that they still learn more about other faiths than most Australian high school students, especially those in the public system who get virtually no faith teaching at all<sup>14</sup>. Surveys show that most young Australians know very little, if anything, about Islam, and that this ignorance is linked to intolerance. While the Islamic schools are doing their best to develop outreach, other means will need to be found to dispel the ignorance in the wider Australian community that continues to breed misunderstanding and intolerance.

Abe Ata's research has found that 'having a friend who is Muslim is significantly associated with reduced prejudice towards Muslims'<sup>15</sup> but worryingly his research also indicated that there was a strong tendency for the two Christian groups surveyed – Catholic and Other Christians – to be less well-disposed towards Muslims and Islam than were the

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<sup>13</sup> The fourth Abrahamic faith, the Baha'i faith, also presents a difficult issue for many Muslims, especially because of their ongoing persecution in Iran.

<sup>14</sup> New South Wales now allows visiting speakers in to talk to students but most seem to be untrained as teachers and are often Evangelical Christians. I have not come across any teaching of Comparative Religion in public schools except at Year 11-12 level.

<sup>15</sup> Abe Ata, 'Introduction' in Ata (ed), *Catholics and Catholicism in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne, 2012, p. 5.

Non-religious. He also reported that when it came to gender differences, boys were less accepting of Muslims and Islam than were girls. Ironically, given the emphasis on dialogue outreach by the Islamic schools with other independent schools, he reported that state school students felt more positively about Muslims and Islam than did private school students<sup>16</sup>. While Ata conceded that could draw no conclusion on causation of these findings, it does indicate that more dialogue can only be a positive factor in improving mutual understanding, but with 704,000 children in 1698 Catholic schools<sup>17</sup>, there is no way such a large number of Catholic students can be reached by the Islamic schools in this way. Given this imbalance in numbers, perhaps there needs to be more effort by the Catholic schools to learn about Islam and for teachers to pass on what they learn to their students. In addition, leaders from the wider Muslim community could be involved in speaking to religion teachers as part of their Professional Development, and there is certainly no shortage of suitable texts and audio-visual resources these days.

Beyond the independent and Catholic schools, the major difficulty is that the public schools in Australia do not teach about comparative religion at all and most students would not have the vaguest basic knowledge, even about Christianity. While there are a number of dialogue groups in the major cities backed up by an increasing range of audio-visual programmes, most young Australians are not likely to either be interested in them or lack the knowledge that they exist. The same goes for the size of audiences taking in Religious programmes on the ABC, like *Compass* and *Encounter* (and the *Religion Report* when it existed) which cover a wide range of multi-faith issues, encouraging a hard thinking and critical approach to questions raised. What techno-savvy young people do find on the internet is often bitterly hostile to Islam (and not just Islam when it comes to religion) and inevitably what there is, would also provoke disagreement among Muslims themselves.

Even with the best will in the world, dialogue groups are simply not going to reach most young Australians of student age, so promoting basic knowledge and toleration in the wider community will clearly have to be undertaken at a variety of different levels. While the schools try to promote outreach, obviously not all students are involved, and the question therefore remains as to whether or not some of these students are isolated because they attend the same school all their lives and never take part in activities outside the school. The final chapter therefore considers the allegation that the Islamic schools create a 'ghetto',

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Perception of the 'Other' in Catholic schools in Australia, A National Survey'. pp. 45-47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Current figures quoted by Ata, p.2

promoting exclusion rather than inclusion, and making it hard for the students to develop a self-confident identity ready to enter the outside world after leaving school.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE VALUES DEBATE IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 2003

Much of the antagonism directed at Islam and the Islamic schools in Australia, comes down to a perception that Muslim values are different from Australian values and do not fit into this country. There is a similar ongoing debate along these lines in Europe, covering both arguments about what constitutes ‘values’ and the more recent arguments about multiculturalism. Those writing on the subject in a European context ask if Islam has simply become a battlefield that highlights the limits and boundaries of multiculturalism itself<sup>1</sup>, particularly since 2001, a position that also reflects the situation in Australia during the last decade.

The debate in Europe is important because it is mirrored in Australia in many ways, especially with the focus on values as a marker of Muslim incompatibility although more recently as in this country, the same arguments have shifted to the issue of multiculturalism. Again, the critics are singling out Muslims to demonstrate that it has failed, although in Europe each country is dealing with the presence of Muslims from a different perspective<sup>2</sup>. In Germany, the focus is on the Turkish community who originally came as ‘guest workers’. In the Netherlands and Belgium, most of the Muslims came from North Africa (Tunisia and Morocco), although in the Netherlands there are also Muslims from Surinam (formerly Dutch Guiana). In France, the issue is complicated by the country’s colonial past in Africa as well as the historical tradition of secularism. In Britain, most Muslims originally came as migrant workers from Pakistan, Kashmir and what is now Bangladesh, so the communities are now often second or third generation today. In Scandinavia, the vast majority of Muslims arrived as refugees and were welcomed at first but there has been a big swing against their growing presence in the last decade and traditional Scandinavian tolerance has now been replaced with the emergence of Right Wing anti-immigration parties like the Sweden Democrats who got into the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) for the first time in 2010 with 5.7 per cent of the vote.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Gole and J. Billaud, ‘Islamic Difference and the Return of Feminist Universalism’, in (eds) A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood, N. Meer, *European Multiculturalisms. Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*, Edinburgh, 2011, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Kepel outlines some of these differences in his chapter on ‘The Fatwa and the Veil in Europe’, in *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard, 2002, pp. 185-202.

In recent years, all these countries have been affected by a steady flow of refugees, many from Somalia, Iraq (both Arabs and Kurds) and Afghanistan. The pattern in Australia has been very different, with Muslims coming to this country first as cheap labour (the Turks), as skilled professionals (mainly the Indian subcontinent) and since 1975, as refugees from a wide variety of countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

There is a classic example of this hostility to Muslims in Australia expressed in terms of values, demonstrated on the Camden Islamic School Protest Site. It opens with the statement,

WHY? There are a number of reasons, but the primary reason for 'this' site is 'VALUES.' No matter what the planning guidelines say, they will not address this fundamental problem or issue, and they could slip in under the darkness of fuzzy thinking and uninformed minds.

WHAT? There are a number of specific values the Islamic community is obliged to promote among the Muslims because they are contained in the *Quran*. Others are found in the *Hadith* tradition.<sup>3</sup>

The word 'values' has come to encapsulate the difference between those Australians who feel hostility towards the growing number of Muslims in what they perceive as a predominantly Christian society and those who argue that Australia is today a multi-cultural and multi-faith society where Muslims belong as much as anyone else. As Yan Islam points out in a recent essay, the values debate can lend respectability to bigotry<sup>4</sup>. Later he observes, that as long as the 'Muslim problem' can be reframed as a values debate, then this allows politicians and others to express Islamophobic sentiments without guilt. Obviously this debate affects Muslim students at the schools as well as the wider Muslim community as has been well documented in a number of publications. However this thesis seeks not only to ask how schools reacted to the values debate but also to draw out the students and

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<sup>3</sup> Camden-Islamic-School-Protest. Home page, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Y. Islam, 'A lapse of reason or Islamophobia at work?' In *Islam and the Australian News Media*, 2010, p.141.

teachers on whether they feel that Muslim values are different from Australian values and what they felt about the debate launched by Brendan Nelson almost a decade ago when he was Minister of Education and sent his letter about values taught in the Islamic schools to his state counterparts. While it is true that this question could be seen as overly simplistic, it was designed more to open up a general discussion on the ‘Values debate’ rather than just expecting a Yes/No answer. This did prove the case although students who were at school prior to 2003 were not able to respond to any feelings they had as students at the time and some younger students were also unaware of it.

### **The discourse on values and problems of defining it**

One initial major problem is agreeing on what the term ‘values’ means. Academics have written extensively on the term in the context of this debate, although journalists persist in using the term loosely at a polemical level. William Maley refers to the vacuity of the notion of ‘Australian’ values, asking if ‘it refers to some idealised list of virtues, or is to be grounded in observation of the actual behaviour of ordinary Australians?’ He warns of the danger’ that promotion of ‘Australian values’ could be used to promote a model of political life which is far from liberal, and devalues the importance of freedom of association and individual conceptions of the good.<sup>5</sup>

Saeed puts the debate into an Australian context in his chapter on ‘Commitment to Fundamental Australian Values’<sup>6</sup>, when he observes that the perception that Islam and Muslims are somehow incapable of adapting to Australian values and life remains widespread. He notes that it is largely based on the idea that Islam is a religion that is against modernity and Western values so Muslims in Australia are therefore unable to adapt to their host culture. As an example of this hostile view, he quotes Melanie Phillips, author of ‘How the West was lost’ in *The Spectator*<sup>7</sup>, asserting that Muslims refuse to assimilate to Western values and asks what these values are that Muslims are supposed to despise?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William Maley, ‘Australian Approaches to Dealing with Muslim Militancy’ in Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia*, p 277

<sup>6</sup> Saeed, ‘Commitment to Fundamental Australian Values’ in *Islam in Australia*, pp. 198-208.

<sup>7</sup> M. Phillips, ‘How the West was Lost’, *The Spectator*, London, 11 May 2002, [www.melaniephillips.com/how-the-west-was-lost](http://www.melaniephillips.com/how-the-west-was-lost), accessed 27 April 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Saeed, p. 198.

If these values are the rule of law, democracy, human rights, equality, pluralism, a fair go for all, the truth of the matter is that Muslims around the world, including many in Australia, are often yearning for exactly these values. In fact, one reason why many Muslims migrate to the West is the very existence of these values. The fact that there are a few Muslims in Australia who may be against Western values does not justify the labelling of *all* Muslims as holding these views.<sup>9</sup>

Like some of the students interviewed, he goes on to ask if Western secular values include values such as commercialisation of women's bodies, drunkenness, alcohol abuse and sexual harassment, adding that it would be unfair to attribute all these values to all Australians and to say that these are the secular values on which Australian society is based. His own definition of the fundamental values on which Australian society are based include egalitarianism, rule of law, parliamentary democracy, respect for human rights, freedom of expression, equality of the sexes, multiculturalism, religious pluralism and English as a national language, adding that while it is difficult to put forward a generalised view with regard to 'Muslim commitment' to these fundamental values, it is noticeable that the hostile commentators usually focus on religion as the only demonstrating factor to prove that Islam is incompatible with 'Western values.'

The Erebus International report<sup>10</sup> also asks if we can delineate Australian values, commenting that it may be impossible to find an authoritative source that sets down undisputedly what these values are, particularly as these things change over time.<sup>11</sup> However after making the point that terms may mean different things to different people, the authors say that it is not the place of the report to debate such matters and what they are looking at is to 'identify the practical and tangible representations of values as they can be found in Islamic and other Australian schools.'

Phillips and Smith carried out their research<sup>12</sup> before the Australian Values debate got under way, observing that 'a key concern in studies of Australian identity has been to

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>12</sup> T. Phillips and P. Smith, 'What is 'Australian'? Knowledge and Among a Gallery of Contemporary Australians,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2000, p. 217.

identify and understand the range of values and beliefs that characterise Australia.’ In their research, based on six socially diverse groups, they noted that ‘the qualities selected by the groups can be classed into two general types: the traditional Australian values such as social relations, social institutions and national stereotypes, and modern political ideals emphasising democratic values and citizenship rights.’ The same terms that seemed to recur were mateship (eg volunteering, helping others, pulling together) and having a relaxed and easy going orientation to life. In addition, they agreed on the ‘Australianness’ of such qualities as ‘a fair go,’ owning your own home and having a family (eg holding up family values). If this is what is meant by Australian values, it is hard to see why anyone would think that Muslims would disagree with any of them, an opinion endorsed by all of the students when they were interviewed on this question.

Allegations of intolerance and contrary values were also countered by former multicultural affairs commissioner, Joseph Wakim (a Christian Maronite Lebanese who came to Australia in 1965), when he pointed out that Islamic schools surpassed most others in their open days, Harmony projects, inter-faith activities and inviting public school, Catholic, Jewish and Aboriginal students for dialogue and sharing. Like other non-Muslim Australians, he asked the question of who defined Australian values anyway, pointing out that most students in Islamic schools were born in Australia so could not ‘clear off.’ Many of the schools had already published their values on websites and in their yearbooks or taught ‘values’ long before the Howard government came up with their list and not surprisingly they referred to tolerance, respect, understanding, equality, freedom, justice, peace and democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Even before the Australian values debate got under way, Donohoue Clyne wrote about her research conclusion,

Islamic schools aim to educate children for life in what it is hoped will be a diverse and tolerant society, not to indoctrinate Muslims with un-Australian values.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> J. Wakim. 2005. ‘Why Muslim schools? What about the rest?’ *The Age*, 29 August.

<sup>14</sup> Donohoue Clyne, 1997, ‘Seeking Education for Muslim Children in Australia,’ p.11.

### The values and multiculturalism debate in Europe

The same debate has arisen in West Europe where since the events of September 2001 in the USA, countries have started to question their pluralist traditions and the benefits of multiculturalism.<sup>15</sup> As Roy observes, since 9/11 the debate on Islam has become more confused than ever and, if anything, sometimes more nasty.<sup>16</sup> Gole and Billaud ask whether Islam has simply become a battlefield that highlights the limits and boundaries of multiculturalism. Emphasising the importance of identity within a multicultural framework, Gropas and Triandafyllidou then stress that education can be a tool through which identity, perceptions and understandings, real and imagined, are developed. They point out that it can be inclusive but equally it can propagate prejudice and stereotypes with perceptions of cultural confrontation.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the question becomes whether state-funded state schools are compatible ‘with an approach that valorises cultural/ethnic/religious/racial diversity in education within a secular context or whether, by contrast, it leads to religious segregation and thus to the development of parallel societies.’<sup>18</sup>

Their preference for the first option would be rejected by those opposed to the establishment of Islamic schools as these critics are invariably against multiculturalism as well. By contrast, the people interviewed for this research on the question of faith based schooling and the values taught, did not see the schools as helping them to create a parallel society. They saw themselves as Australian and Australian values were perceived as universal values. Furthermore there was nothing really unique about Australian values, however much the term may be tossed around by politicians and other community leaders, along with that undefinable but emotive expression, ‘unAustralian.’ Unfortunately this focus on values is increasingly used by forces hostile to the growing number of Muslims now living in Europe and North America because, like the Camden protesters, they see the difference in values as marking out why for them, Muslims can never fit into a democratic, secular Western society.

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<sup>15</sup> N. Gole and J. Billaud, ‘Islamic Difference and the Return of Feminist Universalism’ in *European Multiculturalism. Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*. Edinburgh, 2012, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> R. Gropas and A. Triandafyllidou, ‘Religious Diversity: Intercultural and Multicultural Concepts and Policies’, in A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood and N. Meer, *European Multiculturalisms. Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*, Edinburgh, 2011, p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Another conservative political figure, former National Party Senator, John Stone, also makes this linkage between values and culture in an Australian context, arguing that ‘Islam has become a failed culture’ and that we should abandon multicultural policies and ‘sharply reduce, indeed virtually halt Muslim immigration.’ For him, Muslims, because of what he calls their culture, are unlikely to readily integrate into society, though he then quickly acknowledges that many, or even most, Muslims in Australia are indeed law-abiding.<sup>19</sup>

Another grey area affecting this debate on multiculturalism is the argument over ‘cultural relativism.’ Academics like Susan Moller Okin in the United States equate it with advancing and preserving Islamic or other group cultures<sup>20</sup>, as does Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She argues that this multicultural view denies that cultural and religious standards can have negative effects and retards the integration and emancipation of peoples, particularly Muslims. She goes on to assert that this neutral approach will merely encourage the vast majority of Muslims to continue with a separate, inward focus on their own isolated culture. In turn this leads to state subsidies for non-state schools to allow Muslims to have their own schools, ‘in which young girls are indoctrinated to expect a future as mothers and housewives in accordance with very conservative Islamic practices.’<sup>21</sup> While she specifically refers to Muslim schools in Britain, the Netherlands and the United States, her definition of values is somewhat different as her objection to these schools is that they do not teach the values of freedom and individual responsibility, and tolerance,<sup>22</sup>

Australians must ask why there is need for Saudi Arabian financed Muslim schools? Young people should be groomed to be Australians first, to see their nationality first not religion.

Her views contrast with research undertaken in Sydney and Perth by Kabir, when she interviewed 60 Muslim secondary students, aged 15-18, in Sydney and Perth in 2006,

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<sup>19</sup> John Stone, ‘One nation, one culture’, *The Australian*, 22 July 2005, reprinted in On Line opinion, 26 July 2005, [www.onlineopinion.com.au/print\\_asp?article=3713](http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/print_asp?article=3713), accessed 30 April 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Moller Okin cited in A. Ali, *The Caged Virgin. An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, New York, 2006, p.6

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

though almost all had attended state schools, not Islamic schools<sup>23</sup>. The students were asked what it meant to be ‘Australian’ and ‘un-Australian’. Kabir observes that literature defining the terms Australian and un-Australian is limited, but refers to some of the definitions offered by Australian writers including Phillips and Smith<sup>24</sup>. Their research into concepts of Australian values found a difference between an urban white-collar perspective, a non-English speaking woman or a traditional nationalist perspective, and suggested further research. However Kabir found that the young people she interviewed emphasised tolerance, helping people, freedom of speech, integration and citizenship. She did note a difference between Australian-born and overseas-born young people as she felt that the latter felt more affiliation to their religion than the Australian-born students did but that this did not pose a cultural threat as their first priority was to respect the law of the land.

While it may be true that there are such schools in England<sup>25</sup> and the United States as outlined by Ali, there is no evidence of any such schools in Australia, where the state provides funding<sup>26</sup>, and where all money coming from Saudi Arabia is now carefully monitored. Her other main criticism, that the schools fail to provide a critical approach, was not born out by interviews with imams or former students, although the latter were not slow in offering criticism of who they considered to be unqualified or inadequate teachers in the faith units.

As the submission to the Land and Environment Court in Sydney by Camden church leaders and Christian ministries demonstrates, hostile critics see Islam as an ideology driven by a desire for world domination<sup>27</sup>. As far as they were concerned, the proposal to build a school at Camden was part of a plan for Muslims to advance their influence into new non-Muslim populated areas by first establishing a presence through a supposed community

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<sup>23</sup> N. Kabir. ‘What does it mean to be Un-Australian? Views of Australian Muslim students in 2006’, *People and Place*, vol.15, no 1, 2007, pp. 62-79.

