GLOBALISED MUSLIM YOUTH:
A STUDY OF SINGAPORE AND SYDNEY

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BA HONS, M SOC SCI (SOCIOLGY)

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Statement of Authenticity

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir
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Abstract

This thesis is a sociological study of Muslim youth culture in two globalised cities in the Asia Pacific, Singapore and Sydney. This research compares two groups of youth living in secular multicultural cities, across three aspects of popular culture: hip-hop music, tattooing and cultural consumption. The two case studies illuminate a range of attitudes adopted by young Muslims, which demonstrates strategies employed to reconcile popular youth culture with piety.

The research explores the extent to which globalisation results in a convergence of popular culture among young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney. It argues that while globalisation does bring about a certain degree of convergence, different state and societal structures in place play a significant role in bringing about different manifestations of Muslim youth culture. As an extension, the thesis explores how different forms of religious management by the authoritarian and liberal models of the Singapore and Sydney states respectively function as crucial mediators of popular Muslim youth culture.

This thesis argues against the conventional view of the cultural alienation of minority Muslim youth that promotes the idea of a clash of civilisations and the radicalisation of Muslim youth thesis. Rather, it posits that global cultural flows and forms of piety interact with locally promulgated forms of popular culture, which Muslim youth partake at varying degrees. The dynamic nature of Muslim youth culture is set against attempts by the state, religious leaders and other gatekeepers of particular popular cultural domains who seek to maintain a “puritan” and “contained” view of youth culture. Hence, these demonstrate a plurality of religious rationalities amidst an individualisation of views by young Muslims. These result in some young Muslims existing in the interstices of local youth culture that increasingly conflicts with the globalising and multicultural realities of youth in Singapore and Sydney.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Global events such as September 11 and an increasing religiosity across the Muslim world have focussed the attention of politicians, scholars and the media on the role played by young Muslims in their countries. If we want to imagine the social conditions of Muslims a few decades from now, it is only logical to undertake a study of Muslim youth today. Muslim youth are not only vital to the sustainability of states, kingdoms and republics in Muslim majority countries. With the rise of Islamophobia in particular, the state of Muslim youth also serves as a litmus test to the success of forms of multiculturalism and minority living in many states around the world. Hence, it is of great importance that we analyse how Muslim youth themselves respond to these global processes in the context of their specific localities.

This thesis is a sociological study of popular Muslim youth culture in two globalised cities in the Asia-Pacific - Singapore and Sydney. Not only are these cities economically dynamic centres, they are also the sites of contestations where the contradictions and paradoxes of modern-day living are most stark. Popular youth culture provides the lens to understand the lived experiences of these young Muslims within secular, multicultural settings. Through an examination of Muslim youth culture, this thesis aims to build upon, among others, the works of Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) to better understand the implications of globalisation upon cities, in a way that not only emphasises the “flattening of the world” but also the differential paths that cities follow in the process of globalisation. The thesis argues that different forms of social cultural actors function as crucial mediators of popular Muslim youth culture. In the process, the thesis illuminates the range of attitudes adopted by young Muslims which demonstrate the strategies they employ to reconcile popular youth culture with piety.
The central research question of this study is to what extent does globalisation result in a convergence of popular culture among young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney? Through examining the engagement of Muslim youth in three aspects of popular culture; hip-hop music, tattooing and cultural consumption, the thesis will address a set of corollary questions:

- How does Muslim youth reconcile competing ethnic and religious identities with secular, national identities and other sources of selfhood through their participation in popular culture?
- How do the state and other social actors interact with global cultural flows to mediate cultural homogenisation and shape different manifestations of Muslim youth culture?

This research is set against the numerous studies done on Muslim youth. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, Literature and Method, a number of dominant patterns emerge out of these studies. Firstly, as with many studies on youth in general, studies of Muslim youth have predominantly taken on a “social problem perspective”, centring their analysis on issues of juvenile delinquency. Secondly, a large body of existing literature emphasises the formation of Muslim youth identity in Muslim majority countries and diasporic communities in the West. These studies examine young people’s struggles to reconcile their evolving identity amidst constraints imposed by their local communities and the global cultural flows brought about by migration, as well as the demands of living as a minority in a “wired society” (Gasser, 2008). The third approach analyses the youth from a social movement perspective, looking at the ideologies and the social conditions that motivate youth mobilisation. A common thread that runs through many of these studies is the idea of the “cultural alienation” of Muslim youth (Schulz and Hammer, 2003; Ayubi, 1991; Demant, 2006; Mastors and Defenbaugh, 2007; Harmsen, 2008).

In this light, the thesis will also address the question of whether Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney are experiencing forms of alienation which affect their
capacity for social participation. This study will depart from the cultural alienation thesis that pervades scholarly works and popular media. The concept of cultural alienation has been advanced to refer to an individual’s rejection or sense of detachment from dominant social norms and values (Cozzarelli and Karafa, 1998; Schacht, 1970). It is characterised by a feeling of estrangement and an absence of a sense of belonging (Bernard, Gebauer and Maio, 2006; Nicassio, 1983). This corresponds with Seeman’s (1959) conceptualisation of alienation as being demarcated by five key characteristics, namely: the sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement, in addition to a more general sense of alienation from the values of mainstream society. Many studies of cultural alienation have been devoted to the youth (Klomegah, 2006; Suarez, Fowers, Garwood and Szapocznik, 1997). Among the causes of cultural alienation that have been identified include low socio-economic status, limited/restricted social interactions with the dominant group, inability to comprehend and navigate mainstream society, for example, due to inability to speak the local vernacular, and delayed sense of belonging can lead to cultural alienation (Nicassio, 1983).

In its most severe form, cultural alienation is purported to lead to cultural amnesia for those who are culturally alienated as the individual severs all connection to their history and cultural traditions (Martin and Martin, 1995). At times, those who are culturally alienated are aware of their heritage and traditions but instead choose not to practice them as the images that the individual obtains about his cultural group have been distorted in order to meet the political and socio-economic interests of the culturally dominant group (Ani, 1994; Kambon, 1992). These lead to a distorted and uncomplimentary image of the individual’s cultural self (Akbar, 1996; Asante, 1991) and a sense of cultural self-denigration that arises as one constantly measures oneself in the image of the group that culturally dominates and controls one’s range of interpretations (Akbar, 1996; Fanon, 1961; Karenga, 1993). Although some minority youth may consciously reject aspects of the dominant or traditional values and beliefs, they also may not have access to the resources to master or feel part of their
new society. Hence, a significant aspect of cultural alienation for minority youth is their aspiration to excessively identify with the dominant group’s cultural norms (Akbar, 1991; Ghee, 1990; Oliver, 1989). I will advocate that while alienation does exist in areas such as economic life and politics, it is often contested in the domain of popular youth culture. Furthermore, I argue that such a thesis is often used as a discursive strategy to preserve the sanctity of the dominant popular culture from the contamination of Muslim youth devices. Viewed from an everyday and ethnographic perspective, popular youth culture acts as a mediating element in the Muslim youth’s ability to gain acceptance in mainstream society.

Global cultural flows and forms of piety interact with locally promulgated forms of popular culture which Muslim youth partake at varying degrees. Because of these interactions, it is imperative to examine the dynamic nature of Muslim youth culture against attempts by the state, religious leaders and other gatekeepers of particular popular cultural domains to maintain a “puritan” and “contained” view of youth culture. As the thesis will show, some young Muslims exist in the interstices of local youth culture which increasingly come into conflict with the globalising and multicultural realities of Singapore and Sydney. This results in a plurality of religious rationalities amidst the emergence of an individualisation of views by young Muslims.

**Rethinking Muslim Youth Culture, Globalisation and Piety**

The two factors that one needs to take note of in studying popular culture and urban Muslim minority youth is that it is both globalised and complex. For the former, one has to be aware of the many ways globalisation has been understood. It has been argued that globalisation has led to convergence and homogenisation. Globalisation has been termed “Coca-colonization” (Hannerz, 1992) and “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 1993 and 2001) to connote its homogenising tendencies that far outweigh diversity. Ritzer argues that with McDonaldisation, a particular variant of rationality emerges which results in a homogenisation of local cultures along the lines of American trends. Another proponent of the cultural
homogenisation thesis, Serge Latouche, suggests that “planetary uniformity” will arise out of a “standardisation of lifestyle” along Anglo-American values and norms in the midst of a relentless media push towards a consumerist culture (1996:3). A number of scholars continue to equate globalisation with Americanisation as evidenced in the interweaving of the global “lead” (American) society with its “lead ideology” (capitalism) (Bonnett, 2006). The concept of “grobalisation” has also been put forth by Ritzer in his book The Globalization of Nothing (2004). Grobalisation (from the words grow and globalisation) refers to the imperialistic ambitions of nation-states, corporations and other institutions to impose themselves on other geographic areas in the interest of power and profits (Ryan, 2007: 2022-3). Hence, Ritzer (2010) later on argues that grobalisation – comprising the three sub-processes of capitalism, Americanisation and McDonaldisation – brings about a globalised spread of “nothingness”, that is a globalisation of empty forms devoid of distinctive content.

On the other hand, Roland Robertson (1992) posits that global cultural flows tend to reinvigorate local cultural niches. Robertson sees a pluralisation of culture as localities respond uniquely to global forces. This results in “glocalisation”, a complex exchange between the global and the local characterised by cultural borrowing. This process of cultural mixing is also often referred to as “creolisation” and “hybridisation”. With respect to youth culture, “hybridisation” can be defined as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (Rowe and Schelling, 1991:231). Along this line, Appadurai (1996) warns that “hybridisation” cannot be understood as the recombination or cultural mixing of two or more equal forms. In this thesis, I put forth that national cultures are much stronger than people tend to imagine and that one of the unexpected features of the global age is the robust nature of local and national cultures.