<sup>24</sup> T. Phillips and P. Smith, ‘What is “Australian”?’ pp.203-224.

<sup>25</sup> I use the term England here, as although there are Muslim communities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are no Islamic schools there.

<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, some funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States was sought in the early days of the schools, hence their original names, but this no longer occurs.

<sup>27</sup> This echoes the argument of the Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, who has also stated that ‘Islam is a totalitarian ideology. In other words, the right to religious freedom should not apply to Islam.’ Acceptance speech for the Freedom Award given by the Florida Security Council in Miami, April 27, 2009, [www.jihadwatch.org/archives/2009/04/025884print.html](http://www.jihadwatch.org/archives/2009/04/025884print.html) accessed 4 May 2009.

facility, such as a school.<sup>28</sup> Their assertions fail to make any distinction between what European academics like Tibi and Roy refer to as the difference between Islam as a religious belief and political Islam or neo-fundamentalism<sup>29</sup>. They see Islam as reflecting a political ideology, often reflecting the views of activists with little or no interest in religion.<sup>30</sup> Ali, however, defines Islam as not just a belief but a violent way of life, imbued with violence, and encouraging violence. For her, a confrontation between the values held by Islam and those of the West is inevitable, and the clash has already begun.<sup>31</sup> Obviously the crucial difference is between those who fear the schools in Australia because they see Islam itself as the problem and those who can make a distinction between Islam as a faith and political Islam as an ideology.

### **The origins of the values debate in Australia**

What can best be described as the Values Debate in Australia commenced in the years following the events of September 2001 in the United States, and after lobbying of Federal Government ministers in Canberra by various un-named groups about Islamic schools. This came in the context of what has become a wider community debate during the past decade about immigration in general, asylum seekers and multiculturalism. However it should be emphasised that there is nothing new about values as the subject of debate and how to transmit values to a younger generation, and it certainly surfaced in Australia in the late nineteenth century when arguments over education became very bitter and divisive.

The current debate on values culminated in a Citizenship test for new migrants (Citizenship Act 2007) while the hidden agenda was really about Muslims in Australia, as a

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<sup>28</sup> *CathNews*, 21 May 2009, quoting a report in 'Christian Today.'

<sup>29</sup> The use of terminology like 'fundamentalism', 'Islamism' or 'political Islam', is explored by Nader Hashemi in his chapter on 'Islamic fundamentalism and the Trauma of Modernization' in M. Browsers & C. Kurzman, (eds), *An Islamic Reformation?* Lanham Maryland, 2004, pp. 173-174. Roy, *Globalized Islam, The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, 2004, describes it 'as the brand of modern political Islamic fundamentalism that claims to re-create a true Islamic society, not imply by imposing shari'a, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action.' p. 58. See also footnote on Islamism in the Introduction.

<sup>30</sup> Bassam Tibi. *The Challenge of Fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, Berkeley, CA, 2002, p 139

<sup>31</sup> Ali, *Nomad*, p 245

number of commentators have pointed out.<sup>32</sup> Aly has made the related point that a lot of the contemporary railing against multiculturalism and the threat of Islam in the last decade is the product of deeper identity politics that he considers have little to do with Muslims themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Values debate triggered off a great deal of discussion, most of the literature in Australia is either polemical, forming an extension of the culture wars, or it has tried hard to be objective and not single out Muslims. This applies in particular to the website linked with the Government's Values Education programme and presentations to a number of conferences held on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

Anna Clark makes the point that the Values framework was far from the first attempt to define Australia's values and democratic institutions. A lot of material had come out before the anniversary of Federation in 2001 but the public debate launched by Brendan Nelson as Minister of Education 'was far from partisan. Instead of facilitating a widespread public consideration of values education, the framework became tied to a politicised and exclusive debate over 'Australianness.'<sup>35</sup>

The most effective rebuttal of the position taken by those using the Values debate to question the presence of Muslims in Australia is contained in a book of six essays<sup>36</sup> edited by Gaita in 2010, seven years after the debate was initiated. In his introduction, the editor penetrates the smokescreen used by culture warriors from the right through their focus on attacking multiculturalism<sup>37</sup> while later contributors to the book challenge the claim that Islam and Muslims are locked into a clash of civilisations with the West, the Huntington<sup>38</sup> thesis<sup>39</sup>.

This claim then leads to an attack on Australia's immigration programme, suggesting that Muslims do not fit in Australia, or a slightly more moderate position,

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<sup>32</sup> For example, contributors in R.Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims & Multiculturalism*.

<sup>33</sup> W. Aly on *ABC Religion and Ethics programme*, 6 October 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Such as the Values Education forum in Melbourne on 28 April 2004 and the National Values Education Forum at the National Museum of Australia on 2 May 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Anna Clark, 'Teaching National Narratives and Values in Australian Schools. What do students really think about Australian identity and character?' *Agora*, vol. 43, no.1, p. 4, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*.

<sup>37</sup> with references to speeches, interviews and articles by conservative politicians and commentators such as Peter Costello and Keith Windschuttle.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, 1996.

<sup>39</sup> G. Levey, 'Multiculturalism and Terror', in Gaita (ed), p. 26.

Muslims are fine as long as they become like us and disown ‘radical’ Muslims who should go somewhere else other than Australia<sup>40</sup>. This was the line taken by three Sydney residents whose petition was tabled in Federal Parliament on 10 February 2011 by Senator Gary Humphries<sup>41</sup>, calling for a ten year moratorium on Muslim immigration into Australia with preference to be given to Christians from all races and colours. The petition cited the constitution, the founding fathers and the current parliamentary prayer to insist that Australia is a Christian Commonwealth and rejects what it describes as ‘attempts to establish a Muslim nation in Australia.’ It also justified this argument on the grounds that 69 per cent of Australians are Christians, adding that during the moratorium, ‘an assessment can be made on the social and political disharmony currently occurring in the Netherlands, France and the UK, so as to ensure we avoid making the same mistakes.’<sup>42</sup>

Aly further explores this popular anti-multiculturalist narrative in his chapter in the Gaita book<sup>43</sup>, noting the crutch that many anti-multiculturalists lean on, ‘Australia’s Judeo-Christian heritage.’ For those who see the Islamic schools as hotbeds of terrorism and learning how to make bombs, as well as teaching students to hate Christians and Jews, he makes the important observation,

In fact it is difficult to identify even a single Western Muslim terrorist who attended an Islamic private school in the West.<sup>44</sup>

Davison in his chapter points to the now-familiar paradox, ‘that as fast as globalisation dissolves the barriers between nations, it strengthens moves to shore up the defences of the nation-state.’<sup>45</sup> He goes on to refer to the political agenda behind the Values debate, ‘Under Howard, national sentiment was ruthlessly exploited, not only to marginalise Muslims and other minorities, but to divide his political opponents.’<sup>46</sup> Later he analyses the wording in the official Australian Values textbook on citizenship for prospective citizens, ‘Life in

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Costello, ‘Our values or go home: Costello’. *Age*, 24 February 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Liberal Party Senator for the ACT.

<sup>42</sup> Senate Hansard, Canberra, February 10, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> W. Aly. ‘Monoculturalism, Muslims and Myth Making’ in Gaita (ed).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>45</sup> G. Davison, ‘Testing Times: Citizenship and ‘National Values’ in Britain and Australia’, *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.141.

Australia', pointing out how the principles expounded in the book were really aimed at what he describes as 'the stereotype of Islamic extremism.'<sup>47</sup>

In the context of the schools, the values debate was narrowed down when Brendan Nelson as Minister of Education wrote to his state counterparts in 2003 asking them to ensure Islamic schools were meeting curriculum requirements and not encouraging anti-Christian and anti-Western sentiments among the students<sup>48</sup>. He stated that he had received letters from citizens concerned that such feelings were being fostered.<sup>49</sup>

This was despite the fact that the ACIES had sent the Minister a copy of the Muslim Schools charter<sup>50</sup> two months earlier, which amongst its aims, states specifically:

\* We are a proud part of the Australian education system and committed to teaching according to the guidelines of government curriculum standards and shared Australian values.

\*We teach the children in our schools to respect the rights of others and to understand the different backgrounds and religions of Australia's multicultural society.

\* We stand against those who preach violence and hatred.

The debate broadened out when Brendan Nelson urged that Muslims in Australia who did not want to accept local values should leave the country, or in his own words 'clear off.' He went on further to say that all Australian schools would now have to teach the national values framework including tolerance, responsibility and understanding.<sup>51</sup>

This debate on national values arose in the context of a broader concern about national identity, heightened in the aftermath of the events in the United States on 11 September 2001. It was also as a result of increasing Muslim immigration in Europe and

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>48</sup> The letter was discussed by Stephen Crittenden with Ameer Ali, President of AFIC, and Anna Bligh, Premier of Queensland, on the ABC Religion Report, 2 April 2003, [www.abc.net.au/radionational/Islamic-schools-under-scrutiny/3540062](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/Islamic-schools-under-scrutiny/3540062)

<sup>49</sup> O. Guerrero, 'Minister urges watch on Islamic schools.' *Age*, 28 March 2003. Also discussion on the ABC's Religion Report with Dr Ameer Ali, 2 April 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Full text is on the ACIES website [www.acies-org.au](http://www.acies-org.au) and as Appendix 2. It was first agreed on in 2001 then again in 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Samantha Hawley interviewing Brendan Nelson on the ABC PM programme, 24 August 2005, [www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2005/s1445262.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2005/s1445262.htm)

the political impact this has had in terms of the reappearance of populist right wing political parties. In addition, it marked the reappearance of the concept of a folk-devil, when ‘a condition, episode, person or group of person emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values or interests and its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media.’<sup>52</sup> As the British journalist, Johann Hari, points out, it further artificially deems minority cultures to be monolithic<sup>53</sup>, culminating in the assertion made by Phillips that ‘Muslims regard Western values as an assault on Islamic principles.’<sup>54</sup> Aly, analysing this approach, demonstrates that a majority group is then constructed whose values are determined for it by the declaration of an elite.<sup>55</sup>

In Australia, this seems to have involved the Prime Minister of the time, John Howard (1996-2007), and his Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews (2007), putting together what they considered to be a list of these values. Not surprisingly, the list was met with a certain amount of derision in the light of the Howard government’s treatment of the boat people coming to Australia as asylum seekers, given the first value, Care and Compassion. There was a savage irony in this declaration given that it came out following the Tampa affair in August 2001 and the tragedy of the sinking of the SIEV-X two months later. The link between the issue of values and citizenship was encapsulated by Kevin Andrews in a speech to the Sydney Institute when he started by speaking about these issues reflecting ‘a fundamentally different global dynamic which has emerged over the last twenty years,’ and went on to focus on migration and its impact on Australia,

It is against this background that the Government has decided to introduce a citizenship test and a values statement for people applying for permanent residency visas.<sup>56</sup>

He went on to make the point that ‘the current debate’ was not unique to Australia, referring to the UK, the Netherlands, France and Germany, and dwelt on ‘the Australian way of life’ and ‘the Judeo Christian beliefs and traditions brought by the British settlers.’

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<sup>52</sup> W. Aly quoting Stanley Cohen in ABC Religion and Ethics programme, 6 October 2011.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Quoted by Aly.

<sup>54</sup> Aly quoting Melanie Phillips *Londonistan*, *ibid*

<sup>55</sup> Aly in the same programme.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Citizenship – committing to a way of life’. Kevin Andrews addressing the Sydney Institute, 31 July 2007.

However, while values are important to society, they cannot be expressed in group terms. If freedom of thought is an essential component of Western liberal democracy, then there are a lot of people in our society whose personal values would cause great offence to other Australians, yet we do not discuss expelling them from this country or telling them to ‘clear off.’ Values are also dynamic and change over time. Our attitude to women is an obvious example, given the Howard government’s constant reference to equality of men and women as a national value. Australia’s historic attitude to indigenous people or religious tolerance could be cited as other examples although the recent wave of attacks on ‘multiculturalism’ might indicate that a fair number of Australians still hanker after the White Australia policy.

Part of the drive for values education comes as a reaction to what was perceived as the values-neutral approach adopted by the National Curriculum sponsored by Education Minister John Dawkins in the late 1980s. Terence Lovat, Professor Emeritus at the University of Newcastle, points out that there is nothing new about the idea of values education, although he does suggest that its image, if not its name should be changed. Looking back into history, he cites the NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880, which stressed the need for students to be inculcated into the values of their society, ‘including understanding the role that those values had played in forming their society’s legal codes and social ethics, as well as learning to conform to those values in the form of good citizenry.’<sup>57</sup> Brian Hill, who has been writing articles about values education since 1960, feels that he has been living through a period of great change with respect to values education as a result of the social upheavals of the time and the changes to Australian society. He comes up with his own definition, that values are ‘the priorities individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure.’<sup>58</sup>

Teachers and schools are perceived as natural agencies of values education so not surprisingly the recent values education debate has been focussed on schools. The problem here is that the kind of broad values envisaged here do not proceed from the same agenda as those politicians who took on the issue after 2001, in particular the focus on the rise of faith schools which inevitably have a values-rich curriculum reflecting their own beliefs.

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<sup>57</sup> T. Lovat, ‘What is Values Education all about?’ Paper put out for the Values education for Australian schooling website by the Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 2005. [www.valueseducation.edu.au](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au)

<sup>58</sup> B. Hill, ‘Values Education in Schools. Issues and Challenges’, Speech to National Values Education Forum in Melbourne, 28 April 2004.

The Howard Government had initially commissioned the Values Education Study to look at how all schools could be more effective in teaching values to young people. It was conducted over two years and involved 69 schools, and from the report developed a Draft National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools. Funding of \$29.7 million was allocated over the period 2004-8 to help make values education a core part of Australian schooling. The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools was then released in May 2005 with the official list of nine values, and an image of Simpson and his donkey superimposed in the background.

### **What the students thought on the subject of values**

It was this issue that formed the catalyst for my research within the Islamic school community, given that much of the values debate was focused on the Muslim community, albeit in coded form. As part of the interview questions, staff and students were therefore asked what they felt about the values debate and whether they saw any contradictions though it excluded students who had attended Islamic schools prior to 2003. Asking for their comments seemed important as none of the discussion to date on ‘Australian values’ seems to include what these young people - or staff in the schools - thought. The most perceptive response came from Student L who did a sample citizenship test on-line,

Like I remember it was 2006 or 2005, it was on the Australian citizenship test, it had: ‘Australian Values are based on (a) Judeo-Christian tradition, (b) Qur’anic teaching; (c) secular or something else?’ Obviously the answer was Judeo-Christian tradition but you know what you are doing in that instance is excluding all the other religions that may exist in Australia that may have the same values, obviously a different name, that you are saying that is not shared by everyone else, whereas they are.

The term ‘Judeo-Christian values’ is dealt with by Aly, who points out that,

the forging of a Judeo-Christian tradition as a historical basis for Western civilisation is more of a political act than a historical fact.<sup>59</sup>

He then points out that while the Australian Government makes special note of it in its information booklet for prospective citizens, the entire concept of a Judeo-Christian heritage is ‘a remarkable rewriting of history’.<sup>60</sup> Given that this constant reiteration of Judeo-Christian Values is central to the argument of so many people who assert that Muslims do not fit into Australia<sup>61</sup>, it is important to take a closer look at it. As a concept, it only seems to have appeared in the first half of the last century, given the history of 2,000 years of Christian anti-Semitism and the belief that the Jews were guilty of deicide<sup>62</sup>. While Jews and Christians to a certain extent share a common text in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, theologically Judaism has more in common with Islam in terms of asserting the oneness of God, while the *Qur’an* incorporates most of its named prophets from the Jewish tradition, albeit with the names spelled differently, plus Jesus and his mother, Mary.

Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch politician who took a strong stand against Muslims in the Netherlands before his assassination in 2002, expressed the term somewhat differently by using the expression ‘Judeo-Christian’ culture. He viewed Islam as a menace to Europe in itself because Muslims resisted multiculturalism, which he saw as a sort of truce, arguing that Islam was the only value system waiting in the wings if the multicultural order fell.<sup>63</sup>

The wider issue of Australia’s mythical national values was raised by visiting US political philosopher, Michael Walzer, in 2005, when he reported on his visit in the US magazine, *Dissent*,

When people talk about ‘Australian values,’ mateyness is what they mostly mean. Hence the first response of Australians when

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<sup>59</sup> Essay in Gaita (ed), p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>61</sup> a typical such letter appeared in the Hobart *Mercury* where the writer stated, “This is a country whose laws are based on the 10 commandments, it is a Christian country”, adding that if migrants do not like our customs and way of life, then why did they come here? 9 April 2012, p. 13. Not surprisingly, Pauline Hanson also referred to Judeo-Christian values in her attack on Asian immigration and multiculturalism in her Melbourne speech in October 1996.

<sup>62</sup> The voyage of the *Dunera* and the fate of its Jewish passengers in 1940 is one such example from Australia’s past.

<sup>63</sup> Referred to by Caldwell in *Reflections on the revolution in Europe. Immigration, Islam and the West*, New York, 2009, p. 311.

radical Islamic preachers told their young listeners that Muslims must choose only Muslim friends: ‘That’s not matey.’ I think that’s a pretty good response, though I should note that the ruling Liberal Party is busily enacting a neo-liberal program whose inegalitarian effects are also, definitely, not matey.<sup>64</sup>

Davison from Monash University puts the values debate in the context of globalisation, ‘because as fast as it dissolves the barriers between nations it strengthens moves to shore up the defences of the nation-state<sup>65</sup>’. He went on to argue that,

Under Howard, national sentiment was ruthlessly exploited, not only to marginalise Muslims and other minorities, but to divide his political opponents.<sup>66</sup>

The over-riding question raised by the values debate was defining Australian values and having drawn up the official list, the Howard government circulated a poster to all schools. This was still displayed in some of the Islamic schools visited although students who were younger at the time of the original debate could not recall them.