This thesis follows Nayak (2003) in analysing young people's differential responses to, and “embodied performances” of global youth culture. Nayak contends that space, globalisation and race should be seen as primary thinking tools for
rethinking youth identity in a globalised world. Further, one should transcend the documentation of youth activities to include an examination of the global movement of people and information that transform the geographical landscapes of cultural and spatial understandings, the levels and forms of cultural, local, or global conflict experienced by young people, as well as the impact these have on youth identity formations. One of the significance of Nayak’s research is that it presents a challenge to prior interpretations of youth culture as either merely in a context of its indignance of the dominant culture or as a form of aggressive resistant masculinity. On the contrary, Nayak's argument of youth culture as operating in relation to other forms of social or global conflict and embodied in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways illuminates a more nuanced appreciation of the practices of popular youth culture.

The onslaught of globalisation has also caused serious implications not only to the practices of governance but also on the body of theories that seek to explain the process of governance. For Pieterse (2009), the current wave of globalisation has brought about a relative weakening of the nation-state economically and culturally. The rise of the global village has eroded the power and autonomy of nation-states as economies are increasingly globalised. The view that policy choices are limited and some kind of convergence is inevitable is based on a perception that globalisation leads to a “hollowing out of the national state” (Jessop, 2002). In many writings on globalisation, there is a tendency to side step the nation-state all too hastily as if it had minimal function in the contemporary world (Dissanayake, 2006:41). Globalisation theorists tend to ignore the ability of the state to shape globalisation and the challenges unleashed by new global forces (Ripsman and Paul, 2010:174). Ong perceptively observes, “When an approach to cultural globalisation seeks merely to sketch out universalising trends rather than deal with actual existing structures of power and situated cultural processes, the analysis cries out for a sense of political economy and situated ethnography. What are the mechanisms of power that enable the mobility, as well as the localisation and disciplining, of diverse populations within these transnational systems? How are cultural flows and human
imagination conditioned and shaped within these new relations of global inequalities?” (Ong, 1999:11).

The second critical factor is the sheer complexity which lies in the manifestation of piety within popular youth culture. Piety needs to be understood not merely in the form of a strict adherence to orthodox interpretations of religious scriptures. Although many Muslims would regard these expressions of “piety” as problematic as they appear to subvert the nature of personal piety and more conventional interpretations of religiosity, it is imperative to grasp how piety is redefined in new contexts and spaces. Popular youth culture thus offers the prospects for discussion and discourse that may transcend the official culture. The everyday individual/group and local/global conversations provide the opportunities to bypass and challenge the traditional gatekeepers of Muslim orthodoxy. Through ethnographic reflections on the participation of young Muslims in popular culture, this thesis documents the youth’s self-descriptions about their attitudes toward piety.

Islam is a galvanising force with its own set of laws and restrictions maintaining a hegemonic hold upon the Muslim community (Al-Qaradawi, 1994). However, it is immaterial whether the shariah is implemented as the official code of law. It is diffused throughout society rather than centralised in a special institution and the sentiment to which the penal law corresponds is imminent in all consciousness. The shariah exists in the collective consciousness of Muslims. More importantly, once the religion has been internalised, we can see the overriding influence of the social over that of the religious (Kamaludeen, 2007).

The expressions and performances of religiosity in popular youth culture can be termed as acts of piety (Turner, 2008). In the thesis, I investigate how acts of piety in the fields of hip-hop, tattooing and cultural consumption are defined and employed by these young Muslims as an expression as well as a way of cultivating their piety and identity. Acts of piety may involve bodily practices related to diet, conduct and clothing. It is through such practices that one’s religious identity is expressed. Acts of piety are partly a creation of modern times, where religious identities are
becoming more critical and problematic (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009:23-24). Turner (2011: 289) contends that the modernisation and the globalisation of the everyday world are expressed through these acts of piety. In the context of popular youth culture, this has the propensity to create post-traditional lifestyles in competition with the religious laity. Such practices of “piety” reflect the agency of social actors to construct their understandings of religiosity. As such, in examining the relationship between popular youth culture and religion, it is pertinent to note that the latter is often not the same as the traditional religions they hark back to. Several factors can be said to have contributed to this confusion.

First of all, as Wilfred Smith (1983) argues, the problem with much scholarly study of religion, especially in the modern West, is the taking of religious practices to be fixed, unchanging forms. Working under such assumptions would lead researchers to miss out on the cumulative and developing nature of “religious traditions”. Therefore, the re-emergence of the centrality of religion in the lives of young Muslims does not necessarily equate to the exalted position of the “papacy” and the religious literati. The ubiquitous nature of Islam in popular youth culture is in fact an extension of the democratisation of Islam that began with a crisis of religious authority (Turner, 2007). As Beckford puts it, religion today is better thought of as “a cultural resource… than as a social institution”. The decline of the familial, communal and organisational foundations of religion as a result of living in a globalised world has created a situation that although “religious and spiritual forms of sentiment, belief and action have survived as relatively autonomous resources… retain[ing] the capacity to symbolize… ultimate meaning, infinite power, supreme indignation and sublime compassion”, they now have “come adrift from [their] former points of social anchorage or ideal: not just organisations with specifically religious objectives” and as such “they can be deployed in the service of virtually any interest-group or ideal: not just organisations with specifically religious objectives” (Beckford, 1992:22-23).

As the thesis will demonstrate, the sphere of popular Muslim youth culture is also characterised by the deregulation of religion and a de-dogmatisation factor. We
are now living in an era in which religious institutions such as mosques as well as religious orientations or hierarchies have lost their monopoly on distributing the religious “product”. The idea that “elders” form the custodians and preservers of religion is increasingly indefensible as the youth actively partake in the re-interpretation of Islam. This thesis takes the stand that there has been a general shift from the intellectual doctrinal structure and the institutional derivations of religion to a more existential and pragmatic approach in Muslim communities in global cities such as Singapore and Sydney. Contemporary Muslim youth yearn to make their own choices, or in some cases, choices they are led to think are their own. Senghaas (2002) posits that whenever an encounter between modernity and tradition takes place, there is also a need for innovation. This thesis examines how the manifestation of Islam that is fused into popular youth culture departs from their classical or traditional expressions. It will also show that although this is inadvertently characterised by a blurring of the sacred and the profane, it does not necessarily signal a loss of religiosity.

The second reason for this complexity stems from the inadequacy of present scholarly works on the relationships between modernisation, globalisation and Islam in explaining the manifestations of contemporary Muslim youth culture. For instance, Olivier Roy’s conception of a globalised Islam (2004), where migrant Muslims in Western societies are increasingly turning to Islamic ideals as they are deterritorialised and deculturalised from their historical roots, has its limitations. Firstly, I contend that the process of the deterritorialisation of Islam is also relevant for native Muslims as religion is increasingly de-regionalised in a globalised world. Gone were the days when one can associate a particular religion with a specific geographical area or break them down into various “spheres of influence”, for example Christianity in Europe and North America, Islam in the Middle East and Indonesia, and the Hindus in the subcontinent of India. This has ceased to be true. A key outcome has been that of religious pluralism. One can no longer take for granted the religious identity of an ethnic group with the rise of categories such as Chinese Christians, American Buddhists and British Muslims.
Secondly, whilst it is true that Muslim migrants are physically detached from their countries of origin, the idea of belongingness to a given locality or space is still central to migrant and native Muslims, both from a top-down and bottom-up perspective. With the former, the state’s efforts at engineering ideal forms of Singaporean or Sydney Muslim youth identities can be seen as attempts at setting perimeters within which particular youth culture are allowed to thrive. The latter refers to the sense of identity Muslims would attach, not just to their country of residence but often also to particular districts and localities they originated from. As the thesis will demonstrate, these attachments are often revealed and arrived at in manners that directly contest official state initiatives.

The other body of scholarly works relates to theories of modernisation. Modernisation — a concept that is linked to globalisation— is not necessarily identical to secularisation. Proponents of the religious resurgence thesis can be traced to the 1970s, marked by Harvey Cox (1981)’s turnaround which reflected a shift in academic thinking. Cox describes what has been termed as “a tidal change in human spirituality” describing how religion has metamorphosised since the 1970s. He argues against the notion that modernity would eventually lead to a secularisation of society. This, according to Cox is untrue for the reason that modernity has been a contributory factor to the crystallisation of Islamic orthodoxy among many Muslims. Religious lines and boundaries defined by the Enlightenment thinkers, such as the separation between the private and public morality, religion and science, amongst many others, have now been redrawn. Gilles Kepel concurs with this argument, in his book The Revenge of God. He notes that around 1970s the whole process of modernisation “went into reverse” (1994:2). The trend of religious reform was no longer to modernise Islam but to Islamise modernity. This has led to a re-education of Islam amongst an increasing number of Muslims. Two groups have played instrumental roles as the main proponents of this re-education process. The first was the Arabic-speaking and the religious-educated group, and the second are youth educated in English and their native languages. These youth are active on both the local and global fronts. The two groups are not necessarily mutually in support of
each other. In fact, new evidence points towards elements of conflict between them (Reeve, 1996:171). Hence, to conclude that there exist a singular variant of religiosity and a monolithic re-education of Islam among today’s youth would be equally misleading.