The Erebus International Report observed that it may be impossible to find an authoritative source that set down indisputably what Australian values and Muslim values are, given the wide variation in cultural practices associated with Islam and continuing debate within Australian society about the definitive list of characteristics that define ‘a good Australian.’ It added that while the term ‘mateship’ is much loved by politicians to describe a common Australian value, for some the term implies exclusion rather than a sense of brotherhood. It also pinpoints the issue of equality with regard to women, given that some Muslims would say that while Islam considers men and women equal, they have different social roles and responsibilities. In addition, another view, underpinning current Australian law, is that separate is inherently unequal.<sup>67</sup>

The official values list as drawn up by the Coalition government were referred to in the ensuing textbook for prospective citizens where the opening paragraph said,

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Gaita, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> Erebus Report, p. 10.

Australian values include respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and secular government, freedom of association, support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, equality under the law, equality of men and women, equality of opportunity and peacefulness. These also include a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces fair play, mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good.<sup>68</sup>

The textbook went on to say that ‘Australian values’ must prevail over all others,

All Australians are asked to make an overriding commitment to Australia, its laws, its values and its people.

Davison argues that the real target was the stereotype of Islamic extremism which also became clear when political leaders spoke out strongly on the issue, saying that anyone not accepting Australian values should go back where they came from.<sup>69</sup>

Gaita sees the values debate in the context of the argument that developed later in the decade over multiculturalism which he perceived as a call ‘to assess the assimilability of Muslims’ and an opportunity,

for cultural warriors from the right to reignite a longstanding argument with the left over multiculturalism – an argument that had really nothing to do with the so-called ‘war on terror.’<sup>70</sup>

Any consideration of the views of those arguing that Judeo-Christian values and Islamic values are incompatible or that Muslims simply do not fit into Australia seems to boil down to allegations that Muslim women are treated as inferior by Muslim men, that their religion allows marriage between minors, that *shari’a* law includes a penal code which is brutal and which Australia abandoned many years ago, that Muslims are taught to hate Christians and

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<sup>68</sup> Life in Australia, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Davison, ‘Testing Times,’ p. 145.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

Jews and cannot mix with them and that Muslims believe in violence and support terrorism. Some go so far as to argue that Muslims want to introduce the full *shari'a* law into Australia<sup>71</sup>, whatever that might mean, and make it part of a regional *caliphate* which would include Indonesia.

Behind all these allegations lies a view of Islam as monolithic and the views of a handful of individuals are taken to be those of all Muslims in Australia. Various hate sites are used to back up these allegations though a lot of the hostile material emanates from the United States or the UK, like Jihad Watch, Islamist Monitor and books and articles by writers like US based Niall Ferguson (who married Ayaan Hirsi Ali in September 2011), Daniel Pipes and Robert Spencer.

Much of the confusion focuses on conflicting views those like of Ayaan Hirsi Ali whose critique of Islam sees it as a 'moral framework not compatible with the modern Westernised way of living'<sup>72</sup> and 'a liberal Muslim of a Middle East background' such as Bassam Tibi, who views Islam as a religion and not an ideology, making a clear distinction between Islamism as a political ideology and not as a religion,

As a Muslim I believe in Islam as a faith and honour its precepts as a source of ethics for humans and of orientation in their conduct. But this is not the way fundamentalists see Islam.<sup>73</sup>

Ali refers in her latest book to two value systems and outlines what she sees as three main barriers to integrating Muslims into the West. She describes the first as Islam's treatment of women, the second is the difficulty many immigrants from Muslim countries have in dealing with money, and the third is what she describes as socialization of the Muslim mind. She summarises these obstacles in three words: sex, money and violence.<sup>74</sup> In addition, she accepts the concept of a clash of civilisations.

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<sup>71</sup> One such typical allegation was made in a letter to the Hobart *Mercury* on 21 October 2011, 'In 50 years our grandchildren will be cursing us for allowing them (asylum seekers) easy access when their children want to change Australia to a Muslim way of life with their laws.'

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in *A clash of civilisations* by Emma Brockes in *Age*, 18 June 2010.

[www.theage.com.au/action/printArticle?id=1615153](http://www.theage.com.au/action/printArticle?id=1615153) accessed 20 March 2012

<sup>73</sup> B. Tibi. *The challenge of fundamentalism. Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, p 139. His description of himself as a liberal Muslim is on p. 155.

<sup>74</sup> A. Ali, *Nomad. A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, pp. xvi-xvii.

Another critic of Muslim immigration, US journalist Christopher Caldwell, writing on the situation in Europe<sup>75</sup>, defines European values as individualism, democracy, freedom and human rights, though he acknowledges that these values were never defined with much precision. He argues that these values encourage social cohesion and the rate of Muslim immigration to Europe has upset this in recent years.

Not surprisingly, the early values debate in Australia impacted heavily on the Islamic schools in particular and a number of students interviewed said that their schools reacted to it by putting a lot of emphasis on values education in various forms, including specific Values Education classes, lectures on Values in assembly, and sending staff and students to participate and speak in national conferences on Values Education. Student D recalled those times at her school,

I remember when all that happened and it was like these are the values and we never really thought about it before, and it wasn't like, oh, that's an Islamic value and that's not an Australian value, and then they made this whole big deal out of it, and then it was kind of like, don't we have values? I remember we had that poster of Australian values in the library and it was all just kind of mateship. Then we had an assembly and someone went through the values and gave the Islamic version of them, like mateship is known as brotherhood, so there was really no line or difference, something like that. I never defined a value as either Islamic or Australian, it's just a value.

In discussion on how the values debate had affected her at the time, student L perceptively added,

You'd think they'd include practical things like what to do the red flags on the beach symbolise. These are things we have learned growing up here but that is what new migrants do not know and it is quite hard to explain to them.

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<sup>75</sup> Caldwell, *Reflections on the revolution in Europe. Immigration, Islam and the West*, p. 83.

She went on to recall,

I remember there was this huge hype around it a few years ago and there was this huge Muslim conference just on values to prove the point that Islamic values are not exclusive. It's not, 'I'm just exclusive to the religion or those who follow Islam' ... It's universal values of fairness, of mateship, of equality.

Later as school captain she went to Canberra with another girl to a National Values forum,

for teachers about Australian Values, Islamic Values, and how we fit in and gave a talk there, mainly interacting with teachers and government people....

The terms of reference for the 2006 Erebus International Report, which set out to investigate what schools and other sectors were doing to encourage the message to young Muslims that Islam is compatible with, and can live alongside other faiths and Australian values, involving six schools in three states. Three of these were Islamic schools and their case studies carried out demonstrated good practice insofar as Islamic schools assisted Muslim students and their parents to understand that Islamic culture could harmoniously co-exist with Australian civic values and cultures. It also found good practice where schools that promote the understanding of Islam among Australian students demonstrated how it could be compatible with other Australian values and cultures.<sup>76</sup>

Several Islamic schools said that they taught values long before Brendan Nelson raised the issue. One school employed a teacher to head their Values Integration unit that put the emphasis on Islam as a whole way of life that had to permeate all learning areas. Her assistant said that these included themes like punctuality, truthfulness, honesty and respect for elders, and her job was to get the students to develop presentations on the theme of the week. She added that the woman in charge of Values Integration had spoken at a conference in which other teachers had expressed interest in her work long before the values debate got under way.

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<sup>76</sup> Erebus International Report, p. vi.

Arkana College at Kingsgrove (Sydney) stated in its brochure for 2005,

In a society of many changes it is important to show, that as a School we adhere to the same principles and practices, and with the release of the Australian Values Document to all schools, it is with a sense of pride that we demonstrate our schools' own vales and mission in today's society. This year, we introduced a new school song to be performed along side the National Anthem for all occasions i.e. At School Assemblies, ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day to name a few.

The IIU project survey, which involved three Islamic schools in Sydney, stated that, 'one of the most consistent responses from principals was that in some ways, IIU was not new because the agenda was already a part of their existing sense of purpose - linking particularly to the values and citizenship domains.'<sup>77</sup>

Responding to this question of whether they saw any difference between Australian and Islamic values, Student N took a line taken by everyone interviewed,

Well, I guess most of Islamic values and Australian values are the same but of course there's a religious view with Islamic values but at this school they were inter-coordinated with each other so we were taught Islamic values and Australian values and to adopt all of them in one go.

Like other students interviewed, Student M said he could see no difference between Australian values and Islamic values,

Values in general are about manners, how to behave, to be kind, what kind of religion would not teach that? What is unAustralian? Australian values are quite simple, mateship, unity, leadership

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<sup>77</sup> IIU Pilot Project, p. 24-25.

qualities, being nice, I don't see why Islamic values such as manners and behaviour should be different from Australian values.

Both staff as well as students constantly emphasised that the value systems were the same as far as they were concerned. Teacher D said she didn't believe there was a contradiction between the Islamic values and Australian values, then made the point,

It is not just at school that you have these values, you take it out to the workplace when you get older, out onto the social scene. Kindergarten years are the crucial years when they shape their personality and values, especially as I am a Muslim teacher. Manners are the first value I teach them, to their parents, teachers, the elderly, their friends, society as a whole.

Student A gave another typical response when she observed,

I always ask the question of what is your definition of an Australian value and to me, Australian values come down to Christian values, because it is predominantly a Christian country and Christian values and Muslim values are exactly the same. 'Treat others the way you would like to be treated.' So Australian values really ultimately come down to give everyone a fair go. That's exactly how we were brought up so I don't think there is any difference between our values and Australian values essentially. Of course, there are minor things like the way we practice but that's the same with every religion, even within Christianity itself, but in terms of values, no problem.

Teacher O said he saw no contradiction over values, adding that at his school they tried to teach young people to be good Muslims because that would allow them to be better Australians and greater contributors to Australian society,

To be a good friend, to uphold the law, to have good character, not to lie, not to take a sickie, all these values that society in general

upholds, Islam should be the first religion to uphold that from those that practice the religion.

Echoing this view, student M felt that attempts to differentiate between Australian values and Islamic values were ‘ridiculous.’ Perceptively he made the point that the values he was taught at school had given him a base or foundation to work on, especially as he had come as a child from a strife torn country in Africa, so appreciated the grounding he had been given in Australia.

Student K had matriculated and was at university when the values debate got under way but said she had done a unit in Year 11 on Beliefs and Values when,

we went through values that were in all religions and we explored the similarities between each religion so it was more about looking at what we have in common rather than looking at how we are so different so in a way we were taught Australian values. How do you define Australian values anyway? In Islam we have these values with different names, brotherhood, sisterhood, equality.

### **What is an Australian value anyway?**

The question of exactly how to identify Australian values frequently came up and more than one student said it was hard to identify what Australian values exactly were. Student E who had attended his school before 2001, thoughtfully identified another issue at the heart of the debate when he commented that,

One of the biggest problems is the question since 2001 of whether you are a Muslim in Australia or an Australian Muslim – are you a Muslim first or an Australian first? This whole question is unnecessary because I have never heard the term of Australian Christian, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and I don’t see why that question should be the concern of Muslims only. One is a question of nationality and citizenship and one is a question of faith and there shouldn’t be any clash.

Another student at one of the early schools thought it was hard to identify what Australian values are but said reflectively, that ‘to be a good Muslim made her a better Australian.’ Student A, whose father is a local imam, identified another common viewpoint when he pointed out that mateship and a fair go were all deals that every country aspires to, adding that,

people say we are trying to enforce an Islamic state which is completely not true when we’re a minority. That makes no sense. If we want an Islamic state, we can go to Saudi Arabia, we don’t want *shari’a* law, we don’t want all that. It’s just these few vocal people that think they speak for the rest of us.

The schools often gave Australian values a special focus at the height of the debate. Student H said that in her opinion ‘to suggest that there is something strictly called Australian values is misleading.’ At her school,

we had themes of the week, this week in assembly we are talking about something like forgiveness. Every week, students would have to present or write a short thing and talk about it. Once in Year Ten, we had these big billboards that we all had to paint, focus on Islamic values, forgiveness or truthfulness or honesty. The rest of the time, Islamic values were transmitted through the director giving his view of what Islamic values were.

Student M brought a humorous note into his comment on the Values debate,

I remember that time quite clearly, when John Howard came out on it. I think my school maybe went overboard on it because it was stuck in every single room and in every assembly our principal kept screaming ‘Aussie values, Aussie values’ when really we are sitting back and I’m thinking wherever I am in the world these aren’t Aussie values, these are universal values. They were pushed way too much and I didn’t really agree with it. This was stuff we knew

already and other people felt like this and we felt victimised. We know what values are.

Along the same lines, student R said their school director went a bit overboard as well and his Wednesday talks in assembly on values often sent students to sleep.

Student F referred to John Howard directing the values debate when he said that back in 2004, he wasn't interested in politics, but 'What John Howard was telling us I had already learned from my Dad and my teachers. He didn't see any discrepancy between values if they were about Fair Go and mateship, adding that Muslims were taught to be brothers in humanity and were taught about justice as well as brotherhood, so he thought that the value systems were complementary.

Student M was very proud of Islam's record of tolerance and humorously asked,

Whereas some of the things when we talk about Australian values, who is the person who judges what Australian is? Is Australian sitting back and watching cricket and sipping a VB?

*Sheikh* M also raised the question of drinking alcohol as part of Australian culture, saying that while he accepted the idea of universal values, there were issues like binge drinking which was not a model to follow in the Australian context.

In a similar vein, some of the discussion raised a variety of issues where students were uncertain what Australian values were and therefore were uncertain whether or not their Islamic behaviour breached these national traditions. For example, student H. mentioned that he was worried about going shirtless on the beach that was part of his Islamic dress code.

Living by example obviously caused complications for some staff who felt that other staff did not set a very good example for the students. A younger teacher, who was born and grew up in Australia attending a mixture of different public, Catholic and Islamic schools in different states, said that now she was teaching she tried to transmit values by her own example of behaviour. However it got a bit difficult telling her students what the prophet had said about not wearing a lot of make up or perfume when some of her colleagues came in with full make up and lots of perfume. She felt that as a result the students could spot these discrepancies in values and so the message was lost on them.

She also felt there had been some improvement over the years at the school where she had once been a student and was now a teacher, observing,

If you are really teaching Islamic values, and if you are doing your job properly then you'd see that in the behaviour of the students, you wouldn't have as many discipline problems or inter-ethnic gang rivalries and fights break out in the yard and the disgusting disrespect that so many students show to their teachers.

Like a number of other teachers, well aware of home problem, difficulties in adjustment for newly arrived refugee students, the trauma many had been through as children and the difficulty for female teachers trying to discipline unruly boys, she felt the school needed trauma counsellors and settlement workers. However it was encouraging to meet at least one former female student who had trained in that area and was now active as a youth worker, though not just at this particular school.

As Islam puts a lot of emphasis on manners and how to behave, these values are taught early on in Islamic schools, Primary school teachers set out to integrate values into their overall teaching of younger children, emphasising values like tolerance and respect. Teacher L, who was doing research on values at university, stressed that teaching values for young children was very important as it was a formative issue and lifelong and contributed to their character and development. Consequently for someone like him as an Islamic Studies teacher, values were the most important part of the programme. At Professional Development sessions for Islamic Studies teachers, he always emphasised the importance of taking a values based approach rather than an information-based approach. He added that unfortunately a majority of teachers tended to take the latter approach and did not agree with him because they didn't like change.

Teacher B ruefully reflected that while she taught her primary age children to care for others and care for animals,

it is important for them to reflect on how they are using and applying these values because some of the boys in my class although I am teaching them respect, they don't always show it.

Several teachers stressed the importance of what they saw as a specifically Islamic perspective when dealing with small children, especially those coming from what Teacher M, an imam, called ‘real bad situations.’ As an example he gave a discussion on who owned a particular book that the children were squabbling over or who was allowed to play with others,

You are going to come across the situation where someone says to you, ‘you’re not playing,’ while all your friends are playing, you’re singled out because the person who is boss wants to prove he’s boss and he’s the owner, while in Islam we teach you are not the owner, God’s the owner, everything you have is a privilege, you share the way the Prophet Mohammed behaved, you act the way he acted.

Several high schools had a dean in charge of behavioural issues, usually a non-Muslim, but they always worked closely with the school *imam* who got brought in to reinforce their stand against bullying and dishonesty by stressing *Quranic* teaching on these concerns, as well as working with the families who they knew in the local community. Another dean of students made the important point that while values were an integral part of his school’s curriculum, Islam’s biggest strength was also one of its biggest weaknesses because no one person was in charge. As a result when one *imam* says something outrageous on issues like the position of women, many Australians think that he represents all Muslims.

Like a number of other people interviewed, Teacher H had attended a Catholic Primary School before going to the Islamic high school where she now taught. She said she was ‘able to differentiate between the two religions and relate how similar the two religions are’. Teacher M had taught at a very strict Catholic school but said she felt at home in an Islamic school because their values overlapped and she worked closely with the school imam. Her colleague, a Catholic married to a Muslim, had taught at the same school but commented that her new school was more accepting of her than the Catholic school<sup>78</sup> where she said they took the line, ‘It’s their way or the highway.’

Teacher H said she wasn’t taught much about values at school, as she was at school prior to 2001, but she hung out with a multicultural group and so learned a lot about Australian

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<sup>78</sup> This was a PARED (Parents for Education) school in Sydney, linked with Opus Dei. The first of the Tangara schools started in 1982 and new schools are still being established.

values through them. Only later did she realise that a lot of the Islamic values and the Australian values coincided, which she saw as an emphasis on being a good person and helping other people.

An interesting cross-cultural issue that often came up was the issue of shaking hands, a central part of Australian culture, so awkward for more devout Muslim women who are taught not to shake hands with men. Teacher M had thought about it a lot, having come originally from Iraq but trained as a teacher in New Zealand so she used the issue as an example of trying to teach her students to be open minded,

We teach them that shaking hands is *haram* but I have to shake hands with people coming from outside because I have to justify that afterwards. I am doing this because this gentleman he is trying to show respect. This is Australia so I have to know how to respond. God knows what is in our heart, what is our intention, but I have to be a model to the students.

The issue of gender equity often came up, as a number of non-Muslim staff as well as Muslim students referred to the fact that there was little social mixing of boys and girls at school, and sometimes students found it hard to adjust to the social mixing that they found later at university and in the workplace. However it should be noted that this did not mean that they were taught that men and women were not equal. The same difficulties sometimes arise from students educated at single sex schools and in particular at strict faith-based schools such as some of the conservative Christian schools and ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools.

Teacher J, a non-Muslim at a primary school where most of the students were newly arrived from overseas, said that in his first year there, there was an issue with the boys coming into school first so he let the girls in first for a change and the boys objected. He told them that in Australia where this doesn't happen and got them to take it in turns that had worked very well, adding, 'it's that way you can bring in the values.'