Religious rigour has always been associated with the uneducated and the rural (King, Elder and Whitbeck, 1997, Krauss, Azimi, Turiman, Sidek, Rumaya, Jamiah, Khairul, Hasnan and Azma, 2006). What is counter intuitive is that Islam flourished better among those who lead relatively secure lives. This is evident by the tendency for dakwah (missionary) activities to be best received in urban centres with a large presence of educated youth. Jose Casanova (1994) argued a strong case for the deprivatisation of religion with his analysis centering on the politicised nature of religion. A study of Muslim youth and popular culture allows us to wholly appreciate the deprivatisation of religion in the modern globalised world. It demonstrates the complexity of the process of deprivatising religion and questions liberal and secularist claims that religion in the modern world is and ought to remain exclusively a private affair. This is unanticipated because as early as forty years ago, scholars delving into religious studies were still deeply entrenched in the myth that modernity, progress as well as the notion of science, technology and rationality will gradually overcome superstition and spirituality. How does one reconcile the fact that secularism demands a person to shed his religious identity once he enters the public domain? This study will show that the division between the private and public sphere is not at all clear-cut. Concerns that used to be addressed in the comforts of the private sphere such as issues pertaining to identity, moral values and the family are increasingly becoming themes of debate in a globalised arena. Hence, a study of urban, cosmopolitan and developed centres becomes necessary. To be sure, they are also the sites of struggle between piety and the dominant narratives of youth culture. It is therefore imperative to develop a framework to analyse the ironies, paradox and contradictions of this collision.
Research Case: Why Singapore and Sydney?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A) Grounds for Comparison</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Sydney</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Highly urban globalised cities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Minority Status of Muslim Population</td>
<td>15% (450,000)</td>
<td>3.4% (163,392)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Economic Background</td>
<td>Mostly Lower Working Class</td>
<td>Mostly Lower Working Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Official policy of secularism and multiculturalism</td>
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| (B) Acknowledged Differences                                                               |                            |                          |
| 1. Characteristics of Muslim Population                                                    |                            |                          |
| - Ethnicity                                                                               | Mostly Malays              | Diverse                 |
| - Migration                                                                               | Mostly natives             | Mostly 2nd generation    |
| - Educational Level                                                                       | Below national average     | Above national average   |
| 2. State Management                                                                       |                            |                          |
| - Politics                                                                               | Authoritarian              | Liberal                  |
| - Press                                                                                  | Regulated                  | Free press               |
| - Military                                                                               | Conscription               | No conscription          |

Table 1: Comparison between Singapore and Sydney

In this study on Muslim youth culture and globalisation, the case studies of Singapore and Sydney are chosen for three key reasons. Firstly, in current times, Singapore and Sydney are ranked two of the most globalised cities in the world. Measuring the cities’ influence on integration with global markets, culture and innovation, the Global Cities Index 2010 conducted by Foreign Policy, A.T. Kearney and The Chicago Council on Global Affairs places both Singapore and Sydney in the 8th and 9th positions respectively. This report corroborates with the 2008 findings of the Globalisation and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network group. To add, the 2010 KOF Index of Globalisation which ranks countries according to their degree of globalisation, global connectivity, integration and interdependence of the economic, social, cultural, political, technological and ecological spheres places Singapore and Australia in the seventeenth and nineteenth positions respectively, ahead of other cities in the Asia Pacific region by a considerable distance. Australia and Singapore
also share a common British colonial heritage and have come to develop similar institutions, albeit with some differences, such as a common law system, an overtly parliamentary system and an economy driven primarily on free-market capitalism.

Secondly, as this thesis particularly intends to analyse two cities in the Asia Pacific region, the significant Muslim population in Singapore and Sydney also makes the choice of comparison an ideal one. More importantly, the two cases were chosen due to the minority status of the Muslim populations in both cities. “Minority” in the sociological sense not only denotes a numerical inferiority but also connotes forms of marginalisation from mainstream society. As a case in point, Muslim minorities in both cities are economically depressed. The fact that both social groups find themselves, in the main, to be of the lower working class is important for a few reasons. The first reason stems from the common assumption that economic alienation leads to social alienation (Galabuzi, 2006; Gough, Eisenschitz and McCulloch, 2006). Secondly, this similarity is interesting because while the Singapore Muslim youth is lagging in some ways behind the other ethnic groups in terms of academic achievements, the educational level of Muslim youth in Australia is higher than the national average. The third and most significant reason is the different forms of solidarity groups – religious, trans-ethnic, transnational - that young Muslims in both cities are observed to be forming along the idea of a minority. This is apparent as the thesis discusses the appropriation of hip-hop music, tattooing and cultural consumption in the following chapters.

The considerable difference in the number of Muslims in the two cities does not pose a problem in the comparative analysis. In making sense of the Muslim presence in the two cities, one needs to go beyond looking at data based on absolute numbers. The “actual” presence of Muslims in both Singapore and Sydney is greatly impacted by the different styles of state management of their respective demography. In Singapore, the Muslims are spread out because of the ethnic quota imposed upon their residential choices. On the other hand, whilst the Muslim population in Sydney only makes up 3.4% of the total population, the state’s non-interventionist policy allows for significant concentrations of its Muslim population in particular suburbs.
like Auburn, Bankstown and Lakemba. Hence, an understanding of the minority status and youth culture cannot be divorced from the different styles of management of the two governments in determining the life choices of their people.

The third reason for the comparison is that Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney are faced with issues associated with being members of a minority community struggling to create a niche for themselves in a multicultural, secular environment. Both Australia and Singapore adopt a policy of multiculturalism in managing their diverse populations. As will be further elaborated in Chapter 3, whilst there is a scholarly consensus that Singapore’s multiculturalism has been characterised as a means of social control and a method of disciplining difference (Purushotam, 1997; Hefner, 2001; Chua, 2003 and 2009; Goh, Gabrielpillai, Holden and Khoo, 2009), Australia’s current practice of multiculturalism is often described as one in crisis (Ang and Stratton, 2001; Galligan and Roberts, 2008; Markus, 2008; Smolicz and Secombe 2009). Scholars such as Ghassan Hage, Jon Stratton and Ien Ang have argued that multiculturalism is used “as a strategy to reproduce the cultural hegemony of the white majority” (Baringhorst, 2010:71). To go further, Poynting and Mason (2008) posit that the state’s intrusion into the cultural and religious realms in their management of Muslims in the post 9/11 era has amounted to a retreat from its initial interpretation of multiculturalism. Seen in this light, the predicament of the two minority groups are analogous. As secularisation in Singapore is intricately bound with the issue of Sinicisation, young Muslims in Sydney have to negotiate their everyday lives against the expectations of a white Christian Anglo-Saxon majority. However, as this chapter will further discuss, even though there are indications that Australia seems to be adopting a more proactive role in their management of Muslims, on the whole the state still takes a liberal approach in contrast to the paternalistic and legalistic stance of their Singaporean counterparts.

Given this context, the thesis will discuss the dialectical tensions between the efforts of the two governments to maintain a secular environment and that of a rise of religiosity amongst Muslims in Singapore and Sydney. Multiculturalism and secularism exist in perpetual paradox. Multiculturalism differs from pluralism in that
it is not a mosaic society, but implies a level of social interaction. In order for both to co-exist, there needs to be a public sphere which relegates the practice of religion to the private domain. It has been argued that for the various groups to exist harmoniously there has to be the creation of a common space. This is where I argue that multiculturalism is suspended. However, today, we are seeing a process whereby the public sphere and institutions of secularism such as schools and the capitalist working environment are being de-secularised. The common space is being contested on an everyday level. Rules and regulations which curtail the physical display of piety are constantly transcended.

Whilst laying down the basis for comparison, this thesis will not ignore the differences between the two cities. As the table above shows, there are significant differences in the characteristics of Muslim populations in Singapore and Sydney - the two key ones being the characteristics of their Muslim population and the nature of state management. The paragraphs that follow will discuss these differences and analyse their impact, if any, on the Singapore and Sydney analysis.

Youth in the two cities are somewhat different in terms of demography and history. Singapore’s Muslim youth are mainly Malays whilst the Sydney Muslim youth are quite ethnically diverse. This is reflected in the ethnic composition of the respondents in this thesis (see Annex). However, this study does not conceive ethnicity to significantly affect the comparative analysis. During the course of fieldwork, it was found that both second generation young Muslim migrants in Sydney and native Muslims in Singapore had overwhelmingly downplayed the importance and function of ethnic culture and the tradition of their parents in their everyday lives. Both sets of young Muslims state that they see themselves primarily as Muslims and Australian/Singaporean above their respective ethnic affiliations. In this aspect, the findings of this research on young Muslims are somewhat similar to the assertions made by Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005) who studied the social construction of local belonging and its connections to globalisation as revealed by the social practices, relationships, and discourses of their research subjects within cities near the larger English district of Manchester. They assert that residential space
is a key arena from which people define their social position. Places serve as sites chosen by particular social groups to announce their identities, with elective belonging used as a strategy to define personal history. Identities are developed through the networked geography of places articulated together.

Linked to the issue of ethnic composition of Muslim youth in both cities is the fact that youth in Sydney is primarily made up of second generation Muslims whilst most Muslims are the indigenous people of Singapore. On the whole, the 20th century saw waves of Muslim immigration to Australia. Muslims came from Turkey, Albania, Lebanon, and the former Yugoslavia amongst others. Many moved to Australia to escape the political and social uncertainties back home. Nonetheless, Sydney’s cultural diversity, compared to the migrants’ native countries, may present different challenges and experiences for minority youth. According to the 2006 Australian census, there are 340,400 Muslims in Australia with 62% born overseas. The 2001 Australian census states that the largest group of Australian Muslims (48%) live in Sydney. Migration is a mainstay in Australian public discourse and remains a key issue in politics, as was vividly demonstrated in the 2010 Australian national elections whereby debates often evoked the issue of the “acceptability” of Muslim migration into the country. Expectedly, the subject of “moral panic” in the Australian media is often tied to the ebbs and flows of immigration. The 1970s saw the Italians and Greeks in the media spotlight, the 1980s was the turn of the Asians and since the 1990s it has been those with “Middle Eastern Appearance” (White, 2006:167). A study by Moran (2005) on the impact of globalisation in Australia documents the apprehension of the larger society towards Muslim migrants. He posits that the conflation of concepts such as “the illegal migrant” and “Muslim” as “one symbolic threat to the nation” which arises even among those who are not against migrants of other social groups. Among the reasons cited by interviewees are the perceived incompatibilities with Christianity, their lack of loyalty, as well as the Muslims’ desire to change Australian society and not leave it as it is.