Discussing gender equity in Islam, teacher W blamed both Muslims and the media for misunderstandings on the treatment of women, citing texts from the *Qur'an* that forbade the practice of burying girl babies alive and the prophet's statement that 'Paradise lies at the feet of your mother.'

Another non-Muslim teacher at the same school who had taught in the Middle East as well as in Australia, said that in her view values were universal but the problem was the hardliners in all faiths, citing the views of Americans in the Bible belt as an example, besides Muslim extremists.

This comparison with the situation in other countries was also raised by teacher S who said that he happily deviated from teaching science to talk about values and wider issues to his students. He thought that the problem for non-Muslims was that they read stories in the media about what went on in countries like Afghanistan so you could understand why plenty of people thought that Islamic values were different from Australian values.

Challenging the conventional view of many Australians, Imam H who felt there were no contradictions between Islamic values and Australian values, added that,

Most of our Muslim students are happy to be here, they can practice their religion much better than in the Muslim countries, for example where there is state discrimination and it can be very rigid. Australia fits for a Muslim very well.

Teacher N, a Muslim primary teacher, had to teach classes largely made up of new arrivals and agreed that on values some of them clashed a little bit because of where they had come from. She felt that the clash was mainly in the community rather than the school, though this could be a problem when little children tended to copy their parents.

Another primary school teacher felt that it was really effective being a non-Muslim because she could be in the classroom telling her students that though they were Muslim and she was a non-Muslim, they shared the same values. She said that when she came to the school, she didn't know much about Islam and much of what she knew came from watching television, so now she got quite defensive but at least she knew where some people were coming from with their ideas on Islam.

Teacher A said that at his school they trained students in values at two levels, the structured one and the unstructured one. The structured one came through the whole school approach to values where each faculty was encouraged to emphasise values and the way they taught students. This meant encouraging students to be balanced thinkers, to be reflective and to be inquirers, with the emphasis on tolerance, acceptance of others and freedom. At the non-curriculum level, students were taught values through emphasising

practice so they had excursions, cooperative sporting activities, interfaith gatherings, and inter-school debating. The students were taught that they should understand other people's faith backgrounds though they didn't have to be like them, just accept what they are.

He also explained that the value of cleanliness, which is heavily emphasised in Islam, extends in this way to have students involved in cleaning the school every day and participating in Clean Up Australia Day outside the school with the local community.

Teacher M told me about a particular teacher he knew who always questioned the poster, arguing that as far as he was concerned it was just values, not Islamic values. He added that in the Middle East, the word for education was *Talim* while the word for values or character building was *Talibiya*, so values and character building were a central focus for an Islamic school.

### **What is the real issue? Some interesting contradictions**

While the initial values debate has now moved on, and the political debate has shifted to multiculturalism and asylum seekers, the underlying issue still remains 'Islam'. For many Muslim students of school age, the doubts and questions continue to surface whenever the media drags up the issue of whether Muslims belong in Australia or not, stirred up by bursts of intolerance from politicians, conservative Christians and the media.

In this respect, where values are concerned, as one teacher interviewed pointed out, the values clash is in the community rather than the schools, but the faith schools bear much of the impact because they are perceived as imparting values to young people. This is why it has been important to ascertain what is taught in the schools to counter the wild allegations made by critics<sup>79</sup> and to find out what the alumni themselves think about the issue. Given that not one student or staff member interviewed felt there was any contradiction between what they perceived as Muslim values and the official Australian values, it seems that the argument that the two are incompatible bears no resemblance in reality. What is obvious is that whatever the evidence, Muslims are being stereotyped as a monolithic culture based on reports from overseas. While there have been a few isolated

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<sup>79</sup> For example, those referred to on the Camden Islamic School Protest Site, using texts from the Qur'an or Hadith: (1) Old Men, Young Children and Sex, (2) Old Men and prepubescent girls and sex; (3) Hatred for Non-Muslims, (4) Cruel Treatment of Captives. 2009, <http://camden-islamic-school-proterst.wikispaces.com/>

incidents based on reality, most reports, as Aly has pointed out<sup>80</sup>, are based on the folk devil image, an image reconstructed in Australia during the Camden school debate in 2007 and analysed by Al-Natour.<sup>81</sup>

What is clear is how hurtful the older students at Islamic schools have found the hostility levelled against them, particularly after media headlines on terrorist incidents at home or abroad, or for the girls and young women, abuse about their appearance because they choose to wear the *hijab*. Several of them spoke about the protection offered by their school as a faith community and a number felt that their faith teaching had given them the strength to defend their religion and values, and to explain what it was about rather than try to pretend they were something that they were not. Many were sceptical of the political motives of the media and politicians who targeted their community in one way or another and several said they had written letters to the papers to challenge misconceptions about Islam and Islamic values and were proud of doing so. Some laughed about their school going overboard on stressing ‘Aussie Values’ while both Muslim and non-Muslim staff sought to incorporate values at different levels, in the classroom or during prayer assemblies.

Islamophobia is often driven by reference to *Quranic* texts quoted out of context or drawn from an overseas experience, well portrayed by Deen in her recent book, *Jihad Seminar*, about the Catch the Fires Ministries<sup>82</sup> court case brought by the Islamic Council of Victoria that lasted from 2002 to 2007. While my interviews were obviously limited to a certain number of Islamic schools and their *imams*, I found almost no evidence of any values teaching of the kind referred to by critics, especially like those quoted out of context by the Camden Islamic School Protest site. This same lack of evidence also applies to others associated with the protest like Fred Nile’s Christian Democratic Party, alleging the teaching of religious intolerance directed against other faiths, the legitimate use of violence against women or support for terrorism. There are cultural issues, such as those affecting young women getting married off at a young age, but this is not unique to Islam in Australia. As outlined earlier, there have been isolated newspaper reports about visiting speakers at schools in Melbourne teaching hatred of Christians and Jews but a significant

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<sup>80</sup> Aly interviewed in ‘Who’s afraid of multiculturalism?’ in the ABC Religion and Ethics programme, 6 October 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Natour, ‘Folk devils and the proposed Islamic school in Camden’, *Continuum, Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2010, pp. 573-585.

<sup>82</sup> H. Deen, *Jihad Seminar*, Perth, 2011.

number of both migrant staff and students spoke warmly of Australia's culture of religious tolerance in contrast to the countries they had come from<sup>83</sup>.

The paradox in this debate is of course that when it comes to values, the conservative Christian Right, which so vehemently attacks Islam and Islamic schools, shares many of the same values as the Islamists, on family, drugs, sexuality, gay marriage, creationism.<sup>84</sup> Both have strong views on relationships between boys and girls, and it is worth remembering that church schools in Australia were largely single sex until quite recently and many still are. Roy, writing on the values debate, states that the issue is not Western versus Muslim values, but between religious conservatives and non-religious people<sup>85</sup>. He makes the point that Muslims increasingly align with conservative Christians and Jews, 'to the extent that they adopt some positions that till recently had no equivalent in Islam (for example, defining abortion as a mortal sin, or adopting the category 'homosexual' instead of speaking of 'acts of depravity.'<sup>86</sup>

If anything, the real damage will be done if young Muslims feel that they are being demonised and marginalised, as several other studies of Muslim youth have shown. However the advantage of the Islamic schools seems to be that though far from perfect, like any other school, they do offer security to their students in a society that can be hostile at times. On balance, they do serve to strengthen their students faith and values in a way where there is no incompatibility with what most of us, Muslim and non-Muslim, regard as universal values: mateship, a Fair Go, equality and toleration.

The values debate leads on to the final chapter and the question of whether the schools exist as agencies of exclusion rather than inclusion in society and are they further dividing the students from other young Australians as often alleged.

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<sup>83</sup> This fits in with Bouma's observation, noted earlier, that over half of Australia's Muslims come from countries where Muslims are a minority and they are often seeking refuge from political and religious persecution, Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, p. 94.

<sup>84</sup> A point also made by Roy, *Globalized Islam*, p. 32-33.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.



## CHAPTER 9

### A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

#### **‘To be a good Muslim, made her a better Australian.’ Student R**

The question of identity is central to the debate over whether the Islamic schools are agencies of exclusion or inclusion and whether or not they are contributing to the wider discussion on the possibility of developing a specifically Australian Muslim identity. Although the research questions were designed to draw the students out on whether they felt the schools excluded them from mainstream Australian society or promoted inclusiveness as well as giving them an Islamic identity, the model of identity and difference as the dominant model of political organization, is one that is in fact fairly recent<sup>1</sup>. As Woods notes<sup>2</sup>, ‘consulting the literature is an integral part of theory development, and the main way of making comparisons outside the study,’ although the current literature on ‘identity’ comes more from outside Australia than within, particularly from Europe.

While the debate on identity has been pursued extensively at an academic level, both through conference papers, essays and articles, it continues to be an emotive term for polemical journalists and politicians whose statements are often seen as hurtful, if not threatening, by many young Muslims, as well as the community as a whole. Some useful research in the Muslim community has been carried out at this level by a number of academics, both in Australia and in other Western societies. Pursuing this discourse at an Australian level, Fethi Mansouri observes that ‘our sense of national identity as multicultural citizens is differentiated, yet shared in its acknowledgement of the diversity of citizens,’ but points out that the Howard conservative government put the brakes on a ‘pluralist, inclusive multiculturalism, which appears to be felt as a threat to a cohesive, Anglo-Australian national identity<sup>3</sup>.’

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, 1996, p.2

<sup>2</sup> Peter Woods, *Qualitative Research*, University of Plymouth, 2006, p.37,

<sup>3</sup> Fethi Mansouri, ‘*Citizenship, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Australia*,’ in Akbarzadeh and Yasmeen (eds), *Islam and the West*, Sydney, 2005, pp. 152-153

The impact of this is further examined by Silma Ihram who explored the discourse on community identity amongst young Muslim men in South West Sydney<sup>4</sup>, deliberately focusing on this group because they were often perceived as ‘the most vulnerable to influence from radical leader<sup>5</sup>.’ She also quotes Hall, ‘identities are about assertions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not ‘who we are?’ or ‘where we come from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves<sup>6</sup>. However her research was with a very different cross-section of young Muslims than those interviewed as graduates of the Islamic schools, who came from five different cities and a wide range of ethnic first or second generation backgrounds.

This range of identities is also explored by Levy<sup>7</sup>, who argues that for what he describes as ‘cultural nationalists’, typically Anglo-Celtic, there is only one way of being Australian, and that for them, citizenship and government in general should be about insisting that all Australians conform to this way. The second group he identifies as post-nationalists, because they contest the idea that there is a distinctive Australian culture and identity but our national identity and cohesion can only be about accepting a range of political values, what he describes as basically liberal-democratic. However he prefers a third alternative, which he describes as liberal nationalism, and that holds that ‘Australian national identity is multifaceted and occupies different domains.’

One of the major charges laid against Islamic schools is not only that they are exclusive but they also serve to further divide young Muslims from other young people in the wider Australian community. This argument can come from both sides of the community spectrum, because not only is it a charge levelled by critics of the schools but it is also a concern in the Muslim community itself. While some parents are still eager that their children grow up aware of their Muslim faith, they do not always want them to attend a specifically Islamic school and prefer to educate them at home or at the local mosque in addition to a formal education at a public school or other private school.

The problem for the non-Muslim critics is that if they deny the right of Islamic schools to exist, then why do they make an exception only for Muslims but not Jews,

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<sup>4</sup> Silma Ihram, *Muslim Youth and the Mufti; youth discourses on identity and religious leadership under media scrutiny*, University of Western Sydney, 2009

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.iii

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15, quoting Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1996, p.4

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Levey in Raimond Gaita (ed), *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism*, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 44-45

various Christian denominations or other community groups who want their children to grow up in a private school with their own particular values? At this point, the only consistent criticism that can be levelled, is by those who are opposed to all faith schools and call for an entirely secular, public education system<sup>8</sup>. However such a position is only held by a minority of Australians today and would run into economic difficulties over paying for education funding in general, given the significant and growing role that private education now plays in Australia, especially at secondary level.

### **The discourse in Europe**

A number of the arguments about faith-schools creating division in the community are mentioned by Striepe and Clarke<sup>9</sup>, who refer to the fears expressed by Professor Barry McGraw, the head of the National Curriculum Board, appointed in 2008. In an investigative report in *The Age*<sup>10</sup>, he is quoted as saying, ‘These people often form a narrowly focused school that is aimed at cementing the faith it’s based on.... If we continue as we are, I think we’ll just become more and more isolated sub-groups in our community.’ His fears seem to be more aimed at some of the more authoritarian conservative Christian schools that allegedly limit students from thinking independently and critically and appear to place religious instruction or knowledge in front of academic learning. Striepe and Clarke call for more research into this area but while they mention the Islamic schools, all indications are that on the whole they do not fall into this category, and the secondary schools put a great deal of emphasis on their exam results as well as faith teaching. In addition, as demonstrated in chapter 7, they encourage dialogue opportunities with students of other faiths, although not all students take part.

Barbara Giles has also written about the choices made by Somali mothers in Perth in a paper based on research carried out in 2006-07<sup>11</sup>. She agrees that there is a perception in the wider community that Muslims adopt exclusionary attitudes by educating their children at Islamic schools but based on her interviews with eight Somali mothers, she says they are well aware of the concerns and even if they choose to send their children to one of the

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<sup>8</sup> A position well articulated by the National Secular Society website in Britain, [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

<sup>9</sup> M. Striepe & S. Clarke, *Faith-based schools in Australia*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bachelard, ‘Faith school boom ‘creates division,’ *Age*, Special Investigation, 25 February 2008, accessed 31 May 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Giles, ‘Somali narratives on Islam, Education and Perceptions of Difference’, in Yasmeen (ed), *Muslims in Australia. The Dynamics of Exclusion and Inclusion*, pp. 162-185.

Islamic schools in Perth – and in Perth, 40 per cent of Muslim children attend religious schools because of the choice available – ‘the choice of sending children to Islamic schools, however, did not appear to exclude any form of interaction with the wider society.’<sup>12</sup>

In the same volume, Yasmeeen discusses the concept of inclusion and exclusion for Muslims in Australia, asking if it is possible to discern inclusive processes involving both Muslims and non-Muslims living in Australia, as well as asking what role Islamic schools play in the exclusion/inclusion dynamics? Part of this research is therefore a response to those questions, predictably finding both a positive and negative side to the issues raised.

However it is an issue that has been widely debated in the UK and other countries in West Europe and there are a number of articles on the subject. Geoffrey Short<sup>13</sup> comments on the British government’s Green Paper issued in February 2001 which made clear its commitment to fund an expansion in the number of faith-based schools. The paper met a mixed response, particularly after the events later that year. Not surprisingly, the debate focused largely on the charge of divisiveness, which in the British context also included the situation in Northern Ireland as well as the growing number of Islamic schools. Because of the hostility, largely expressed through the media, the government suggested a compromise position whereby new schools would be encouraged to become more inclusive, which rather negated the point of creating them. Short, however, defends the schools, arguing ‘that faith schools per se pose no threat, actual or potential, to a unified society.’ Rather, he believes that they can legitimately be seen as a force for unity, referring to the claim that in fact,

They enhance their pupils’ academic attainment, self-esteem and sense of cultural identity, and that the result of such enhancement is the strengthening of inter-communal ties.<sup>14</sup>

The critics of faith based schools argue that children attending them will prefer to associate with members of their own group and the schools mere existence will fuel enmity between religious or ethnic groups. Short quotes Atkins who believes that inter-communal friction is an inevitable by-product of these schools.<sup>15</sup> He also quotes Rabbi Jonathan Romain who wrote in *The Times* after the riots in the north of England in May 2001, that

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> G. Short, ‘Faith-based Schools: A Threat to Social Cohesion?’ *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 560.

<sup>15</sup> P. Atkins, ‘The Church school – good or evil: Against’, p. 7, 2001.

faith-based schools could lead to ill-feeling between religious or ethnic communities but only under particular circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Romain described faith-based schools as a ‘recipe for social disaster,’ arguing that the problem is not their purpose but their consequences. He added that while they may be designed to inculcate religious values, they result in religious ghettos. Going further, he wrote, ‘ Even those faith schools that genuinely try to reach out to the wider community and teach good citizenship still segregate Jewish, Muslim or Catholic children from each other and bring them up in what amounts to an educational apartheid system.’<sup>17</sup> Short argues that such an opinion rests on the sole explanation for the riots being segregated schooling where members of the different communities are ignorant of each other and where ignorance automatically leads to suspicion, fear and hostility,<sup>18</sup> a position which he dismisses on the grounds that such an argument constitutes the ‘fallacy of the single factor’ as it does not take into account other causes of the hostilities such as economic disadvantage, unfair treatment, discrimination, exclusion and social despair.

Another view he refers to is the one articulated by the General Secretary of The National Secular Society who saw faith schools as an obstacle to a tolerant society, a point of view often put in the context of Northern Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Short concludes that the historical evidence indicates that in England, the long history of faith schools demonstrate that this is not the case and that the issue is the curricular content of such schools, not just the fact of their existence. He believes that there is no evidence that students at these schools are any more prone to develop feelings of animosity towards adherents of other faiths or non-believers than students attending other types of schools.<sup>20</sup>

Meer<sup>21</sup> points out that in Britain there are over 4,700 state funded Church of England schools, over 2,100 Catholic, 33 Jewish and 28 Methodist schools, so Muslim campaigns for the faith schooling of Muslim children in the state sector indicates what Skinner

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<sup>16</sup> J. Romain, ‘The lesson of Bradford is not to create apartheid in our schools’, *The Times*, 26 July 2001, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Romain quoted by D. O’Keeffe in Crisis of Faith, *Education Review*, 12 September 2007, pp.8-9.

<sup>18</sup> G. Short, p. 562.

<sup>19</sup> Reported in A. Kelly, ‘Talking Point’, *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 February 2001, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> G. Short, p.570.

<sup>21</sup> Meer, ‘Identity articulations, mobilization, and autonomy in the movement for Muslim schools in Britain’, in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2009, p. 381.

describes as ‘ a modern society which is widely perceived as increasingly secular but is paradoxically increasingly multi-faith.’<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless when the Labour government proposed to make it easier for independent schools, including faith schools, to opt into the state sector to access millions of pounds in funding, the chairman of the House of Commons education select committee warned that religious schools posed a threat to the cohesion of multicultural communities. A public opinion poll at the time (August 2005) also indicated that almost two thirds of the public were against plans to increase the number of religious schools due to anxiety about their impact on social cohesion. While a quarter of those polled felt that faith schools were an important part of the education system and that if Christian and Jewish schools had state backing, then the government should also fund Muslim schools, eight per cent said that Christian and Jewish schools should be funded but not Muslim schools.

The same article in *The Guardian* quoted David Bell, chief inspector of schools, saying that Islamic schools posed a challenge to the coherence of British society, alleging that ‘traditional Islamic education does not entirely fit pupils for their lives as Muslims in modern Britain.’ This view was countered by the Association of Muslim Schools, which said that faith schools ‘ turned out rounded citizens, more tolerant of others and less likely to succumb to criminality or extremism.’ Their chairman, Muhammad Mukadam, head of the Leicester Islamic Academy, said, ‘We give our young people confidence in who they are and an understanding of Islam’s tolerance and respect which prepares them for a positive and fulfilling role in society. I have letters from further education colleges and universities commenting on how well our students mix and interact with other people and that comes from security.’<sup>23</sup>

Halstead defends the rights of cultural minorities to preserve their distinctive identity from the undue influence of dominant groups in society.<sup>24</sup> He argues that Muslims in Britain, who made up about two per cent of the population when he wrote his paper, find themselves targets of racist behaviour as well as being economically disadvantaged and under-represented in public decision-making processes. As such, it is their religion which gives them a distinct identity and that is what they want to preserve rather than any cultural

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<sup>22</sup> G. Skinner, ‘Religious Pluralism and school provision in Britain’, *Intercultural Education* vol. 13, 2002, pp. 171-181.

<sup>23</sup> M. Taylor, ‘Two thirds oppose state aided faith schools’. *The Guardian*, 23 August 2005.

<sup>24</sup> M. Halstead, ‘Voluntary Apartheid? Problems of Schooling for Religious and Other Minorities in Democratic Societies’, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1995, p. 257.

heritage. His own research into the aspirations of Muslim parents in Britain shows that their two main educational goals are the preservation of their distinctive beliefs and values and access to the opportunities offered by a good general education. While some Muslims are happy to provide their children with faith teaching at home and in the mosque, others require the establishment of separately publicly funded Muslim schools, a point of view echoed by other minority groups in contemporary British society. He argues that this should not be a problem in a liberal democratic society but favours education for cross-cultural understanding is also vital in a pluralist society.<sup>25</sup>

Halstead also co-authored a paper with McLaughlin, 'Are Faith Schools Divisive?'<sup>26</sup> in which they explore various arguments claiming that such schools are divisive, a charge that goes back a long way before the current debate. Today it also includes charges that faith schools provide potential breeding grounds for terrorism as well as the line that faith schools serve to exacerbate the prejudice, exclusion and alienation which many members of such groups experience.<sup>27</sup> They refer to research done in 1966 that concludes that Catholics educated in Catholic schools are just as likely as Catholics educated in public schools to be interested in community affairs and to have non-Catholic friends and neighbours and co-workers, and that there are no differences in tolerance or divisive attitudes between the two. They also accept that some schools teach a particular attitude on issues which could be taken to mean that they are then going to be intolerant of those in the wider community who do not follow their line, particularly on sexual practices such as pre-marital sex and homosexual sex.

While accepting that these are complex issues, they feel that a pluralist liberal democratic society can handle these differences. They stress that the evidence to date indicates that faith schools do emphasise attitudes of tolerance and respect and provide a distinctive contribution to citizenship and life in a liberal democratic society. However they concede that there can be problems where parents try to avoid their children mixing with members of other groups. Finally they stress once more that faith schools do assist children to explore their own distinctive faith and culture in greater depth and provide them with a stable, secure context in which they can develop a confident sense of identity and self-image.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.265.

<sup>26</sup> Halstead and McLaughlin, 'Are Faith Schools Divisive?' in Cairns and Gardner (eds), *Faith Schools: Conflict or Consensus?*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Ansari<sup>28</sup> gives a valuable historical outline of how Muslims in Britain have sought to approach the issue of how best to educate their children, though he stresses that British Muslims, as in Australia, are not a homogenous community and there is no unified approach to the issue of educating their children. By the early 1970s, the educational establishment was in favour of a multicultural approach that would include Muslim children but the problem of secularism still remained a barrier for Muslims who wanted a religious dimension included in the syllabus. Single sex education was also an issue for many parents from a South Asian background. The Conservative government after 1979, as in Australia after 1996, set out to roll back the multiculturalist agenda, and Muslim members of the Swann Committee that reported in 1985, took a dissenting view on its opposition to 'separate' schools.

The campaign to establish voluntary-aided Muslim schools gathered momentum and attempts to establish Muslim schools began in 1982, the same time as in Australia. The state refused to fund them but granted voluntary-aid status to other religious minorities, which Muslims saw as blatant discrimination. The number of independent Muslim schools expanded from 45 in 1996 to 77 in 2002, though their establishment was strongly opposed by the New Right. The Labour Government elected in 1997 issued Green and White papers which highlighted the advantages and positive outcomes of faith schools, with the result that four schools were approved between 1997 and 2001 in London, Birmingham and Bradford. Organisations on both the left and the right continued to object to Muslim schools as divisive and inimical to integration, and political developments like the Rushdie Affair (1988-89), the Gulf War and the London bombings affected the debate, as in Australia. Thus there are some interesting parallels to the situation in Australia but also some important differences, especially in the attitude of conservative governments to funding faith schools.

A stimulating argument, that again has a parallel in Australia, was made by Johnson and Casteli who argued that Islam in the West was undergoing a change and that Muslim schools were engaged in creating an identity not only for the school and the students but also for the larger communities associated with them. Although the schools are specifically Islamic, they portray a diverse interpretation of Islam, which the authors see as a kind of

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<sup>28</sup> Ansari, 'British Muslims and Education: Issues and Prospects,' in *The Infidel Within, Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London, 2004, pp. 298-339.

English Islam that is new and finding its way and identity within a new context.<sup>29</sup> Mandaville takes a similar line when he refers to the possibility of detecting ‘a new hybrid model of Islamic education in Britain that combines elements of traditional Islamic sciences and liberal Islamic studies in the same curriculum.’<sup>30</sup>

Akhtar, author of a ‘White Paper on Muslim Education in Great Britain’, takes a line that he describes as delayed assimilation, whereby,

a minority struggling to maintain its identity often welcomes a limited amount of isolation that might enable it to gain the confidence and security it needs in the early days of its establishment. That confidence, once achieved, might later help in its attempts to assimilate on its own terms.<sup>31</sup>

Opposition to Islamic schools comes largely from two groups, those who genuinely believe that they will ‘ghettoize’ Muslim students, a view articulated in France by the Paris-based imam Kechat, and those who support a secular education and object to any state funding of faith-based schools. This argument is particularly used in France, not only by non-Muslims and members of the National Front, like Jackie Blanc, who ‘believes that Islamic schools would hinder Muslims’ ultimate integration into mainstream French society,’ but also by Muslims with French citizenship. Much of the debate in France has focused on the ‘Scarf Affair’ of 1989<sup>32</sup> and increasing requests for availability of *halal* meat, but calls for the creation of Muslim-oriented French private schools recognised and sanctioned by the National Education Ministry<sup>33</sup> run into the wider historic tradition of secularism or *laïcité* in France, which is not just targeting Muslims. There is also the view that Islamic schools serve to reinforce the inferiority of women, a view not just held in

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<sup>29</sup> H. Johnson and M. Casteli, ‘Beyond Orientalism – how to understand the culture of Muslim schools in England: some methodological reflections’, *International Journal of Education and Religion*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2002, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> Mandaville, ‘Islamic Education in Britain: Approaches to Religious Knowledge in a Pluralistic Society’, in Hefner & Zaman, p. 299

<sup>31</sup> S. Akhtar, *White Paper on Muslim Education in Great Britain*, 1992, p.43.

<sup>32</sup> The Scarf Affair or L’affaire du foulard started in France in October 1989 when three girls were suspended from their middle school for wearing the hijab. Over a hundred more cases occurred up till 2003 when the government introduced a Law against wearing conspicuous religious symbols in schools, essentially aimed against the hijab.

<sup>33</sup> as in a call by the Forum Citoyen de Cultures Musulmanes in 2002.

France, and certainly central to the bitter criticism of Islamic schools made by Ali in her most recent book, 'Nomad', where she argues that they are set up by wealthy Muslim extremists deliberately to isolate and indoctrinate Muslim children.<sup>34</sup>

Various British government reports have wavered over the same issue like the 1985 Swann Report which concluded that government funding for separate religious schools 'would not be in the long term interest of ethnic minority communities.' David Bell warned in 2005 that separate Muslim schools 'do not fit pupils for their lives as Muslims in modern Britain' and that the schools themselves

must adapt their curriculum to ensure that it provides pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England and helps them to acquire an appreciation of and respect for other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.<sup>35</sup>

A British MORI poll, soon after the events of September 2001, indicated that 43 percent of respondents were opposed to government funding of Islamic schools,<sup>36</sup> which probably explains the wavering of government reports on the issue. Commenting on this, Fetzer and Soper attribute the tension to the view of many people who see the schools as seeking to preserve Muslim religious identity, values and practices, and many people do not share their values, particularly with regard to gender issues.<sup>37</sup> Feminists, like Okin<sup>38</sup>, have suggested that any patriarchal religious group, and not just Muslims, should be denied tax-exempt status because they discriminate against women and that Muslim concepts of gender equality are incompatible with liberal values. Fetzer and Soper agree that if such schools do exist, then it would be legitimate for the state to choose not to fund them, but they argue that Muslim schools do not deny women the opportunity for academic success just because they segregate the sexes for physical education classes or public worship.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ali, *Nomad*, p.136.

<sup>35</sup> D. Bell, *What does it mean to be a Citizen*, speech to the Hansard Society. Reproduced in *The Guardian*, 17 January 2005.

<sup>36</sup> J. Fetzer & J. Soper, 'Public Attitudes toward State Accommodation of Muslims' Religious Practices', in *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany*, p.143.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>38</sup> S. Okin, *Mistresses of Their Own Destiny: Group Rights, Gender, and Realistic Right of Exit*, 2003, pp. 325-350.

<sup>39</sup> Fetzer & Soper, p.152.

Tariq Ramadan, while not opposing Islamic schools in principle, warns of the danger of creating ‘artificially Islamic’ closed spaces that are cut off from the surrounding society, ignoring the fact that the students are surrounded by other young people who do not share their faith and whom they never meet. His other criticisms of Islamic schools are that most Muslim parents will never be able to afford the fees and that the teaching staff are often not well educated and many teachers are not properly trained, especially when it comes to teaching Arabic. He also worries about the impact of Islamic Studies teachers from what he calls ‘there’ who do not identify with the ‘here’ of where their young students are living. However he does concede that there are a few Islamic schools, which have been founded in a new spirit, referring specifically to Britain, Sweden and the United States. My own impression is that he would find common ground with the vast majority of Islamic schools in Australia as well.<sup>40</sup>

Gropas and Triandafyllidou, also set out to examine whether state-funded faith schooling was compatible with an approach that valorised what they described as ‘cultural/ethnic/religious/racial diversity in education within a secular context’<sup>41</sup> or whether it lead to segregation and hence to the development of ‘parallel societies. After examining faith based education in nine European countries, including the UK, Germany, Belgium and France, they concluded that as long as people belonging to different religious traditions and schools that taught different faiths, were prepared to abide by a common set of citizenship principles, then faith-based schooling could provide a positive school environment which allowed the children to flourish, especially if they came from minority backgrounds.<sup>42</sup>

### **Community opposition to new Islamic schools – why?**

A more ideological opposition was expressed in Australia through opposition to the establishment of the proposed Islamic school in Camden, New South Wales, in 2008<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Ramadan, ‘Towards a reform of Islamic Education’ in *Western Muslims and the future of Islam*, pp. 130-133.

<sup>41</sup> R. Gropas & A. Triandafyllidou, ‘Religious Diversity and Education: Intercultural and Multicultural Concepts and Policies’ in Triandafyllidou, Modood & Meer (eds), *European Multiculturalisms. Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*, p. 164.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Natour covers the dispute in some detail in ‘Folk devils and the proposed Islamic school in Camden’, *Continuum. Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2010, pp. 573-585. He also has a chapter on the issue, ‘Local Islamophobia: The Islamic School Controversy in Camden, New South Wales,’ in Greg Morgan & Scott Poynting (eds),

Church leaders (local heads of the Baptist, Anglican and Presbyterian Churches and the Evangelical Sisters of Mary) said that the school would be a beachhead for a subculture ‘which is not compatible with broad Australian egalitarian culture, as Islam was not simply a private religion but was driven by a powerful political agenda.’ They saw the school’s backers as advocating ‘a political, ideological position that is incompatible with the Australian way of life.’<sup>44</sup> One of the individual opponents, a local resident, said the school would be ‘a breeding ground for terrorists.’ The journalist reporting on the outcome of the court case, which found against the proposed school, wrote that each new proposal for a school prompts the same questions. ‘Who are the people behind these schools? What do they teach? And what, if anything, do Australians have to fear?’

Muslim spokesmen conceded that the *Quranic* Society, which was behind this particular school, had not done enough to enlighten the local community, and that there should be more vigorous public engagement when public concerns could be faced head-on. Ameer Ali from AFIC and Murdoch University commented in the article,

Are Muslim schools trying to integrate these people or lead them to lead separate lives in the long run? That needs to be debated.... That is why integration has to be done quite aggressively, so we can dispel the fear about Muslims. That is how we ensure social harmony. When people understand they are just normal schools, the fear will dissipate.

However most opponents of the school would come in a category that would never accept Islamic schools as political parties associated with the opposition had included a ten year moratorium on new Islamic schools in their party policy platform as well as a ban on further Muslim immigration. In addition, many of the submissions to the Camden Council just expressed hostility to Islam in general, asserting that the school would bring violence and terrorism to Camden, and that Australia was a Christian culture so there was no room for Muslims.<sup>45</sup> One peaceful protester at a public meeting about the school in November 2007 which was attended by around 900 people, said that given there were eight Catholic schools

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*Global Islamophobia. Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*, Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2012, pp. 101-118.

<sup>44</sup> S. Neighbour, ‘No lessons here’, *Australian*, 3 June 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Natour, ‘Folk Devils,’ pp. 580-581.

and three Christian schools within the area, he did not see why there was so much unrest about the idea of one Muslim school. However the mood at the meeting was clearly against the school being in Camden, although the reasons given ranged from concerns about traffic to wild allegations that the school was a test case to buy up land for more schools elsewhere in New South Wales, ‘Watch out Australia!’<sup>46</sup>

The Camden Islamic School Protest site<sup>47</sup> included opposition to the school that was mainly based on values and references to the *Qur’an*, which in their opinion allowed under-age sex and promoted hatred of non-Muslims to justify their opposition. The fact that this is not the case would probably not sway these critics. However the arguments are ones that hold sway in certain parts of the Australian community, which do have some impact when it comes to Islamic schools obtaining planning permission for new developments. Other allegations about what Muslims teach their children are based on reports of talks by clerics like Samir Abu Hamza who was alleged to have told his followers that it was OK to hit their wives while another allegation said that Islamic schools were turning innocent young boys into violent sex predators.<sup>48</sup>

This lack of awareness is also articulated in the US context by Selby, an American Muslim, who in an article on the Islamic education movement there, expresses her concern that after some fifty years of formal Islamic educational institutions in her country, so little information is known about the movement, which she says is invisible in the educational literature and barely visible elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> While her article specifically focuses on one school, she suggests in her summing up, that future research might look more carefully at who is teaching in Islamic Schools and how they are creating an Islamic experience for their students. In addition, she observes that it is equally important for researchers to track the effect of Islamic education on students, asking whether their education prepares them for a

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Edwards reporting, ‘Council denies racism behind opposition to Islamic school,’ AM programme on ABC radio, 6 November 2007.

[www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s2082562.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s2082562.htm), accessed 30 May 2012,

Also Tom Iggulden reporting, ‘Tensions rise in Camden over Islamic school proposal,’ on PM programme on ABC radio, 20 December 2007,

[www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2007/s2124550.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2007/s2124550.htm), accessed 30 May 2012.

<sup>47</sup> [Camden-islamic-school-protest.wikispaces.com/](http://Camden-islamic-school-protest.wikispaces.com/)

<sup>48</sup> Kwanak, *Islamic Schools – Australia Says NO!* Street Corner, Western Sydney, 22 January 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Selby, p. 47.

future as American Muslims and whether it alienated them either from Islam or from American culture.<sup>50</sup>

### **Responses based on research interviews.**

All the 31 former students interviewed were asked whether they felt that attending an Islamic school divided them from other Australian high school students. In addition they were asked whether they felt that they benefited from going to an Islamic school rather than a local state school where there was no faith teaching. The last question asked was to what extent they felt that their Islamic education helped strengthen their faith and prepare them for tertiary studies in Australia.

While a majority of students felt that attending an Islamic school did not divide them from other students, their reasons not surprisingly varied. A considerable number of students at various points through their K-12 education had attended non-Islamic schools. This was sometimes because of the location, sometimes because they didn't like their Islamic school or the school did not like them or their subject preferences. At other times it was because their parents felt that they had been given an adequate faith grounding in primary school and other non-Islamic high schools offered a wider range of subjects.

It also depended on how much opportunity the students at an Islamic school had to mix with students attending other schools, with some schools having more opportunities than others, especially at secondary level. This usually consisted of inter-school sport and other co-curricular activities such as debating, or for older students, inter-faith dialogue forums. A small number of students who had only been to an Islamic school used the term 'living in a bubble' and they were the ones who said it had been an exclusive experience.

As a result of having the opportunity to interview a range of former students, including some who had attended Islamic schools in their early days of existence, it was noticeable that they felt positive about greater opportunities to mix with other students than in their day. In addition, all those who were at school in 2001 commented on the decision by schools to try and reach out more to combat the increased xenophobia in Australia.