On the other hand, most of the 450,000 Singaporean Muslims were born in Singapore. However, as the thesis will demonstrate in Chapter 3, the fact that the
majority of the Muslim population are natives of Singapore does not negate the impact of migration. An important aspect of the East Asian-isation or Sinicisation of Singapore society is the state’s liberal policies on Chinese immigration which has also maintained the Chinese numerical dominance. The number of Malaysian-born resident population from the Chinese ethnic group rose sharply over the years. The government has also been courting migration amongst the well to do and educated in Taiwan and Hong Kong since the 1980s. Lately, an influx of immigration is observed from China whose residents arrive under lucrative terms (Lily, 1998: 72; Trocki, 2006:157; Saw, 2007: 70-72). This has caused anxiety, even among the majority Chinese Singaporeans, as evident from the vibrant discussions in the Internet forum pages. Although the rise of China has led some to argue that Singapore is waiting for developments in East Asia for its next cultural jump (Chua, 2006), a more nuanced reading taking into consideration the sentiments on the ground, might suggest that this projection might neglect both the localised and globalised nature of Singapore as a global city.

These varying issues with respect to migration may seem to complicate the Singapore and Sydney comparison. Scholars have argued that the cultural challenges of globalisation affect immigrants and native-born youth in different ways. It is postulated that the task for children of immigrants is to weave elements of the parent culture, the culture of the host country and an emerging globalised youth culture; whilst for those in the host society, the challenge is to expand their cultural horizon to incorporate the changing perspectives, habits, and potentials of its diverse newcomers (Suárez-Orozco, 2004:197). However, it is my contention that such a dichotomous outlook neglects both the impetus of state policies and the complex socio-cultural realities in which many young Muslims find themselves. This binary perspective assumes a homogenous host culture and fails to take into consideration the competition within plural societies for cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, the impact of the countries of origin upon diasporic second generation youth can also be overstated. During the course of interviews, young Muslims in Sydney talk not only about being “out of place” when travelling to their countries of origin but also their
“strangeness” at being around their relatives there. As the impact of migration on the study of youth and popular culture in a globalised setting remains, at best, problematic, this study between Singapore and Sydney will therefore not engage this variable in great depth as a comparative element.

As the thesis explores youth culture amongst those in the 18 to 25 age bracket, the issue of conscription thus presents itself in the Singapore case study. However, it is not foreseen that the conscription of young men in Singapore will make a crucial difference to the thesis. As will be elaborated in Chapter 3, Singapore’s conscription policy of young Muslims is a mere extension of the state’s micro-management of its population. Hence, while it may add to the discussion at the level of empirical evidence, it is unlikely to be a determining factor at the level of analysis.

Having considered the factors listed above, I argue that it is the second difference which is the nature of state management that emerges as the most central variable in the study of youth culture in the two cities. One of the key differences between Singapore and Sydney is that Singapore is a highly controlled urban space which leans towards a micro-management of individuals. This thesis will therefore look at the different mechanisms for the management of young people which shape the everyday experiences of Muslim youth in the two cities. As noted above, although Singapore and Sydney are entrenched in a capitalist structure, there are marked differences in their state-society authority relationships.

The Australian government’s more liberal stance can be contrasted to the Singaporean government’s “management of religion” (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009). The example cannot be clearer from the comparison of the office of the Mufti in both countries and the role played by mosques in both cities. Religious authority is a much-contested sphere in Australia. Even whilst Taj Al-Din Hamed Abdallah Al-Hilali held the Mufti-ship in Australia, he was seen only as a “nominal religious leader of Australia’s (or more specifically Sydney’s)” (Ihram, 2008) within the Muslim community. Most religious leaders in Australia are from overseas. They
are trained in overseas seminaries and brought to Australia to serve a particular ethnic community such as the Pakistani, Bosnian, Turkish or Lebanese. As yet, there are only a few Australian-born imams (Saeed, 2003:53). Nonetheless, even though Muslim clerics and individual mosques are by and large autonomous, there have been of late, some attempts by the state to regulate their activities.

Amongst these interjections by the state are the promotion of religious leaders, recruitment/training of local clerics, creation of national Islamic bodies like the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) and the attempt to make local mosques somewhat accountable to these bodies, as well as efforts in engineering what constitutes an Australian Muslim. Muslims in both Victoria and New South Wales have a Board of Imams (representing all or perhaps most imams of the state) (Kerbaj, 2005; Bevin, 2006). Officially, the Board of Imams represents the religious views of the community. However, in practice, relatively few imams are actively involved on the Board. This means that, even at the state level, there is no unified religious leadership (Saeed, 2003:55). Hence, even despite recent attempts to unify religious leadership amongst the Muslims, it can be surmised that the state generally plays a minimal role in the management of its Muslim population. To be sure, it has been described that Australia's overriding norm is that religion should be a "low-temperature" matter and left very much on its own; ensuring “that religious conflict quickly subsides and is not able to be turned into a basis for other forms of social differentiation” (Bouma, 2004, 2010). In fact, the government’s hesitance to pass religious anti-discrimination regulations is more a “reflection of the institutional norm that religion is not likely to make a difference, and the expectation of policymakers that it will all go away quite soon, rather than the power of groups who may wish to discriminate” (Bouma, 2004:341).

At the other end of the spectrum, the Singapore state undertakes an overt management of its Muslim population. Although it does not have a state religion, Islam occupies a special place at the heart of the secular state, with the Mufti’s position enshrined in law. As early as a year after Singapore’s inception as an independent nation in 1965, the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) was
charted to enhance the system of administration governing the Muslims in Singapore. Upon the implementation of AMLA in 1968, a statutory board, Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), was established under the Act, under sections 87 and 88 of the AMLA as a regulatory authority over Muslim religious matters in Singapore. Under the AMLA, MUIS is to advise the President of Singapore and the Government on all matters relating to Islam as well as the Muslim community's concerns. To add, as of 1996, the state has also appointed a Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs. Under the AMLA, the President of Singapore may, after consultation with MUIS, appoint a fit and proper person to be the Mufti of Singapore. The Mufti is located within the MUIS. MUIS also oversees the development and progress of madrasah education and all religious activities come under the purview of MUIS. Another point of note is that although several madrasah reside on wakaf land, under sections 58 and 59 of the AMLA, all wakaf lands are vested in MUIS. Syed Isa bin Mohamed bin Semait, an Arab Muslim, is Singapore’s Mufti. He has held office for almost four decades. The MUIS and the Mufti are given their legislative and disciplinary powers by the AMLA. In a book published by MUIS, the Mufti has been likened to almost an institution in the Singapore Muslim community (Zuraidah, 1994).

These unique mechanisms are not without points of convergence. A Singaporean has in the past acted as the Mufti of Australia. In 1979, The Muslim Reader carried a report stating that a Singaporean, Syed Omar bin Abdullah Al-Shatri, had set off to Australia to act as Mufti to the Australian Muslim community after being appointed by the Australian Government.

The extent of the management of Muslims in Singapore and Australia can also be analysed though the governance of mosques. A key focus of MUIS is the role of mosques in society. As such the Management of Mosques Regulations was enacted, requiring all mosques to set up a Board of Management to ensure that the affairs of the mosque are conducted in compliance with the Regulations. MUIS undertakes the appointment of a number of key executive members of the Board, including the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. One of the duties of the Chairman of the Board is to see that
mosque activities are in line with Muslim Law and in accordance to the Mosque Management Regulations or any directives or instructions handed by MUIS. In Singapore, mosques have also taken the lead on social issues by utilising their pulpits to spread information as well as conducting related activities. In the 80s, for example, the anti-drug campaign that was disseminated from all mosques as a sustained topic incorporated into the Friday sermon (*The Straits Times*, 28 Sep 1989) appears to be well placed given the disproportionately high percentage of drug abusers amongst Muslim youth. Haji Shafawi Ahmad, a MUIS representative, posits that the strategy of getting the mosques involved in the fight against such social problems is a positive development as mosques are held sacred by the Muslims and present a "ready-made reservoir of people" in each sessions held by religious leaders (Pereira, 1989). The fact that MUIS today, as a centralised regulating body, writes and disseminates these Friday sermons to mosques all over Singapore, facilitates this process.

Unlike the Singapore scenario, mosques in Australia are mostly privately run institutions that serve the local community. As such, there is a great degree of freedom and agency that is granted to the mosque establishment, not only to put forward what they deem to be a suitable line up of mosque administrators, but also a preferred programme and curriculum. This allows a plurality of views to emanate from within diverse religious centers. Many mosques in Sydney are organised along the lines of ethnic groups. The mosques also act as a dispenser of cultural activities in the native vernacular, providing the “formal meeting place for the local association, information provision, communal prayer, funeral services, retirement village, welfare provision for newly-arrived Muslims, women's groups, and youth groups” (Dunn, 1999:303). The organisation of mosques along ethnic lines facilitates the heterogeneity of Muslims in Sydney. However, in this case, it can also give rise to a floating liminal identity within a minority of the Muslim community, which depending on individuals, might lead to a feeling of empowerment or displacement.

To conclude, this comparative analysis of Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney is set against the common platform of urban minority youth negotiating their
everyday lives against a multicultural, secular and highly globalised backdrop. Whilst there are several differences in the characteristics of Muslim population in both cities, these are unlikely to greatly affect the comparative analysis in this study. Nonetheless, as the thesis has established, the contrast between the different forms of management by the authoritarian and liberal models of the Singapore and Sydney states respectively will be an important variable in this study.

**Thesis Contributions**

This thesis will make a number of contributions. Firstly, utilising the youth as an entry point into how Muslims can be studied gives agency to social actors on the ground. Having said that, it is also necessary to map out the structures that juxtapose themselves onto the social realities of these youth in order to illuminate how structure and agency interact in the case of Muslim youth culture. Hence, this study provides an interesting angle through which Muslims can be studied.

Secondly, the thesis will provide an investigation into the lived experiences of youth in Singapore and Sydney, contrasting a highly regulated religious field of the former and a largely deregulated religious field of the latter. A study of cross-national variation in Muslim youth culture provides useful perspectives on how inter-ethnic and state-society relations shape youth transitions. Examining the convergence and divergence of the lived experiences between similar social groups of Muslim youth allows one to deconstruct myths of particularistic ethnic problems. The use of a comparative framework also enables a comparison of the positive and negative features of both models and explains differences between countries in specific patterns of behaviour; implying that a given outcome may be expected in all countries of a similar type.

What will further set this thesis apart is that it will make a significant methodological contribution by taking on a comparative transnational perspective and introducing the Asia Pacific as an important unit of analysis. Australia and Singapore’s proximity with other Southeast Asian countries is all the more significant given that about 240 million or around 40 per cent of the Muslims in the
world is located here. They both share as neighbours, Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world and Malaysia and Brunei which possess significant Muslim majorities. Hence, Muslims in Singapore and Australia find themselves in a very unique position when juxtaposed spatially to their neighbours, Indonesia and Malaysia (Devan, 2007). Their Muslim population can therefore be said to be in a double bind. Firstly, it is odd for them to be in a position of minority within Australia and Singapore; secondly, it is odd that they find themselves as a minority community within a larger geographical region of Muslim dominated countries. Furthermore, from a public policy perspective, with the increasing focus on Indonesia as the alleged breeding ground and exporter of Islamic radicalism in the region (van Bruinessen, 2002; Barton, 2004; 2005; Abuza, 2007), it would be interesting to study how the two governments have come to manage the increase in Muslim piety observed within their Muslim populations and how local communities, and Muslim youth specifically, are responding to these approaches.

In challenging the notion of centre-periphery relationships as espoused by world system theorists, it is integral to provincialise the Middle East in the study of Islam and Muslims around the world. In the methodology section of my thesis, I will further elaborate on why it is critical that this study has taken on this angle of inquiry. It is essential to locate the dilemmas of the Muslim youth within a transnational perspective as only then can the complexities of globalisation, nation-state, religion and youth culture be appreciated in all its nuances.

Moreover, whilst literature on Muslim youth has primarily focused its attention on Europe and North America, this thesis will add to the burgeoning literature on youth in Australia, and at the same time introduce Muslim youth as a new subject of analysis in Singapore. Contrary to the current global interest in Muslim youth, there is a dearth of published literature on Muslim youth in Singapore. I will highlight this in greater depth in my survey of how Muslim youth have been studied and in my literature review for Muslim youth in Sydney and Singapore. This is also one of the very few studies whereby Muslim youth of two countries are compared.
Lastly, the thesis engages in the formation of concepts which I argue will be instructive into looking at the dilemmas faced by globalised Muslim youth today. I will advance concepts such as the homological imagination and competitive/assimilative tattooing to explain how young Muslims straddle the ambiguities of a religiosity that is universalising, a traditional ethnic identity which is communal and a secular national environment which is inherently limiting.

**Thesis Organisation**

This thesis is divided into seven chapters of which the first is the *Introduction*. Chapter 2 entitled *Literature and Method* will explore the quantitative and qualitative methodology employed in this thesis. The research combines ethnographic description with a theoretical argument. The study was undertaken in two phases. The first phase encompassed a textual analysis of academic works, news media, publicly available documents from both the Australian and Singaporean governments, as well as documents available through refugee advocacy groups. The second phase consisted of interviews with Muslim youth residing in Singapore and Sydney as well as results from participation observation at common youth meeting places. By pursuing both approaches, the thesis sought to gather a rich set of primary data in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The thesis presents four empirical chapters. Chapter 3 problematises and deconstructs the idea of a Muslim youth identity. This thesis hopes to present the social worlds of the youth in the two cities and illuminate any divergent and convergent trends in their lived experiences, especially since the minority status of Muslim youth in both societies, has placed them in a disadvantaged position with regard to economic and social capital (Coleman 1994). To wholly grasp the context in which Muslim youth culture has developed in the two cities, the chapter also goes on to map the status indicators of the Muslim youth in question, charting employment and education statistics, intergenerational differences, and residential arrangement.
Chapter 4 deals with the Muslim youth’s consumption of hip-hop music in the two cities. Hip-hop and rap is increasingly Islamicised and appropriated by Muslim youth in many parts of the world. Its social commentary and confrontational style is lending a voice to Muslim youth as a vehicle to battle public misconceptions of Islam. This is further compounded by attempts by the moral entrepreneurs to manage the youth through music. According to Alexander, Muslims are now becoming the most marginalised members of society. “Muslims have then, ironically, become the new ‘black’ with all the association of cultural alienation, deprivation and danger that come with this position” (Alexander, 2000:15). More significantly, this thesis following Nightingale (1993), argues that in the main, studies of youth culture among minority groups neglect their connectivity with the larger mainstream culture. Hence, a more balanced study of the exclusion of minority youth needs to take into account the complex, and sometimes, paradoxical ways in which mainstream culture penetrates and interacts with the lived experiences of minority youth.

Chapter 5 looks at the tattooing practices among Muslim youth in the two cities. There are evidences today of an increasing number of Muslim youth around the world living as urban minorities who deploy tattoos both as signifiers of popular culture and as strategic tools to navigate their everyday lives. The thesis will explore how, through markings, the body is used as a site of contestation in multicultural environments such as Singapore and Sydney.

The final empirical chapter analyses the strategies of Muslim youth resistance through a study of youth consumption. This is set against the much-received literature that perceive youth as empty vassals that are susceptible to shifting fashion trends and the latest commodities found in the market. After all, huge companies have been gearing their marketing campaigns to specifically target the youth group in order to tap into their big spending power. This chapter will demonstrate that not only do youth make rational choices in their consumption; these choices are also influenced by global affairs as they partake in solidarity movements along with youth from other parts of the world. On one hand, these large movements showing
solidarity with groups of Muslims who are victims of oppression elsewhere in the world can be seen as another aspect of globalisation and, on the other hand, it can also be viewed as a form of polarisation at a global level.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE AND METHOD

The study of youth culture deals with the examination of meanings and symbolism youth attach to their own social actions and also with how these social actions are interpreted by guardians of the dominant culture. Youth countercultures are formed when the actions of youth groups manifest a methodical antagonism against the dominant culture resulting in social conflict. As such, Michael Brake defines youth subcultures as “meaning systems, modes of expression or lifestyles developed by groups in subordinate structural positions in response to dominant meaning systems, and which reflect their attempt to solve structural contradictions arising from the wider societal context” (Brake, 1985:8). Brake’s definition is useful as a heuristic tool at understanding the attempts of young Muslims in this study to straddle the global/local, state/society, inter and intra ethnic relationships. Living in a globalised city, youth identity is becoming less than one that is merely ascribed by the traditional institutions of school, work or family. This is however not to proclaim that identity in a youth subculture takes on a purely achieved status. On the contrary, the thesis considers age, social class and ethnicity as playing crucial roles in creating youth cultures. Recognising that society is fractured along the lines of age, social class and ethnicity, the thesis locates youth culture as at once a medium of assimilation and resistance of subaltern groups against the dominant culture. Hence urban young minority Muslims can be argued to constitute a subordinate group which seeks to renegotiate the guiding societal norms and value systems.

Youth subcultures are usually perspicuous with their unique mannerisms, styles and affinities. Members usually subscribe to symbolic tangible choices for example in matters associated with personal grooming. As such, fashion, footwear and hairstyles present distinct manifestations of a person’s membership and sense of belonging. Symbolic intangible choices such as communication styles and musical interests also play a vital role among youth groups. As the thesis will pursue in
Chapter 4, a significant part of youth cultures is the attachment to particular music genres to the point that music has become the primary identity of some youth groups such as the affiliation with hip-hop, punk rock, emo and black metal. As Chapter 5 will further demonstrate, body ornaments and speaking style such as speaking in codes, slang and dialects are also other decipherable elements.

The term “youth culture” was coined by Talcott Parsons in the early 1940s to describe a period whereby a decipherable generation undergoing a similar socialisation process was generally becoming disenfranchised from the establishment. Mintz (2004) contends that youth subcultures did not exist till around 1950. Prior to that, adolescents strived towards adulthood, by their own choice or due to circumstances, as swiftly as they evolved physically. When the study of youth culture germinated in America in the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists of youth culture sought to explain the volatile times in the country as the US underwent a period of sexual revolution, civil rights movement, and anti-Vietnam War protests. Although Karl Mannheim had already given a socio-psychological analysis of the subject matter, it was in the US that the study of youth culture flourished with the building up of relevant literature through the works of Erik Erikson (1963, 1965, 1968), SN Eisenstadt (1956) and James Coleman (1961), with Howard Becker’s Outsiders (1963) probably marking the pinnacle of a golden era of youth studies in the US. Although Parsons saw youth culture as playing a positive role by “easing the difficult process of adjustment from childhood emotional dependency to full ‘maturity’”, American sociologists tend to analyse youth culture along the lines of irresponsibility. Danesi (2003), on the other hand, posits that since the 1950s, the Western mass media and other institutions have constructed youth as the dominant culture. This results in a significant number of adults retaining what is considered “immature attitudes” well into their adult life.

Youth culture can also be framed as an external that is imposed upon a group of youth by laying a discursive ideological superstructure whereby youth cultures can be discussed. Stanley Cohen in the Folk Devils and Moral Panics (1972), points to the moral panic created by the labelling action of moral entrepreneurs. The concept
of moral panic was first mooted by Jock Young in 1971. In discussions with young Muslim respondents in Singapore and Sydney, the mass media is accredited to be playing influential roles in generalising an otherwise incoherent social group of youth. Chapter 6 examines the differing strategies of resistance practiced by young Muslims in the consumption of media and cultural products. Consumerism is immanent in the youth culture and it is crucial insofar that it not only forges generational gaps but also places youth in opposition with each other.

In calling for a rethinking of Muslim youth culture, globalisation and piety as discussed in Chapter 1, a critical examination of existing literature on Muslim youth is necessary. This section will engage in a mapping of the emergent terrains of Muslim youth studies which are relevant to this thesis. Through this exercise, I will abstract the themes on which the thesis will build and the gaps that it intends to fill. Furthermore, by looking at a global mapping of Muslim youth, not only will the global cultural flows be laid bare, it is also hoped that new perspectives will be made possible by examining these conversations and conference of works on Muslim youth.