Student L said her school pushed and reassured their students that they were the same as any other students in Australia so they never stopped thinking that they were any different. Earlier she had attended a Catholic school but said they never went out to meet

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

other schools, while at her Islamic school, they were out every term mixing through sports, debating, inter-faith dialogue, and maths competitions. 2001 had been a scary experience for her and her mother had told her to remove her scarf when she got off the school bus every day. However she felt that during this period, being at her Islamic school provided a safe environment and allowed her to learn about her identity and how she could reconcile being a Muslim with her Australian identity. She and her friend, D, said their school made a real effort to reach out into the different communities after 2001 and so as they got older, they saw more interaction with other people and other faiths and other schools.

Student R, who had attended one of the first Islamic schools, also said that there had been a big difference before and after 2001. Now there was a lot more dialogue as well as xenophobia. She added that there is an effective narrative 'but the media ignores it.' She herself had benefited from going to an Islamic school which gave her the opportunity to dialogue with students at a Jewish school and Catholic schools as part of this outreach programme and felt that she could fit in as an Australian by being a Muslim,

To be a good Muslim made her a better Australian.

Student M had been to a local primary school but then got sent to a faith school for the Muslim environment. He felt that his school was more about studies and didn't project Islam well though he felt it had been an advantage for him to attend an Islamic school. This was because when he was in the public school, he was ashamed to be a Muslim and told other students that he was a Christian to avoid embarrassment. He had even changed his name but at his Islamic school he could revert to his Muslim name and now feels that he can be more open about his faith. However his parents had only sent him to the school for its academic record as well as the Muslim environment but they never asked him about his religious studies, only how he was going in Maths and Science. He got more involved in his faith after leaving school and was now training to be a primary school teacher.

I see these as the formative years when you can mould the children to be better, you have to work on them or it's too late. I am looking at teaching in an Islamic school.

Student S felt positive about having attended her Islamic school because they had taught her the basics of Islam and she would not have got that at another school. She felt

that it made her able to wear her scarf because of being at the school and she had also learned Arabic. On the other hand, she admitted that having only attended the one school, it had made going to university a little bit difficult and she still felt more comfortable there with other Muslim students. Her advice in retrospect was that, ‘maybe we needed more classes on integrating with Australian society.’

Student S had been to a state primary school before moving to her Islamic school in Year 7. Her school encouraged interaction with Christian and Jewish schools when they visited these schools and their students visited her school, which she saw as a building bridges exercise. They also met other students through debating and sport. She admitted that she felt more comfortable with people of her own faith and was grateful to her parents for sending her to an Islamic school. It had also helped her at university where they could just follow their practices like praying quite naturally but she was critical of her school because of the pressure to do prestige subjects like medicine.

This criticism of Islamic schools pursuing prestige subjects came up in interviews with several other former students who while they appreciated being at an Islamic school, felt they either had to leave to pursue other subjects not covered or had deliberately made other choices at tertiary level. Obviously this criticism cannot just be levelled at Islamic schools but combined with the exclusion of other subjects, it also excluded some students, however positive they felt about their religious environment.

Student F had been to a state primary school and an Islamic one, with extra Arabic teaching at Saturday school till he started at his Islamic high school. They had lots of inter-faith dialogue with Catholic schools and what he described as ‘mainly Anglo schools’ though he only took part in it a couple of times. He valued his school as he had learned his religion there and had taught Islam to Muslim students in state schools as part of a local outreach programme, giving up his free periods to do this. On the other hand, his principal wanted him to study certain more academic subjects so he moved to a Catholic school for Years 11 and 12, then he went to the local TAFE college. On feeling divided from other students, he said that because he had attended a mixture of schools, this did not apply to him. However he felt that at an Islamic school there was not much exposure to the opposite sex so when they got into the workforce or tertiary education, they didn’t know how to interact with them.

Student M had also appreciated being at an Islamic school but though he knew about inter-faith dialogue activities, he had never taken part in them. His mixing had been more through sport, especially as one of his teachers had promoted rugby union for boys and if

they had any talent, they got put in teams. The most important thing his school had given him was that Islam was the structure behind his life and he had never needed his parents or weekend school for this. This now helped him discuss current issues with students at the university where he was now studying but he had left his school at the end of Year 10 as,

I needed a different experience and to experience a public school to make new friends and improve myself for university, and I felt it was a bit the same and I wanted to meet new people.

He added that quite a few other students also left after Year 10 but most stayed on as the school pushed them to go on to obtain university entrance qualifications.

Two other students from another Islamic school disagreed on whether their experience had divided them from other students, though both had attended other schools first. One felt it did but her friend said going to her school divided her ‘in a good way’ because it was in a lower socio-economic area where a lot of the other schools were ‘really bad/rough’ and so she felt more comfortable at a school where they had less problems with drugs and boy friends/girl friends on the school grounds. Both of them said that their school promoted inter-faith dialogue. However the director only selected top students and he would do most of the talking at schools they visited while leaving questions to the students, though she thought it was hard when they didn’t always have enough knowledge to respond. They had both made close friendships at the school but felt the school had not so much strengthened their faith as provided them with a good social environment. They had joined the Muslim Students Association at university and felt they had now acquired most of their knowledge of Islam from attending a local community based programme there run by a visiting sheikh who came once a fortnight. While their school had set the foundations, they believed it had a lot more potential if teachers were well educated and had a strong Islamic knowledge, preferably in Australia. They were hopeful the situation would improve in the next ten or fifteen years.

Student O had also been affected by growing up in a rough area so when he attended the local state school there, he got into lots of trouble. His parents then moved him to the Islamic school in Year 8, ‘mainly to learn more about my religion,’ and he was very happy that his parents had made this decision for him, ‘one of the best things I’ve probably done in my life.’ He had participated in a few of the inter-faith activities that his school encouraged but mixed mostly through participation in sport. For him, an Islamic education had prepared

him for life and made him more aware of things, his actions, the consequences of what he did and made him think before 'he did stuff.'

This was rather similar experience to Student H who admitted he had been pushed into going to his Islamic school when he too got to Year 8, having learned the *Qur'an* from his mother at home and attending weekend school on Fridays and Saturdays. Because he had been to a non-Islamic school as well as an Islamic school, he felt he could understand both cultures so was social with both sides and with the opposite gender. He conceded that students who went to Islamic schools their whole life did find things really different socially when they got to university although his school had a great programme for mixing with students from other schools. He had been part of the inter-faith gatherings, visiting state schools and Catholic schools, and was proud of his school for hosting students from a country school when they stayed for three days and were shown around the city. He was also proud of the fact that his school had hosted a non-Muslim student for a month in Year 9 and although she had left because it was too different for her, they had kept in touch. He did not think other Islamic schools would act like this over outreach.

One student, M, who came as a refugee to Australia and was now in his final year doing medicine, thought the question about attending an Islamic school dividing him from other Australian students, was 'ridiculous.' He had attended his school from Prep through to Year 12 and thought it was an essential part of education for a young Muslim. His school had promoted dialogue through inter-faith gatherings and sport and he felt this made them become more well rounded individuals. Reflecting on the faith teaching at his school, he said,

It gives you a base or foundation to work on. A lot of young people these days don't have a base or structure but just from observing people, you sort of think there is something missing, people going out to find themselves or find who they are, but for me personally, I never had that feeling that I needed to find myself. We have a clear direction and focus.

Student E had a slightly different perspective. He had first attended an elite boys' grammar school then went to an Islamic school just for Year 12. He was bitterly critical of the faith teaching at this school and said he encouraged his classmates to attend extra lessons out of school 'because it doesn't make sense to be going to an Islamic school only

to have your Islamic knowledge and practice deteriorate in Year 12.’ On being divided from other students, he acknowledged,

Some Muslims, who are more hardline about their faith, do feel that the Islamic school provides them with shelter from the outside world so in that situation it does divide them from the common teenager. This does happen with some Islamic school students but for the most part, Islamic school students are the same as teenagers anywhere else.

Refugee student, Y, had a different view. She had only learned her own language after coming to Australia because her parents had been too scared to teach her before they escaped. This reflected comments made by a number of people with a refugee background, both staff and students, about how they valued coming to Australia as it offered them the chance to live in a tolerant society where differences were respected. Student Y had attended her Islamic school from Prep through to Year 12, and felt she had come in as part of a group and left as a group. There were not many opportunities to engage with other students or interact, though she thought that part of the reason was teenage awkwardness and she felt that was certainly true for her. She had started to meet other students in her last three years at school although again her school had only selected the brighter students to attend a local United Nations Youth Assembly. Because of her experience, she had made a conscious effort on leaving school not to volunteer for an Islamic organisation because she wanted to work with non-Muslims. She felt that this was her contribution to society and it made her a better Muslim and better individual. As for faith teaching at her school, she said she had learned all about Islam at home and only went to her school to validate what she had been taught at home.

Two students who were at school together both offered positive comments about their experience of outreach. Student H said being at her Islamic school since Grade 7 had not divided them because they had a lot of interaction with other students. She had good memories of excursions and camps,

so it’s not like we were put into a little cocoon and only surrounded by Muslim students so we did not have contact with other Australian high school students. I think people will think we are

hidden away and we don't have much to do with other students but that is not the case.

Both students said there was a lot more interaction these days but they still valued what they learned about their faith at school and the faith teaching had helped them at university. Student H also had a positive memory of her Arabic teacher as he told female students that as Muslim women they had to make sure they got a tertiary education before they dared to get married, 'get that first and foremost.' Her friend pointed out that they were the first generation to reach Year 12 at their school so there wasn't much in the way of inter-faith activities but she knew there was a lot more now. It was important because she thought that Muslim students needed to be exposed to non-Muslims at a younger age rather than going to university 'and having the shock of their life and being exposed to all that'. Some have been so sheltered that university is a shock for them. Because of this, she believed that those who mix in their school years end up being more successful. Faith teaching had given her more confidence as well as knowledge of Islam so now that she was at a Catholic University, it meant that she could tell her friends there that she was a Muslim and not an extremist.

Student A had slightly more mixed memories, as she started school in the public system but her parents then gave her the option of going to an Islamic school in Year 4 and she wanted to, though she was still young. However she had kept her friends from primary school having met up with them again through work. In her opinion, there is a divide for students at an Islamic school but it changes once you go on to work or tertiary education so it's like later or delayed learning. Her school had a big inter-faith programme and she gave lots of talks herself. For her, being at her school was an identity thing. Her parents were not particularly religious but her Dad had given her this option, saying, 'go back to your roots and just learn what it is, if you like it, you like it, if you don't, that's fine.' She had decided to wear a headscarf and was the first in her particular ethnic community to take that step. She had learned who she was but it was an understanding she had reached on her own and this had kept her strong.

Student I said she had taken part in dialogue opportunities offered by her school and had made some valuable relationships as a result. One of them was at a Jewish school and they had kept in touch over the Internet and MSN. When the debate over the *hijab* blew

up<sup>51</sup>, her friend had been very eager to contact her and ask what was going on. She had then written a Letter to the Editor of the local paper saying how ridiculous it was and saying how preposterous the argument was and that there was nothing dangerous about wearing a *hijab*. Her Islamic school had always encouraged students to go out and contribute to Australian society and not to the Muslim society only. She recalled that at the end of Year Twelve, her principal had told the student congregation that it was important to always go out and contribute to Australian society, so she was highly offended when some politicians had insinuated that Muslim values were somehow contradictory to Australian values. She had lived in Australia for fifteen years and for her, being an Australian meant giving everyone a fair go, trying your best, and being respectful of people from different countries. She saw these values as paramount to her faith but blamed the media for promoting a negative view. These opinions were picked up by people who did not know any better and this made her sad. She herself had also written to *The Age* on the issue of *hijab* and other issues she felt strongly about, so was pleased when her school publicised letters from students like that.

All these and other students felt positive about their attendance at an Islamic school but equally there were others who did not, and who felt it was a divisive experience. While the comments recorded are anecdotal and represent a random cross section of opinions, it would be well nigh impossible to quantify the experience of every Muslim student so an overall judgement is difficult to come by.

Negative experiences came through at several different levels, ranging from students asked to leave their school to those who chose to leave and continue their education outside the Islamic school system. Others had continued their education but still felt negative and angry about their school experience.

Student D came as a refugee from the Middle East and said she enjoyed the first few months in Australia but found her school too restrictive when she wanted to immerse herself more in the wider Australian community. She hated the dress rules at school and felt the teachers were intolerant although she was happy to still call herself a Muslim, continuing to pray regularly at home and fast during *Ramadan*. She contrasted the tolerance of her own family with the intolerance of those teachers and families who came from a much more strict background and who she felt were shocked by her attitude. Her resentment was directed against one particular *imam* at the school, saying she had not learned anything there

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<sup>51</sup> This was in 2005 when NSW Liberal Senator Bronwyn Bishop and Victorian Liberal MHA, Sophie Panopoulos, called for a ban on the hijab in state schools, [www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1448343.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1448343.htm)

as a result, and her father had told her that what she was being taught was wrong. Eventually she left the school and went to a local state college where she was much happier, before going on to university.

Another student, E, had a similar observation after briefly attending his school in another city. He was critical of what he called ‘hardliners’ on the staff, but he felt that this was because so many of them were not highly qualified and had just learned about Islam through study circles in the Middle East. He had been to this school over a decade ago but said the situation had improved since then as teachers were now more qualified though there was still room for a lot more improvement. However he was optimistic about the future,

It’s a generational problem and I think in the future with more younger imams with more younger classically trained scholars in Islam coming through in Australia, we shall see quite a distinction in how the youth relate to their faith.

Several students used the term ‘bubble’ when reflecting on their years at school, though for others that was an advantage as they felt it was a secure environment and they had made ongoing friendships as a result. Three students said their experience had made them ‘socially retarded’ and it had been hard for them going to university. Student A said he was still trying to get over his time at school three years later and wished he had left earlier. He felt that he had no opportunity to socialise outside school circles and knew nothing of the world he encountered at university where ‘there were all these other ideologies and cultures and temptations that you were never exposed to.’ He had enjoyed doing SOSE at school because they had learned about other cultures in Asia as well as about indigenous Australians. This he thought was important at a lower school level because ‘being in an isolated environment they do need to be exposed to other cultures.’ Some students did rebel but only after they left school. He had no respect for the teaching of religion at his school and thought that no-one was really interested in it either. Though they knew Islamic Studies was supposed to be at the forefront, what they really wanted to do was study hard to get to university.

In contrast to male Student A, who admitted he was quite a shy person, female student A, with a non-Muslim father but a Muslim mother, was much more extrovert. She had started her education in a state primary school, learning about Islam at her local mosque. Moving to another city, she had been sent to an Islamic school, but suffered what

she described as a ‘cultural shock’ because instead of being surrounded by Anglo faces and names, she was confronted with a totally different environment as well as names she could not remember. She spent five years at this school, which she described as a ‘ghetto,’ then suffered from what she called a reverse culture shock after going to university. After six weeks, she had dropped out, as it had been too emotionally overwhelming for her, suddenly having to cope with all the different values and the behaviour of students, particularly when confronted with gender mixing and alcohol. She had taken part in outreach programmes at the school but thought they were contrived and what the students really wanted was spontaneous socialising after the formal presentation, which they never got. On the other hand, being at the Islamic school had strengthened her faith because she was naturally questioning and inquisitive and could relate well to the more qualified *imams*. For this reason, she had eventually gone back to university and chosen subjects that would ‘somehow relate to my Islamic background and would sort of help contribute some benefit to the Muslim community’. Reflecting on her overall experience, she felt very ambivalent,

but there is something undeniable about every day going to assembly and you have the *Qur’an* being recited and you have to recite the 99 Names of Allah and you do *du’as*. It sort of gets to your blood, it becomes part of the rhythm of your life so that when you are taken away from that environment you feel a bit weaker in that sense and it doesn’t have such a strong presence in your life any more and you forget how that feels.

After marrying soon after leaving school, she had a son, but felt that she would not send him to an Islamic school because of the lack of educational standards. She related that at a meeting she had told this to a colleague, who responded by conceding that though the quality might be less, this was offset by the formation of an identity. They agreed that in terms of an Islamic education, the main problem was the lack of a standardised curriculum and at the moment it was just a haphazard approach, ‘people just muddle their way through, there is no strategy in place.’

Another negative criticism echoed by a number of former students concerned the restriction on certain subjects at school, particularly for young people who were creative and loved art and music. This once more reflected the wide spectrum of beliefs in Islam as some schools encouraged art, though what was allowed did vary a great deal, while what was

permitted in music also ranged from nothing at all to employment of music staff. One former student gave me a list of singers that she and her friends loved to listen to on CDs and tapes, and which they felt were appropriate, but agreed that most school students put their music on after school and listened to whatever they liked. Principals who did not allow for music at school all blamed more orthodox parents who complained so they said it was easier just not to have any. Clyne makes this observation too, after a school director she interviewed said it was the community culture, especially Arabs, saying that music was not Islamic.<sup>52</sup>

Student K said that she was denied the chance to express her creative side because of these restrictions. At her state primary school, she knew she couldn't be part of the Christmas play, but had happily made 'costumes and arty things.' Once at the Islamic school, she could not develop this side of her personality so hated her time there. Like some other students, she said her time at an Islamic school had stunted her social growth and found it an isolating experience. In the end she left to repeat Year 12 at a state college where she could take art, drama and music.

You need to express yourself through art and music. There is  
musicality in the *Qur'an* and there is a deep history of art in Islam.

As a result she now felt that she would have preferred to attend a public school all the time as she could have picked up her knowledge of Islam out of school. By contrast, she had friends who were at the Islamic school all their life but now they did not eat halal food, they couldn't read the *Qur'an*, they didn't wear a scarf and they had some really bad values. She was unsure why this happened as your home upbringing was obviously one factor and just going to the Islamic school would not necessarily make you a better Muslim, 'you have to have other support systems for that.' Some of her religious friends had got their faith without attending a Muslim school but through home or Sunday school, while others who attended a Muslim school now went clubbing and drinking.

We went to a Muslim school because it was recommended to  
us, 'go there, you'll learn the *Qur'an*, you are surrounded by Muslims,

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<sup>52</sup> Donohue Clyne, unpublished thesis, p.173.

but most of the kids that come are like myself, my *Quranic* growth went backwards.’ Overall she felt that, ‘If you have a good sense of self, you could survive in a public or private school.’

Personality also came into it with Student I who felt he was a free spirit so the only benefit of going to his school was giving him friends. He had learned his Islamic values from his family. Like some other students, he felt the school stunted him socially. As neither his social skills nor his academic studies were going well, in the end he left and moved with his family to another city to attend a state college for Years 11 and 12. He thought that his school simply did not prepare anyone for tertiary studies and it was even harder for the refugee students. He also felt that while going to an Islamic school does divide you, in the end it depended on what type of person you were and whether you were born in Australia or not.