**Muslim Youth and Globalisation**

I began the thesis by arguing that a study of popular youth culture needs to take into consideration the gaps and criticisms levelled at globalisation theories, primarily the issues of (i) whether globalisation leads to a convergence or a reinvigoration and pluralisation of local cultures as localities respond uniquely to global forces; and (ii) the role of the state and the influence of governmentality on the direction of popular youth culture in particular localities. The recurring themes of “identity” as well as “youth and media” often come to the fore in the literature on Muslim youth culture and bear the promise of giving insights to these complex issues.
Identity

A significant majority of current works have come to focus on the identity of Muslim youth. Established literature is split between those focusing on diasporic Muslim youth in the West, struggling to reconcile the contradictions of living as minorities in multicultural, secular settings and those on Muslim youth in Muslim majority countries facing intergenerational conflicts.

In a study conducted by Jacobson (1998) on religion and identity among British Pakistani youth, she found that it is a problem for these youth to put their finger on what the British “nation” is or what comprises British identity. The problem, she explains, lies partly in the fact that British Pakistani youth themselves are ambivalent about their own identity. It is difficult to reconcile the deluge of popular notions of what “Britishness” is all about with a few interpretations citing “whiteness” or having a British “heritage” as necessary to being British. The awareness that many white Britons view them as immutably alien or foreign, raises the realisation amongst the youth that their Pakistani ethnicity is sui generis, not something that they can freely influence. Both internally within the Pakistani community and externally within white Christian Britain, the modes of thinking, despite being challenged by the youth, also perpetuate a sense of inevitability that their ethnic affiliations still persist as the master identity. However, it is interesting to note that the British Pakistani youth view their ethnicity as an ascribed status but their religion as more of a personal choice, believing that their commitment to Islam does not arise from birth but upon reflexivity. It is of no surprise then that her respondents do not posit a “proliferation of fluid identities” (Jacobson, 1998:154). Instead they emphasise individual agency with a devout belief in the truth of Islamic teaching. The author further puts forth that the attractiveness of Islam as a marker of identity lie in the fact that Islam provides welcomed certainties to these young lives in a life full of ambiguities. Hence, in their upholding of tolerance as a key aspect of multicultural society, the author notes their desire for diversity to be respected and sees Islam as being a barrier to the secularising trends of the larger British society.
The globalised nature of youth identity is a theme that is found either implicitly or explicitly in many studies on young Muslims. For example, the British Alevi youth is the subject of research by Geaves (2003). The Alevis are a group of Muslims who originate from Eastern Turkey. He found that the youth in diaspora immerse themselves in customary Alevi activities as much as their contemporaries in Turkey, from venting about their oppression by the Turkish authorities, to the historical persecution of Hussein at the Kerbala, as well as participating in the cultural displays of a Sufi tariqa and traditional music that is filled with historical lessons about past injustices. The youth camps, activities, rituals and the very popular saz and semah classes are attended by the British Alevi youth in large numbers, galvanised by their collective consciousness of a shared identity based upon an awareness of a turbulent past. However, much like Ritzer’s argument on the globalisation of nothing, although the youth are seen taking up major roles in the organisation, Geaves’ study showed the youth to possess a rather shallow understanding of Alevi spirituality. When probed, the youth often referred the author to a dede (traditional Alevi holy man). This was interesting to the author given that the Alevis are less discreet about their beliefs today and although it was acknowledged that the Alevis do not traditionally discuss esoteric concerns with outsiders, the author did not expect the youth in London to perpetuate the secrecy of their predecessors.

Zine conducted two studies to examine Muslim youth experiences with racism, Islamophobia and peer pressure as well as how they reconcile their gender, race and piety in Canadian schools. The first study (Zine, 2001) involved seven students and three parents while the second study (Zine, 2006), which focused on Muslim girls, is based on 49 interviews with students, parents, teachers and the school administrators in four Islamic schools. In the first study, the author demonstrated that the students resisted assimilation by establishing a strong network with other Muslims in and out of school who share their beliefs and rituals. These networks allow Muslim students to preserve their identity and act as safe havens against the cultural Other. Her more recent work (2006) focuses on how Muslim
girls, who are caught between patriarchal bodily regulations of their community as well as the prejudice and Islamophobia of larger society, construct their sense of self within an Islamic worldview.

Attempts by Muslim youth to reconcile their identity vis-à-vis competing cultures have also been recognised. This is illuminated by Matiki (1999) through a study of Muslim youth in Malawi. He argued that these youth are burdened by the conflicting linguistic and socio-political signals from the “triple heritage” of Islamic, Western and traditional Malawian cultures – each staking a claim on the youth. These young Muslims struggle to convert their cultural capital in different domains as what are considered as “virtues” at home is not viewed favourably in school. On the other hand, the youth mimicking of foreign values and their inability to straddle traditional and Islamic demands can be deemed as inappropriate behaviour on their part. For example, this complexity is played out in the form of naming. Children are given Arabic/Islamic, traditional African and Western/English names depending on the inclinations of the parents and who they want to associate with. This, according to the author, is an indication of an identity crisis. There are also many situations whereby the triple heritages have been amalgamated such that they are unrecognizable in isolation. In the ritual of circumcision for example, the Islamic rule that it is mandatory for males to be circumcised is maintained. However, matters such as when and how the circumcision is done as well as how it is celebrated, contain elements of traditional African and Western practices which have been ingested and passed on as Islamic practices. This predicament of reconciling competing cultures is something that many young Muslim respondents in this thesis relate to.

The study by Berliner (2005) perhaps extended the arguments of Matiki. He posits that, unlike their elders who “abandoned the custom”, Muslim youth in Guinea are very keen about keeping and relaying the pre-Islamic religion of their elders which is linked to the formation of their group identity in the face of Guinean post-coloniality. The author however made an interesting observation that the youth’s attempt to appropriate this pre-Islamic culture is highly shaped by the different
modes of transmission as determined by the men and womenfolk in their community. Specifically, these attempts are hampered by the secrecy and silence of the fathers who at times convey their pre-Islamic experiences in an emotional manner. Women, on the other hand, are more vivid in their expressions; imparting this knowledge through rituals or dances that carry images that are both accessible and longstanding in the minds of the youth.

With religious pluralism being a key feature of globalisation and modernism, it is not unexpected that much study on Muslim youth identity has centered on the issue of “biculturalism”. Recently, there have been relatively extensive studies done on American Muslim youth. In a slightly dated study, it was documented that over three quarters of American Muslim youth attend mosque frequently (Pulcini, 1990). It has been presented that there are three ways whereby Muslim youth in America suffer from a cultural mismatch namely the curriculum, instruction and home-school relations (Sabry and Bruna, 2007). An article by Zaal, Salah and Fine (2007) documents the struggles of 15 Muslim female youth aged 18-24 in post-September 11 New York. The study discussed the anxieties of the girls in navigating notions of the “oppressed” and the label of “terrorist” that have become discursively juxtaposed on the female Muslim form. The writers discussed the silences of the girls in not wanting to burden their families and the weight they feel in representing their religion against suspicions borne both within and outside their community.

An Internet study involving 150 second generation Arab Muslim American youth aged 18 to 25 revealed three trends of affinity to American and Arab culture. Two are essentially bicultural - moderate bicultural (20.7%) and high bicultural (18%) with the other exhibiting a principally Arab cultural identity with a moderate American identity affiliation (54%) (Britto and Amer, 2007). In another study of 70 youth aged 12-18, Sirin and Fine (2007) discussed the evolution of hyphenated selves among young Muslims. This reflects the psychological struggle to reconcile the seemingly colliding notions of being “American” and “Muslim”, even amongst those who had relative success in assimilating into the two worlds. The authors discovered that the Muslim boys demonstrate a significantly higher level of
dissatisfaction, despair and anger and are more averse to embracing a hyphenated bicultural identity. The results reciprocate other studies done on immigrant boys in America (Walters, 1999; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) and the observations of Hopkins (2004) of male Muslim youth in Scotland. Young Muslim women on the other hand, are more able to envision their identities as fluid and see hyphenated identities more as complementary and crucial components of their identity. Whilst acknowledging the struggles they face in reconciling these selves, they draw strength from the freedoms provided for in America. For example, the girls in America realise that framing the hijab as an act of choice, empowers them to engage in issues of civil liberties in America in solidarity with fellow American citizens. Hence, whereas male Muslim youth see themselves as dispossessed and displaced, their counterparts are able to project themselves as global citizens.

Turkish youth in diaspora is also the subject of research by Vedder, Sam and Liebkind (2007). The authors examine the impact of acculturation on the capacity of youth to adapt to their social environment. The study involved a total of 736 Turkish migrant youth between the ages of 13-18 in six countries namely Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Holland and France. The study notes the integral functions that the nature of multiculturalism and the amount of diversity play in a particular country, and how they impact upon the acculturation experiences of migrant youth. The authors posit that the psychological and cultural transformation of migrant youth is incumbent upon the peculiarities present in the host country. Interestingly, it was revealed that higher bicultural and ethnic orientation serve as positive determinants to adaptation and an increased sense of discrimination leads to problems in adaptation. To ground it in the empirical field, it was found that Turkish youth in Germany displayed the lowest bicultural orientation. Whilst those from Finland demonstrated the least ethnic orientation, they compensated for this with a heightened national orientation.
Youth and Media

The subject of youth and the consumption of media is an important aspect in this study. As the following chapters will show, much of popular Muslim youth culture is the result of the dialectical relationship between the youth and the media. Contemporary popular Muslim youth culture is as much the result of the influence of mainstream media as it is a resistance to the negative depiction of the September 11 generation. The media has often focused on the instability in the Middle East as the cause for riots involving young Muslims such as the one witnessed in France in November 2005. De wenden (2006) echoed this point when she highlighted the effects of satellite TV which broadcast news groups such as Al-Jazeera on globalised young Muslims. She linked the events of a group of French youth protesting against the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians to other transnational influences such as the cheering of Saddam in the Gulf War of 1991 and the insulting of the French flag in preference to the Algerian hymns in a soccer game in 2002 which was attended by the then-Prime Minister. Dismissing the role of Islam in the riots, she explicates that most of the Muslim youth participating in the riots are actually only “occasional practitioners of Islam”. They desire a French identity but have been impeded by a vicious cycle of unemployment and discrimination in terms of education, housing and their interactions with the police. These factors maintain their peripheral status in society and leave them susceptible to an underground economy and the rhetoric of religious radicalism. Having said this, the author did not foresee the riots as a significant social movement considering that they lack a leadership structure or any form of organisation or ideology. On the contrary, she maintains that the riots can be seen as a positive sign of social health in the sense that the migrant youth are articulating their discontent in full public view.

A recent study on the youth in Indonesia was conducted through the lens of youth innovation and the effects of a proliferation of new media. Juliastuti (2006) argued that since the year 2000, Indonesia has experienced a proliferation of youth publications that has seen a shift from the normal discussion of political issues of the day to a “celebration of communities and self-existence”. The youth produced new
media often in the form of photocopied publications that are disseminated within the youth networks of Indonesian cities as a platform for transmitting ideas. This mushrooming of a range of publications include those that discuss poetry and short stories, films, visual arts, rave parties and even writings critiquing the influence of capitalism in the music industry. It was reported in 2004 that there was in existence 223 alternative media run by Indonesian youth who were born in the 80s. Although, some of these publications are short-lived, the range illustrates their consumption of global trends as evident in their everyday life. Coupled with the rise in the number of personal blogs, new media has given the youth a new found sense of freedom to fulfill their desires for self-expression and a medium to publicise their private space.

Mushaben (2008) points to the development of Pop-Islam in Berlin which spawned from Arabia towards the turn of the new millennium, citing the increase in the influence of charismatic *imams* and the impact of Islamic satellite television in creating idols and entertainment celebrities. This has created a “young, chic and cool” Islam among marginalised Muslim youth who are deprived of basic rights of citizenship and access to resources in their countries of birth. She noted that tensions within the Muslim community centering on generational gaps had already appeared pre-September 11. The elders still hold the thresholds of power in which the community is governed but this is increasingly challenged by a more educated youth population (Spielhaus and Fa’rber, 2007). It is observed that more youthful religious *imams* or *ustazs* are taking the helm of various mosques. This younger generation speaks the language of their host country, which many of their migrant predecessors struggle with, and does outreach to the larger non-Muslim population through dialogues and sports. It has been documented that the urban Muslim youth see themselves as “genuine Berliners” and do not want to be restrained and pigeon-holed in an insular homogenic social group (Schiffauer, 2005). A recent poll done of Turkish boys and girls in Kreuzberg schools revealed that 60% and 56% of them respectively identify themselves primarily as a Berliner (Spohn, 2006; Baars, 2007). They clamour for a deculturalisation of religion and an overlapping of subcultures, an integration of popular culture with a segregation of the sexes. Whilst wanting to
blend into the urban lifestyle, they still hold on to their “rituals of intimacy” and as it has been put, “They not only want to remain, they also want to remain different.” (Gerlach, 2006:210).

The above studies offer ways in which Muslim youth can be studied as they bring forth key themes that are instructive to any study on Muslim youth. When it comes to the issue of “identity”, Muslim youth in Sydney who predominantly comprise of second generation Muslims, are fraught with the collisions inherent within both their native identity and the identity of their adopted country. On the other hand, Singaporean Muslims find themselves part of a young country of forty-five years which is still trying to forge its own national identity whilst engineering a “Singaporean Muslim identity” (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009). However, this thesis will disagree with Jacobson’s data and analysis of the absence of “fluid identities”. The thesis will also build on Berliner’s examination of cultural transmission through generational perspective. Owing to the porous nature of cultural transmission, it is important to look at the various overlapping fields, local and global.

The major shortcoming of exploring cultural identity through the perspective of a “clash of cultures” framework, as demonstrated in the studies on biculturalism, is the classification of culture as a binary. Sociologists and anthropologists have argued for a long time about the amorphous nature of culture. As this thesis will show, to pit a kind of Muslim Lebanese culture against a Christian Australian culture, or a Malay youth culture against a Chinese youth culture, will simply ignore not only the “clash within cultures” (Senghaas, 2002) but also gloss over the many intersections between two seemingly irreconcilable categories.

Studies around the theme of the “youth and media” are useful in discussing how the transnational reach of the media and the proliferation of youth-driven new media are shaping the opinions of Muslim youth, leading to a liberalisation of values and a rebranding of Islam. However, as mentioned, it is also essential to explore the dialectical relationship between the media producers and consumers. According to
Mauzy and Milne (2002:128), there are undeniable authoritarian aspects of the Singapore government which include draconian laws, control on political participation, and measures limiting civil and political rights and freedom of the press, the television and the cyberspace. Hence, as will be demonstrated in the Singapore case, state regulations of the media also affect the kinds of popular youth culture that can be made possible.

From the review of much of the studies on youth, it was found that these studies have not given much attention to the shortcomings and criticisms of globalisation theories on two interweaving levels. Firstly, they assume a trend towards a homogenisation of Muslim youth culture by giving primacy to a sweeping influence of new media. This is done by neglecting the diverse reactions of Muslim youth to a global youth culture and by ignoring the possibilities of a glocalisation of youth culture. Moreover, even though studies have acknowledged the influence of popular culture leading to the emergence of a pop, chic and cool Islam, there is still a tendency towards understanding youth piety in terms of the traditional ritualistic performances of religion. This is intricately linked to the second level. The varying responses and the pluralisation of youth culture that take into consideration global and local factors can be arrived at by examining issues of governmentality and the peculiar socio-cultural setting of the local environment which much of these studies neglect.

This thesis will take note of these shortcomings in shaping the methodology of this study. Moving on, by way of looking at Muslim youth group through the lens of popular youth culture, this thesis will examine the attempts to reconcile the conflicting meaning systems embedded within global youth culture and Islamic piety. To be sure, the thesis will not assume that there is a monolithic youth culture or a singular orientation of Islamic piety. However, it will be naïve to ignore that urban minority youth, in appropriating things from their everyday lives as symbolic of their young identity, face global and local impediments in accessing certain forms of youth culture. Examining, these struggles, which are conscious ritualistic and symbolic attacks to subvert the hegemonic power of the dominant culture, allow us to capture
the range of responses among young Muslim practitioners. Hence, a study of the practice of youth culture will have to take into account the matrices of power that are ingrained in these relationships.

**Popular Culture and Piety**

As I have argued in Chapter 1, in understanding the manifestation of piety in Muslim popular youth culture, one needs to be cognisant that (i) the fusion of religion with popular youth culture and the consequent blurring of the sacred and the profane do not necessarily signal a loss of religiosity; and (ii) the relationships between state management, globalisation, Islam, inter and intra-ethnic dynamics explain the manifestations of contemporary Muslim youth culture in a particular locality. Studies on the pietisation patterns of young Muslims, both diasporic and native, have looked at issues ranging from the global influence of the television and music, to the emergence of social problems amongst certain sections of Muslim youth on one hand, and social/religious movements on the other. Some studies have also looked at the varied youth responses to “fundamentalism” as young Muslims in globalised cities increasingly turn to popular culture as a vehicle to express their dissatisfaction.

**Popular media and music**

In her work on South Asian Muslim youth in America, Maira (2008) observed that the youth identification with their native homelands like Pakistan and India are based primarily on their consumption of popular culture such as *Bollywood* films and South Asian music which they access primarily through the Internet and satellite television. Through these pursuits, they conversed with other diasporic migrant youth of the same ethnicity, and in the process, found similarities in their tastes. The home is transformed into a fundamental environment in the consumption of this popular culture where extended families access their imagined homeland. The author raises the question of the flexibility of citizenship as well as for whom it is deemed flattering and for whom it is portrayed as a threat. In a time when the War on Terror leads to a rigidifying of immigration and citizenship laws, Muslim youth are turning
to popular culture, their lived realities in the workforce and educational opportunities to make sense of their sense of place in the US. This study followed the author’s previous exploration of the notion of cultural citizenship in her paper (Maira, 2004) which was based on qualitative data elicited from working class American South Asian youth. The paper reports on the youth’s critical views towards the American *War on Terror* which had driven foreign and domestic policies and, in turn, fuelled the fears of prejudice, surveillance and deportation that they experience in their everyday lives.

A study by Turner (2006) deals with male Muslim youth who are influenced by rap music. The author dubbed hip-hop as North America’s foremost youth culture and shows how the youth are converting to Islam as a result of hip-hop’s long flirtation with Islam. Connections are also made to the orientation of Islam that is embraced in the case of a group of youth taking to Sunni Islam. Young Muslims also talk about how Muslim rappers such as Common, Talib Kweli, Hitek, the *Roots*, and *Wu Tang Clan* are popular role models for the spiritually and politically conscious black youth. Part of the influence of orthodox Muslim rappers such as Mos Def with his references to his piety in his lyrics “Allah, the Lord of the worlds” and Muslim rapper Nas’ singing “Been blessed with Allah’s vision, strength and beauty” is that it lends to a “reconstruction of Black masculinity” which the youth finds appealing. The Black Muslim youth’s drawing of the image of Malcolm X as a galvanising tool must be emphasised. Turner underlines Malcolm X’s contribution to hip-hop culture and his influence on the conversion of black youth to mainstream Islam. The extent of his influence is no less owing to the appropriation of his image as part of popular culture in a time when the youth is besieged by information through the print and digital media more than at any other point in history. According to Turner, rap music transcends the “oppositional subcultural music” stereotype for these youth who seek to make sense of “the ultimate spiritual and political concerns in their lives and their identities are paradigms for global Muslim youth” (Turner, 2006:41).