Student A spoke enthusiastically about her Islamic primary school then went to an Islamic high school from Years 8 to 12. She felt that her teachers at primary school were well qualified but at high school they were not, ‘some students went to sleep’ during religion presentations as they were so boring and the teachers were often not properly qualified. She had developed her own knowledge by going to informal weekend classes given by a visiting teacher. While they did art at primary school, which she loved, they did nothing at high school, although apparently there was a fully qualified art teacher on the staff.

The negative thing about my years at this school was that when I stepped out of that school it was very difficult for me to communicate with people from other different backgrounds. It was really hard. It did shrink my confidence down a bit.

She wished that her parents had sent her to a non-Muslim school but because they had been more concerned about her faith, she had to stay there. It had made her feel socially isolated from the real world so,

When I started at TAFE and university, it did not benefit me in terms of communication skills, in terms of

feeling confident with myself, in terms of being familiar with the Australian culture.

Her friend, R, had been to a number of different Muslim schools but again felt she had been living in a bubble with no non-Muslim friends till she got to university. Her parents had given her the choice of going to a public school or to the Islamic school where she could attend girls own classes so she went there as she had just started to wear her scarf full-time and felt safer where she would not get ridiculed by her peers. Later on, as she was the only one in her class to get to her university, she had felt 'like a needle in a haystack' but then made some really good friends through group work and assignments. Her time at the Islamic school had nonetheless strengthened her faith and by mixing with other girls who felt the same, this had helped her too.

Student I felt that the main benefit she had from attending an Islamic school was that she learned to be comfortable with herself as a Muslim, as an Australian and as a female. She had been given the opportunity to learn who she was and figure it out without stigma, whereas if she hadn't had that experience as a young person, she thought she would have felt awkward or tried to hide her identity. She had learned to appreciate different faiths and because she was comfortable with her situation, felt able to take part in dialogue situations and other extra-curricular activities offered by her school. She still wasn't sure what she wanted to do vocationally but knew it would be something that contributed to society and involved helping other people as these reflected the values she had got from her school. She knew that people would say that being at her school had divided her from overall Australian society but thought that was not an accurate perception. While some things at university were a little bit confronting, such as everyone in her Monday tutorials discussing how drunk they had been at the weekend, she had got used to it. Now she enjoyed sharing her faith with students who were not Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, when it comes to inclusion or exclusion, there are a number of factors involved in terms of how attending an Islamic school affects each student. Those who have attended a range of schools, both public and private, or experienced different Islamic schools, seem to have survived better than those who only attended one Islamic school. In this respect, Sydney was a little different from other cities, as there are a number of Islamic

primary schools there, while in other cities, most of the Islamic schools go through from Years 1 to 12.

What does seem conclusive, however, is that provided staff are well qualified and that there is a lot of inter-action with other schools, then for most students their experience is a positive one. A number of students observed that the safe environment of the school was important to them in the time after the events of 2001 and that it helped them cope with some of the hostility they face as a distinct minority culture in Australia. This is especially so for girls who wore their scarf out of school and attracted a certain amount of abuse and hostility as a result.

Former students were also outspoken on the need for younger, well-qualified Islamic Studies teachers, rather than narrow-minded unqualified staff educated overseas who were intolerant of other beliefs. One danger here is the spreading influence of sectarian intolerance arising from internal conflict in countries like Iraq and Pakistan. Teachers at Islamia in London have also noted occasional waves of what they call 'Islamisation' coming from *Salafi*-oriented parents, but this phenomenon is hard to assess, particularly for a non-Muslim researcher like myself.<sup>53</sup>

A lot of students interviewed referred to the fact that there was now a lot more dialogue with other schools compared to when they were at school, though the problem of selection still rankled with some of them. Compared to other schools in Australia, the Islamic schools put a lot of energy into outreach but obviously there are limits to how much time they can devote to these programmes and there are only a limited number of Islamic schools anyway. Clearly these activities benefit students on both sides as polls indicate that tolerance of Islam increases when Australians have the opportunity to meet Muslims and overcome their misconceptions. A number of students who had taken part in these dialogue encounters, talked about the questions they handled and the good humour over their explanations. The girls always had to deal with questions on dress and there was a lot of interest in the *burqini* and sports uniform. One student reported on a question about whether she undressed to take a shower but generally students said that they found that as teenagers they had far more in common than any differences, once they were allowed time to chat informally.

The issue of art and music seems harder to deal with as there is such a wide spread of opinion on these subjects in the Islamic community. Obviously young Muslims in

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<sup>53</sup>Mandaville, p. 231

Australia are going to be aware of popular art and music, especially if they have been to other public or private schools, given that they would not have been to those Ultra-Orthodox Jewish or conservative Christian schools in Australia that have the same critical perspective on contemporary popular culture. There is also the issue of fitting it into the curriculum as many other schools in Australia cannot provide art or music classes, or lack trained staff, just as not all schools can teach drama or provide a wide range of sporting activities. Many Islamic schools are small and on restricted space so simply cannot provide the range of subjects that are found in bigger schools. Those schools that do have more space tend to be the newer ones built on the edge of urban conurbations which means that students spend a lot of time on buses and cannot take part in activities after school.

There are obvious parallels with concern about the potential divisiveness of faith schools with the situation in Europe but on the whole, the Islamic schools in Australia seem to be trying their best to balance giving their students a strong sense of identity with the opportunity to mix with other students from other schools. There are some exceptions where students have felt isolated, essentially when they have been in the system from years K-12, but as some of those students admitted, it is also a question of personality when it comes to self-confidence and social mixing. In addition, not all students have the confidence to take part in dialogue opportunities while at the same time a number of the students interviewed felt excluded because of the selection process. Sport is obviously a great mixer along with other co-curricular opportunities like debating and Model United Nations assemblies as well as the inter faith dialogue encounters.

At another level, that school policy excludes students from certain educational opportunities enjoyed by other Australian school students, the same critique can be applied to other faith schools or even state schools where inadequate funding or space does not permit certain subjects to be taught such as art, music or physical education. On ideological issues like creation science, the Islamic schools are much less hardline than some of the authoritarian conservative Christian schools, which do not give their students the opportunity to learn about evolution theory as an alternative viewpoint.

On balance then, the vast majority of the schools try their best to offer an inclusive option to their students. They provide a 'shelter from the storm' while giving them the opportunity to interact with the wider community. Many students move between the Islamic schools and other schools for a variety of reasons. Invariably they see this experience as giving them the option of living in both worlds, while the students who have been in the Islamic school system all their school life tend to offer a mixed response.

However that can depend on their personality as well as the school they attend and the chances they have to mix beyond the school walls. Many parents choose to positively interact with the wider community as well but an analysis of this involvement awaits further research although there are now many examples of Muslim organisations reaching out to share their existence and festivals with non-Muslim Australians<sup>54</sup>.

In terms of identity, my impression was that as far as the students were concerned, almost all were comfortable with their identities as Australian and Muslim. This was similar to the conclusion reached by Ihram in Sydney<sup>55</sup>, ‘having achieved a relative state of comfort the necessity of arguing for inclusion into what they see as the ‘imagined Australian community’ and self-identification with the dominant Australian culture was less necessary, providing a greater choice of global, transnational and multiple identities.’ She contrasted the experience of early Muslim migrants with the choices made by the second and third generations, though stressing that throughout all the discourses on identity, the religious aspect of their Muslim identity was always there<sup>56</sup>. This is a view echoed by Dahlia, a graduate of a Melbourne Islamic school writing for the ACIES newsletter<sup>57</sup>

At my Islamic school, my Muslim identity became the focus of my life and who I was. But not only did my schooling provide answers to my question regarding what it meant to be Muslim, but more specifically what it meant to be an Australian.

This tailors with Hall’s definition of identity, which contrasts identification constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person or groups or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation, with the discursive approach that sees identification as a construction, a process never completed but always in process. Although a number of commentators have written about the alienation of some sections of the Muslim community in Australia who do feel excluded, this does not seem to apply to the Islamic schools here or the students who attended them. Hopefully they will ultimately contribute to this evolving

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<sup>54</sup> Some of these activities in Melbourne are described by Dupuche and Soliman in ‘Muslim-Catholic Relations in Australia with special reference to Melbourne 1995-2010,’ in Ata (ed), *Catholics and Catholicism in Contemporary Australia*, Melbourne, 2012, pp. 52-62.

<sup>55</sup> Ihram, p.67

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>57</sup> *Reflections from an Islamic school graduate*, ACIES Newsletter, 2008, p. 6

Australian Muslim identity although the stresses and strains of globalisation will continue to promote what Mansouri calls, ‘the conservative brand of multiculturalism which defines both nation and citizenship in relation to otherness.’ This, he argues, is a construct to preserve the power of a dominant ethnicity in order to define these parameters of difference and safeguard the myths of Australian national identity that it has created in its own image<sup>58</sup>. Students interviewed seemed to be aware of this in discussion but while sometimes angry or upset by outbursts of perceived fear and hatred, did not feel it as a threat to their identity as both Muslims and Australian.

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<sup>58</sup> Mansouri, *Citizenship, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Australia*, p. 153

## CONCLUSION

### **We made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other (49:13)**

#### *Text on a wall mural outside one of the Melbourne Islamic schools*

The unfortunate paradox of the situation with regard to Islamic schools in Australia is that while they have made tremendous improvements since the first schools opened in 1983, public hostility to their existence has, if anything, increased. This is because despite the creation of outreach and dialogue programmes involving different faith schools, political events in the outside world have made Islamic schools and Muslims in general a target of hostility, especially since the events of September 2001.

One question brought up by hostile critics concerns ‘what do they teach in there?’ As no research has been done on this before on an Australia-wide scale, the findings that they have nothing to fear are important, although it is unlikely that this will allay any ideological hostility. The fears these opponents of the schools express equate the teachings of Islam with the ideology of political Islam. Furthermore the blanket condemnation of Islamic schools made by critics like Ayaan Hirsi Ali on her visits to Australia will still be used by those ideologically hostile to Islam. Almost always they tend to fall back on examples from overseas<sup>1</sup> or isolated incidents that have occurred in Australia. The overall evidence is quite the contrary, as the Muslim Schools Charter<sup>2</sup> in addition to interviews with imams and former students makes clear. There is no encouragement to use violence and students are not taught to hate Jews and Christians. The thesis does however acknowledge that teachers are not likely to speak about any influence wielded by ‘extremism’ in a school, whether through the School Board, principals, parents, imams or individual teachers. This is partly why the sample of those interviewed included non-Muslims, who might have provided what Hammersley and Atkinson refer to as ‘insider informants’<sup>3</sup>.

The high schools, if anything, are eager to promote and take part in dialogue opportunities, but given the relatively small number of Islamic schools which to date only exist in the capital cities, it would be impossible to spare much more time for this. In

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<sup>1</sup> As Walid Aly demonstrates in his essay on ‘Monoculturalism, Muslims and Myth Making’ in Gaita (ed), 2011

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for text of the charter originally drawn up in 2001 and endorsed a second time in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, ‘Ethnographic interviewing’, in *Ethnography, Principles in Practice*, London, 1968, pp. 117-118

addition, the older students have their studies as a first priority at the age where they are confident enough to go out and meet other students to discuss their faith, although they seem to enjoy the exchanges. Their criticism of the process by students is that either they do not have enough time for informal exchanges or they think their schools tend to manipulate the selection process by choosing only certain students to take part in these gatherings. Understanding Islam is rather like understanding Aboriginal perspectives. There comes a time when non-Muslims (or 'Whitefellas') have to teach themselves about Islam and then share that information in classes on comparative religion, a process that has started, though predictably not without its critics.<sup>4</sup> Haque, who carried out research in Brisbane on the attitude of non-Muslim students and teachers towards Muslims and Islam, suggested a number of ways in which to improve mutual understanding. She added that another interesting area of research would be a study of the Muslim communities in Australia, examining how its members view the majority attitudes towards themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The equality of men and women in the eyes of Allah is emphasised in faith teaching although at a cultural level, the position of Muslim girls and women often differs from most other Australians. This is particularly when it comes to the idea of arranged marriages and marrying on average at a younger age. However it should be pointed out that this is not unique to Muslims in Australia, as it applies to other faith groups and ethnic groups too. Other examples would include the Exclusive Brethren and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, in addition to some Indian families. The Christian denominations who started private schools in the nineteenth century, created gender segregation in their educational institutions and the tradition still remains strong, although some of these schools have recently amalgamated for economic reasons. As for allegations that the schools teach that girls can get married at the age of nine, on the grounds that the Prophet Muhammad married Aisha at that age, there is no evidence for this. Muslims in Australia are taught to obey the laws of the country they live in and the laws on the age of consent and marriage are quite clear on this point.

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<sup>4</sup> for example, A. Ata and J. Windle, 'The role of Australian schools in educating students about Islam and Muslims', *Australian Quarterly*, 2007, pp. 19-27. Also M. Chelebi, *The Australian Muslim Student*, Terrigal NSW 2008; E. Hassim and J. Cole-Adams, *Learning from One Another. Bringing Muslim perspectives into Australian Schools*, Australian Curriculum Studies Association with the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> A. Haque, 'Attitudes of high school students towards Muslims and Islam in a southeastern Australian community,' *Intercultural Education*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2001, pp. 191-193.

What is taught in the faith-teaching units is probably little different in essence from other faith schools. Muslims learn Arabic just as Jews learn Hebrew in their schools and Catholics used to learn Latin. Orthodox schools rely on Greek as the language for devotion in much the same way as Muslims use Arabic although not all Orthodox churchgoers are Greek or Muslims Arabs. What emerges quite clearly is that the teaching of Arabic in some of the schools is still inadequate although it has improved since the early days. A number of students interviewed complained bitterly about the standard of teaching Arabic and said they had learned nothing, but while the imams do teach *Quranic* texts in Arabic from an early age, the texts are translated and discussed in English. The training of *imams* as qualified teachers is a pressing need which to date, while recognised, has not been followed through. Even now there are *imams* who cannot speak good English, although the younger ones who grew up in Australia are slowly increasing in number, a fact that is appreciated by the students. On the other hand, an *imam* who is a *hafiz* and speaks beautiful Arabic is still valued by his listeners.

Whether or not, the faith-teaching units satisfy the parents of students at the Islamic schools is another issue that is hard to assess. Obviously the answers will vary, as some families seem happy just to have their children learning about their faith in an Islamic environment in addition to studying the normal Australian curriculum, qualifying them for university and professional careers<sup>6</sup>. Those who are dissatisfied may well home school their children or send them overseas to a Muslim majority country to study, but with no figures for this and only anecdotal evidence, it is impossible to assess. It would be an interesting angle to research but very difficult to carry out.

Interviews with *imams* and students indicate that teaching materials are still inadequate for faith teaching units, a point made by other commentators like Saeed<sup>7</sup>. Most students could not recall where their texts had been published but *imams* agreed that the teaching material did come from overseas and was often inappropriate, as it did not relate to an Australian context. At primary school level, simple teaching material is being put together by some schools and circulated to other schools too, but putting together material for high school and Year 11-12 students is a lengthy and complicated matter. The success of the VCE unit on Texts and Traditions in Victoria indicates that it can be done with a lot of effort and students appear to appreciate it, particularly when it counts as a pre-tertiary

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<sup>6</sup> The only research specifically on this topic was that done by Noha Sanjakdar in relation to what was then King Khalid Islamic College in Melbourne in 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, p. 154.

qualifying subject. At least one *imam* spoke wistfully of wishing he could be given time to prepare suitable texts for Australian students but at the moment, the schools have other priorities, and releasing staff to write textbooks is an expensive and time consuming process. This is an area where local education authorities could assist, as suggested by at least one school, but again, with shortage of funding, it is not viewed as a priority.

A related concern, raised earlier by Donohue Clyne, is to what extent there is a wider Islamically-focused curriculum in addition to the faith-teaching units. She argued that without such a curriculum, the schools are unable to ensure an Islamic identity.<sup>8</sup> In addition, she points out that some Islamic schools are ignoring the need to develop an Islamic curriculum because of the complex process of meeting government requirements for registration so that Islamic schools are not significantly different from government schools.<sup>9</sup> This situation does not seem to have changed in recent years but part of the problem is that in most schools around half the staff are not Muslims, and even Muslim staff do not always have the adequate background knowledge to enrich the state curriculum, for example with regard to the Muslim history of Australia.<sup>10</sup> In addition, most Islamic schools do not have well funded libraries or trained library staff that could prioritise obtaining suitably relevant books and audio-visual resources to back up other materials. Given the slowly increasing number of books coming out on the Muslim history of Australia, it would be useful to see more of these publications in the libraries available for staff and students. However it should be noted that this issue of adequate library facilities and trained staff is not restricted to the Islamic schools in Australia.

The issue of untrained teachers of faith units has come to the fore more generally in Australia since 2006 when the Howard government set up the National School Chaplaincy Programme. Today there are almost 3,000 such chaplains in Australia's schools, including imams who qualify as part of this programme. The issue is contentious because it is unclear what the chaplains are supposed to do but they are not supposed to proselytise or offer psychological counselling. Critics<sup>11</sup> say they are doing both as most of the chaplains come

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<sup>8</sup> Donohue Clyne, *The political framework to the establishment of Islamic schools: conflicts between curriculum and identity*, p 17

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> This was a concern discussed with Humanities teachers in all school interviews, especially given that very few of them were Muslims.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Stewart, 'Blurring of church and state', London, *The Guardian Weekly*, 4 May 2012, p. 20.

from the evangelical side of Christianity and like the voluntary teachers of religion coming into the schools, they are not trained as teachers. While this does not apply to the imams in Islamic schools, and the programme does assist with funding for them, the wider application of the programme does raise serious questions about Australia's historic tradition of separation of church and state. Several teachers interviewed said that their school would benefit from having a counsellor, particularly for refugee students, who often suffered from trauma, but again this comes down to costs and few of the Islamic schools could afford a full time counsellor, even when the need was recognised. Psychologist Monique Toohey, with ten years of experience working in and consulting in Melbourne's Islamic schools, spoke on the need for counsellors in Islamic schools at a seminar organised by the ACIES in Melbourne<sup>12</sup>. The ACIES followed this up with a submission to the federal government to support the idea of a Muslim student welfare conference, but given the trauma that many first generation Muslim students have been through before arriving in Australia, this is clearly an area that needs far more practical support.

The Values debate continues, with critics continuing to argue that Australian values are based on the Judeo-Christian tradition or just Christianity, while Muslim values are somehow different. The debate has now broadened out, as in Europe, to the wider issue of multiculturalism, but again the underlying issue remains 'Muslims.' This is one area where the evidence from every interview conducted is quite clear. Students and teachers see no incompatibility between Australian values and Muslim values, although as some students interviewed pointed out, they may use different words or expressions. This fits in with a recent wider survey carried out by Jakubowicz, Collins and Chafic, who reported 'that young Muslim Australians overwhelmingly identify as Australians, and as Muslim, and as coming from a particular ethnic background'.<sup>13</sup> Older students and staff interviewed in the Islamic schools were understandably cynical about the politics of the Australian values debate with a number making some penetrating observations, at times almost humorous<sup>14</sup>. Some could be quite articulate in defining what their faith stood for when asked questions in

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<sup>12</sup> Monique Toohey, *Building the Foundations of a School Counseling Department*, ACIES Newsletter, 2008, p.5

<sup>13</sup> A. Jakubowicz, J. Collins and W. Chafic, 'Young Australian Muslims: social ecology and cultural capital,' in Mansouri & Marotta (eds), *Muslims in the West and the challenges of belonging*, 2012, p.43.

<sup>14</sup> Such as the students referred to earlier, who asked whether drinking vast amounts of alcohol or men going topless on the beach were Australian values

dialogue exchanges with non-Muslim students, especially when the hard questions got asked about terrorism, supporting violence or the position of women.

One possible future area of research which might prove of interest and that I became aware of the need for during my school visits, is the role played by Anglo-Australian converts (or reverts) to Islam, who in a number of cities have played a key role in establishing new Islamic schools or teaching in them. As far as I am aware, no research has been done on how many Australians have converted to Islam or why, although there have been one or two feature articles in the media on the subject, such as Linda Morris's article, 'Converts in the house of the Lord'<sup>15</sup>, where she observes that the rush in Sydney has been led by disillusioned Anglicans and Catholics.

The last part of the research focuses on how the students see themselves in terms of their identity and what they are being prepared for. Again the responses vary, with much depending on how they are taught, whether they have attended other non-Islamic schools as well, their own personal self-confidence and family backgrounds. Most students valued what they learned about their faith in confirming their identity as Muslims in a minority-Muslim society without feeling alienated from the wider society but there is a fine balance. The schools also acted 'as a shelter in a storm' as one parent told Donohoue Clyne<sup>16</sup> and a number of students endorsed this when commenting on the impact of the events of September 2001 on them, especially girls targeted in the community because of their distinctive dress.

In terms of their knowledge of Islam, a significant number of students referred to teaching at home or at the mosque while others said that their parents had sent them to an Islamic school to learn about their faith as they felt they themselves had inadequate knowledge. This was particularly the case where students referred to parents where only one was a Muslim. Some students felt they had been given a good start at school but that they learned more once they got to university and joined the student Islamic societies while others felt confident enough to avoid Muslim groups and reach out to non-Muslims to explain what they believed in and why. Even when students resented some aspects of their school, they still felt that the ethos had helped ground them during their formative years, but clearly there are students who did rebel and in some cases were expelled or just lived double

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<sup>15</sup> Linda Morris, 'Converts in the house of the Lord,' Sydney Morning Herald, 18 November 2003

<sup>16</sup> Donohoue Clyne, unpublished thesis, p. 192.

lives after school. Again this is an area where figures are hard to come by but a number of students referred to this occurring with their peers, part of the tension of living in a predominantly secular society where you need to know why you choose to be different when it comes to observing how the majority live.

Muslim staff interviewed felt that their task was, in the words of one principal, ‘to produce Australian Muslims, not an Australian who is a Muslim.’ They knew that the students would leave school and move into a predominantly secular society, so they wanted them prepared to be part of that society, qualified to succeed but firm in their faith. Some of the most interesting responses came from primary school teachers who knew their students would attend non-Islamic high schools, especially in Sydney. These teachers felt that by Year Six, the students had a basic Islamic knowledge which was adequate and would enable them to cope as they reached the difficult teenage years and beyond.

Another area noted by Donohue Clyne over a decade ago remains an issue, the problem of improved coordination amongst the schools.<sup>17</sup> While some progress has been made through the ACIES, now ISAA, a number of schools are still not members and national meetings can be expensive and time consuming in a country the size of Australia. New schools still tend to be set up by different organisations or individuals, reflecting the diversity of Islam in Australia, and while the six AFIC schools are still the most widely coordinated, there have been a number of funding scandals gleefully seized on by a hostile media<sup>18</sup>. AFIC itself has also had a number of organisational problems in recent years. Once again, these reflect ethnic diversity within the Muslim community as well as personalities.

What is still difficult to gauge is whether or not an Australian Muslim identity is beginning to emerge and whether the Islamic schools are playing any role in this. Several people interviewed spoke hopefully of this possibility and Akbarzadeh expressed this ideal over a decade ago, when he wrote about his hope that eventually an Australian Muslim community will emerge that transcends ethnic divides. He did however concede that at the time the ideal was far from the current daily experience of Muslims in Australia.<sup>19</sup>

There is no doubt that the schools have greatly improved since the first two began in 1983 but basic problems still remain such as organisational issues, funding, getting planning

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<sup>17</sup> Donohue Clyne, ‘Educating Muslim Children in Australia’ in Saeed & Akbarzadeh (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Such as the articles on three Sydney schools in *The Australian* in April 2012, although it was not only Islamic schools that were involved, despite the headlines.

<sup>19</sup> S. Akbarzadeh. ‘Unity or Fragmentation’ in Saeed & Akbarzadeh (eds), *Muslim Communities in Australia*, p. 229.

permission, the possibility of training imams in Australia, developing Australian teaching materials and overall coordination to work on a common Islamic educational framework. The schools are aware of them and the evolution of the Catholic schools makes it possible to feel optimistic that a similar process could make the Islamic schools just as much part of the Australian landscape, though hopefully over a shorter time span than 150 years.

Overall, it has been difficult to ascertain any definite pattern to the development of the schools as their diversity makes this difficult without more in-depth and wider research, although general trends are there to be observed as in the approach to faith teaching, although schools vary in terms of how much time they devote to comparative religion.

All indications are that while a number of improvements are still to be made, in most areas there is an awareness of these needs. At the moment, this becomes a question of priorities, given that the Islamic schools are still at a relatively early stage of development. Overall, however, I feel it is safe to assert that what the schools seek to create are young men and women who are very much Australian Muslims rather than Muslims in Australia. While this may not apply to the whole Muslim community in Australia, as far as the Islamic schools go, it is encouraging to see them in the vanguard of creating a distinct Australian Muslim identity that will hopefully emerge in the years to come.

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## GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS USED IN THE THESIS.

**It should be pointed out that these terms are sometimes spelled differently in various publications, due to the problem involved with transliterating Arabic words into English.**

**Ahmadis.** Followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) who founded the movement in 1889, in what was then British India. He saw himself, not as a prophet but as the Mahdi, and the 2-3 million members of his sect in Pakistan were declared to be non-Muslims in 1974, although they regard themselves as Muslims.

**Aya(t).** A verse or verses in the Qur'an

**Barelvis.** The name derives from an Indian Muslim scholar, Ahmed Raza Khan Bareilvi (1856-1921). Its Sunni Muslim followers seek to defend more traditional Islamic beliefs and practices, often associated with Sufism, and in opposition to the more conservative Deobandis and Wahhabis.

**Burqini (or burkini).** A type of women's swimsuit designed by Lebanese-Australian Aheda Zanetti under the company name Ahiida. The suit covers the whole body except the face, hands and feet (enough to preserve Muslim modesty), while remaining light enough to allow the wearer to swim.

**Deobandis.** Those who subscribe to a conservative school of thought in Sunni Islam, emanating from the seminary established at Deoband in North India in 1866. They represent a reaction to Western culture and domination following the failure of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the collapse of the Mogul Empire. To protect Islam, the founders set up religious schools and centres around India which have profoundly influenced many Islamists today.

**Du'a.** Supplication

**Eid.** Festival. The two main Islamic festivals are the Eid el-Fitr or festival of the breaking of the fast that follows the month of Ramadan and the Eid el-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice, that comes in the twelfth month as part of the annual Hajj.

**Fiq.** "understanding", Islamic jurisprudence.

**Hadith.** Stories relating to the sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed.

**Hafiz.** Someone who knows the Qur'an off by heart.

**Haj.** The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, referred to as the Fifth Pillar of Islam, and now involving 2-3 million people every year.

**Halal.** Permitted, lawful activities.

**Hanafi.** One of the four schools of law in Sunni Islam and the main one referred to in Australian Islamic schools.

**Haram.** What is forbidden.

**Hijab.** Veil or head covering by Muslim women in public, often referred to by girls as the ‘scarf.’

**Hizb ut-Tahrir.** Translates as Party of Liberation. An international Sunni organisation founded in Jerusalem by Palestinian Sheikh Muhammad Taqiuddin al-Nabhani in 1952.

**Imam.** In the Sunni tradition, the one who leads the prayers and gives the Friday sermon. He is also regarded as an authority on Islam. In the Shi’a tradition, the imam has a more authoritative leadership role.

**Iman.** Faith.

**Khalifs.** The khalifa or caliph was the successor of the Prophet and the head of the Muslim community.

**Madrassa(h).** school, but more specifically a school offering religious instruction.

**Muhammadiyah(h).** Muslim reform movement in Indonesia founded in 1912. Today it has around 29 million members and is the second largest Islamic organization in the country. It has built many schools and clinics all over Indonesia.

**Nasheed.** Recitations, sometimes with simple music, sometimes without.

**Niqab.** Covering of the face for Muslim women that only exposes the eyes.

**Rakah.** Movements or positions involved in the five daily prayers.

**Sahaba.** The Companions of the Prophet.

**Salafism.** Members of the Sunni puritanical movement of Salifiyya. The term means followers of the pious ancestors. They want a return to the practice of the salaf al-salih (or righteous ancestors), the first three generations of Muslims in the seventh century. They have a strict interpretation of the Qur’an and the sunna, and like the Wahhabis, are hostile to the Shi’a and Sufis. The term originated in the nineteenth century and the movement was the forerunner of the Muslim Brotherhood, originally seen as a means to answer the challenge of the West. Today it means more of a way to ignore the West and is associated with a conservative programme of purifying Islam from cultural influences, both from traditional Muslim societies as well as the West.

**Shari’a.** Literally ‘the narrow way to the water’ but usually used to refer to the body of Islamic Law that governs individual and social aspects of Muslim life. It is derived mainly from the Qur’an and the hadith.

**Sheikh.** A religious teacher.

**Shi’a.** Party or faction of Ali, a reference to the 10-15% of the world’s Muslims who believe that their source of authority derives from direct descendants of the Prophet through his adopted son, Ali, who married Mohammed’s daughter, Fatima. Ali was the

fourth caliph for Sunni Muslims but after the split following Ali's death, his son, Husayn, was killed at the Battle of Karbala in 680 (Ashura is commemorated in the first month of the Islamic calendar to commemorate this event). Today, Iran is the only Muslim country that is officially Shi'a, while everywhere else, the Shi'a are a minority. The exception more recently is Iraq where 60% of the population are Shi'a but the Sunni have dominated the government in Bagdad, hence the ongoing conflict there.

**Sira or Sirat.** Traditional name for biographies of the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Sufism.** The mystic tradition in Islam.

**Sunnah.** The customs of the Prophet, embodied in the hadith.

**Sunni.** The majority of the world's Muslims, who believed that the caliph or leader of the Umma could be any Muslim who fulfilled the quality of an ideal leader, chosen by the leaders of the community. Other than the question of succession, there are other theological differences.

**Sura.** The name given to the 64 chapters of the Qur'an

**Ulama (or ulema).** Religious scholars.

**Umma.** The universal community of Islam that in theory transcends national boundaries, but there are times when some Muslims are excluded from the *umma* by more orthodox followers of the faith who consider that they are not proper Muslims.

**Wahhabism.** A difficult term to define, but usually used to refer to the followers of a puritanical doctrine of reform and renewal, derived from the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-87) who allied himself with the House of Saud in the eighteenth century. The term was coined by his opponents, as his followers prefer to call themselves Muwahhidun or Unitarians. They are hostile to Shi'a Muslims and Sufis.

**Wakf (Waqf).** Religious endowment or foundation where a steady income is provided for the maintenance of a mosque or hospital or a charitable office of some kind.

**Wudu.** Ablution or washing before prayer. It has to be done in a very specific way to be valid.

**Zakat.** The annual one-fortieth of capital that devout Muslims contribute to the poor or an Islamic cause. In Muslim-majority countries this is organised but in a country like Australia, it is left to individuals how they contribute their zakat.

**Zikr.** The remembrance of the name of Allah through repetitive ritual chanting of the divine names or religious verses intended to cultivate religious experience in Sufi circles

**Zuhur.** Midday prayer.

### Acronyms.

**ACIES.** Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools, which first met in 1993. It changed its name to the Islamic Schools Association of Australia (**ISAA**) in 2010.

**AFIC.** The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, based in Sydney, but with branches in each state.

**GDIS.** Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies.

**HSC.** Higher School Certificate (in NSW)

**NCEIS.** National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies.

**PARED.** Parents for Education. An ‘Other Catholic’ educational network in Sydney, linked with the ultra-conservative Catholic Opus Dei movement.

**IU.** (Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding).

**TE.** Tertiary education.

**VCE.** Victorian Certificate of Education.

## **QUESTIONS.**

**To former students:**

**Date:**

**Subject Name: (to be deleted) .....ID.....**

**Name of interviewer: Peter D. Jones.**

- **Review the participant's rights**
- **Explain that the interview has two parts; Part A is background information and Part B is about their experience as a student at an Islamic School.**

### **Part A. Background Information.**

- 1. Age.**
- 2. Gender.**
- 3. School they attended and years of attendance.**

### **Part B. Semi-structured Interview Questions.**

- 1. (a) What form of Islamic teaching did you undertake while you were at school, (b) in terms of learning about the Qur'an, studying the Arabic language and learning about Islam?**
- 2. (a) How would you describe the teaching of Islam and the teachers of Islam at your school?**

- (b) Could you tell me who taught you these subjects, how they were taught and how qualified you felt your teachers were to teach their subject?**
- 3. Were there opportunities to explore Islamic values and Australian values? Did you feel any discrepancy between the Islamic values you were taught and perceived Australian values?**
  - 4. How do you think Islamic values were transmitted at your school? Tell me about how they were taught, not just in the specific units on Islam, but in other subjects like SOSE or in English texts.**
  - 5. How do you feel about arguments that suggest that attending an Islamic school divides you from other Australian high school students?**
  - 6. Did your school offer opportunities to interact with students of other faiths and did you take part in any such activities?**
  - 7. To what extent and how did you benefit from going to an Islamic school rather than a local state school where there was no faith teaching?**
  - 8. To what extent did your Islamic education help strengthen your faith and prepare you for tertiary studies in Australia?**

## **Questions to Muslim and non-Muslim staff:**

### **Part A. Data.**

- 1. Name**
- 2. Gender**
- 3. School and years you have taught here.**
- 4. Subject you teach.**

### **Part B.**

- 1. Islamic Schools teach the normal curriculum along with units specifically on Islam, Arabic and the Qur'an. Islamic values however permeate the whole of life and learning, so in your experience, how are Islamic values being transmitted in (a) the school's core curriculum (Key Learning Areas); e.g. the SOSE curriculum, especially History, English texts, Music, Mathematics, Art, Science subjects, (b) the hidden curriculum of the school's ethos, e.g. prayer times, assemblies, extra-curricular activities.**
- 2. To what extent do you believe that the teaching of values is an important component of the school's curriculum? Do you believe there is any contradiction between Islamic values and so-called Australian values?**

**Part C. Questions to teachers of the units on Islam (Arabic, the Qur'an, Islam):**

**Data: in addition to above questions;**

- 1. Which subjects do you teach in this unit?**
- 2. Where were you trained to teach this subject?**

**Then;**

- 3. One of the key debates on the nature of Islamic education concerns how units on religion should be taught, through the straightforward transmission of knowledge or taking into account critical views, questions and discussion. In your experience, how has this affected your teaching of Islam?**

## *MUSLIM SCHOOLS' CHARTER*

Based on the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), our College together with other Islamic Schools/ Colleges in Australia declare and affirm the following:

- ◆ We promote peace and understanding through interfaith and intercultural interactions.
- ◆ We teach the children in our schools to be proud Australians and be model citizens, to participate positively in building a prosperous, harmonious and safe society in Australia.
- ◆ We teach the children in our schools to respect the rights of others and to understand the different backgrounds and religions of Australia's multicultural society.
- ◆ We teach our children about the rights of their neighbours and their entitlement to respect, to care and to protect their property and persons.
- ◆ We are committed to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in approaching one another in love and understanding, humility and self-criticism, rationality and reasonability, with open hearts and open minds in the pursuit of peace.
- ◆ We stand against those who preach violence and hatred in the name of any religion, including Islam.
- ◆ We stand against those who preach violence and hatred against Muslims and the religion of Islam.
- ◆ We do not condone the taking of innocent life or the threat of such in order to promote a cause.
- ◆ We reject and condemn all violent acts that target civilians, children, and old people in order to promote a cause because it is against Islamic principles.
- ◆ As Australian citizens or residents of Australia, we stand to defend our country Australia from any form of aggression at all times.
- ◆ We believe that the interest of the Muslim community in Australia can be met through the existing democratic systems of governance.





# VALUES FOR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLING

## Care and Compassion

Care for self and others

## Doing Your Best

Seek to accomplish something worthy and admirable, try hard, pursue excellence

## Fair Go

Pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society

## Freedom

Enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship free from unnecessary interference or control, and stand up for the rights of others

## Honesty and Trustworthiness

Be honest, sincere and seek the truth

## Integrity

Act in accordance with principles of moral and ethical conduct, ensure consistency between words and deeds

## Respect

Treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person's point of view

## Responsibility

Be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and to civic life, take care of the environment

## Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion

Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others

CHARACTER IS DESTINY

— George Eliot