Soysal (2004) presented the case of diasporic Turkish youth in Berlin who are not to be regarded merely as empty vassals of Turkish culture or Islamisation.
Instead, he argued, that these youth are to be located within a structured landscape that acts as a discursive space that sanctions behaviour. They found their voice through the landscape of hip-hop which governs their stories through a ghetto narrative and hip-hop lexicon. Hip-hop also sets the boundaries in which the conflicts are drawn as it enables its practitioners to claim social solidarity with a global hip-hop ummah. The “angry street talk” of Turkish youth in Berlin situates well with other groups such as London’s Fun’da’mental, American N.W.A. and Paris’ NTM. The author argued that migrant hip-hop is curtailed both at the level of how it can be performed as a global genre with its peculiar linguistic styling and at the level of local sensitivities in terms of institutional constraints and the management of multiculturalism in the country.

“Fundamentalisms”

In a rare comparative study of Muslim youth, Moaddel and Karabenick (2008) focused on the analysis of fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The study claimed that fundamentalism is reinforced by “the epistemic role of religious authorities, Islamic orthodoxy, fatalistic attitudes and the feeling of insecurity in both countries, and negatively to the frequency of watching TV”. Television is seen as a destabilising element to fundamentalism as it undercuts traditionalism. Moaddel and Karabenick also argued that fundamentalism is undermined by the Egyptian youth’s dependence on their peers for information on Islam’s sociopolitical function even though their comparatively weaker socioeconomic situation explicates a heightened sense of fatalism and insecurity over their fundamentalist attitudes. It was found that varsity education has had no significant impact on fundamentalist attitudes and interestingly, fundamentalism was found to be greater when secular teachers and the media were taken as authoritative. The authors conclude that higher learning in Saudi Arabia and Egypt does little to create an open mind to the extent that will undermine religious-centrism and encourage egalitarian values in relation to the people of other religions. They also postulate that the function of religious authorities and the power of Islamic orthodoxy coupled with feelings of insecurity and fatalism have led to the increase in Islamic fundamentalist campaigns and debates.
Revealing the state of youth behind the “fundamentalist state” in Iran where nearly 70% of its population falls below the age of 30, Cohen (2006) navigates through an ‘underground’ youth culture that involves wild partying, drag-racing, binge drinking and sexual promiscuity. Not unlike the youth in the most liberal Western countries, Iranian youth rendezvous at public parks, cinemas and sports clubs with the coffee houses primarily functioning as a networking site where the youth covertly exchange phone numbers, alerting one another of the latest youth happenings. In an advocacy paper, he reports that less than 3% of Iranian youth attend Friday prayers. Female youth, whilst not particularly averse to putting on the hijab, wants the freedom to exercise their individual choice.

In another study involving 1385 males between the ages of 15 to 18 in Tehran, Mohammadi, Mohammad, Farahani, Alikhani, Zare, Tehrani, Ramezankhani and Alaeddini (2006) made the link between satellite television, the Internet and sexual promiscuity. In congruence with other studies, the authors reported that youth who are “into” smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse are likelier to have engaged in sexual activities. In a presumably conservative country like Iran, it is somewhat counter-intuitive that a significant proportion of the youth population has a permissive stance to premarital sex and is engaging in extra-marital sexual activities. This generational difference is not only stark but impacts upon sexual education, or the lack of it, in the country. As such, boys exhibit grave misconceptions about sexuality which impact on their decisions. Hence, the authors articulate the need for the education sector to provide the necessary information.

A comparative study of 102 diasporic Bangladeshi Muslims in the US and the UK aged 18 to 64 by Kibria (2007) revealed an upsurge of a revivalist Islam “based on a fundamentalist model of Muslim identity and practice” and the adoption of “Muslim” as a public identity. This is fueled by a feeling of entrenched cultural and political alienation, and a yearning by the youth to be detached from Bangladesh. The author found the growth of this “new Islam” among diasporic youth. The author argues that part of the reason was the idea that Bengali Islam sanctions social inequalities reminiscent in contemporary Bangladesh and is “unreflective and
routinized” in character, as opposed to the “self-conscious spirit of devotion necessary to the belief and practice of true Islam” (Kibria, 2007: 254).

Given that Muslims below the age of 25 in Iraq form the majority in the demography of the country, the study of Iraqi Muslim youth has focused on the ensuing war in the country and the place of the youth in the midst of the turmoil. To this end, Powers (2006) wrote an advocacy paper urging the authorities to make Iraqi youth a priority and for American foreign policy to try harder in engaging the youth on the “war against terror” fearing that the extremists would have an edge over recruiting the disgruntled youth who had undergone their childhood trapped in tyranny and occupation.

“Social Problem”

Studies of popular Muslim youth culture have predictably, as with many studies on youth in general, taken on a “social problem perspective” focusing on issues of juvenile delinquency. A literature survey on Muslim youth will highlight that studies thus far have been overwhelmed with issues such as premarital sex, drug abuse and teenage violence. Since the events of September 11, there has also been a sharp increase in studies looking at the criminalisation of migrant Muslim youth living as minorities in Western countries. In a study that slightly predates the terrorist attacks, Jo Goodey (2001) focuses on the criminalisation of Asian youth in Britain, more specifically Bradford and Sheffield with regard to cases of rioting and public disorder involving British Pakistani boys in the mid-1990s. The study demonstrates how the boys vocalised their discontent at the way the police conduct themselves and illuminate the stereotypical behaviours from both sides of the fence.

A large scale study by Oppedal and RØysamb (2007) demonstrates, from a social psychology perspective, that despite the general negative perception of Muslim minority youth living in Norway, Muslim youth across gender and generations (first or second generation) are internalising problems at the same levels as other Norwegian youth and Western immigrants. To add, Muslim youth there are reported to be internalising problems at a strikingly lower level compared to other
Morocco is a society undergoing rapid changes characterised by a fertility decline from seven to three per cent between 1973 and 1995 and the (singulate mean) age at marriage shooting up to 26.3 years in 1992 from 17.3 in 1970 (Courbage, 1997) together with the fact that the number of unmarried people have shot up seven-folds between 1960 and 1982 (Daoud, 1993). This has been complemented by an ‘explosion’ in premarital sex amongst the youth (Dialmy, 1997). It was found that there are distinctions to be made between local youth and those who live abroad. For those living abroad in western societies, the youth find it difficult to reconcile Islamic values with “modern” living which views sexual activity as normal. Those who live locally will often try to reconcile themselves with the Islamic sexual ethic. Fractures in opinion also occur along the lines of gender. Amongst those who live abroad, it is often found that females often subscribe to the Islamic solution to sexuality which is put simply, abstinence (by fasting for example) and early marriage to guard oneself against premarital sex and pregnancies arising out of wedlock. Moroccan youth are at the receiving end of two conflicting messages that are disseminated by their government. The Minister of Religious Affairs instructs abstinence or marriage while the Minister of Health calls for the use of condoms. The youth are then supposed to reconcile themselves with this contradiction (Dialmy, 1998:16-17).

Social movement

In Malaysia, studies of youth are also embarked on from a social movement perspective and a social problem perspective. This is especially significant when we
examine literature on the evolution of Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) which used to be headed by former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister and now Opposition Leader, Anwar Ibrahim. A young 33 year old law doctoral candidate, Yusri Mohamad, took over the reins of ABIM in 2005 in an attempt to recover the essence of the organisation as a youth movement which has been somewhat neglected over the years. It was critical that ABIM seek to remedy the generational gap between its power elites and members on the ground as the youth is the very social group that ABIM claims to have solidarity with. Of late, Yusri has also forged an alliance with Islamic party, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), with regard to working together on youth activities (Ahmad Fauzi, 2008).

Oloyede (1987) also charted the evolution and contributions of The Council of Muslim Youth Organisations in Nigeria, as a group made up of strong leaders that preserved the cultural identity of the Muslims and saved the community from persecution. The progress of Muslim youth was updated by Sanni (2007) who documented the reinvigoration of Nigerian Muslim youth in pushing for the total implementation of the syariah. He credited present day developments to a number of global events. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 provided the impetus that changed the speed and the intensity at which Muslims clamoured for the syariah and Islam as a viable system of governance. The author also cited Libya’s Muammar Qadhafi’s aggressive anti-imperialist and anti-Western stance, his vocal support for Africa’s political and economic concerns and his moderating effect on competing religious groups and lobbies as factors which lend credence to the Libyan model in the minds of Nigerian Muslim youth. Tayob (1995) also takes a social movement perspective when studying the role of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, firstly in locating the movement as part of past resurgent movements in South Africa since the late 19th century and secondly, in popularising the “modern Islamic paradigm” in South Africa.

As can be seen, Western academics researching on young Muslims have predictably concerned themselves with the impact of global youth culture on piety - in particular, that of “popular media and music”. In this thesis, I will argue that the
consumption of popular Muslim youth culture necessitates a form of homological imagination of shared experiences with the Muslim Other. Although Bourdieu (1990) argued for the contextualisation of the social actor to his *habitus*, in the case of the consumption of hip-hop music, for example, through the appropriation of selective facets of the musical genre, it can be contended that there is an attempt by the youth to replicate the structurations of the *habitus* as expressed in the struggles of not only the African American experience specifically, but the hip-hop *ummah* in general. The form of popular youth culture in practice can be conceptualised to the degree and mode of homological imagination that is employed. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 4 on the relationship between young Muslims and hip-hop culture.

Studies done on Muslim youth responses to “fundamentalisms” (Cohen, 2006; Kibria 2007) seem to suggest the trend of decreasing religiosity in Muslim majority countries and an increasing religiosity among Muslim minorities. Four possibilities present themselves here, with the last postulation looking especially dire. First, it is possible that this observation is an accurate depiction of the patterns of Muslim youth piety. Secondly, this increase in religiosity is relative to the pietisation trends of non-Muslim youth. Thirdly, as I will further argue in this thesis, there is a slippage of religiosity/pietisation into the public spheres of popular culture which a researcher might miss if he were to focus on conventional barometers of religiosity. The fourth and last scenario is that a moral panic is being generated in both Muslim and non-Muslim majority countries to fuel the folk devil status of Muslim youth as threats to mainstream society. Depicting Muslim youth as deviants might account for strategies to keep them in line with the dominant culture of the society.

Studies which attempt to analyse youth from a “social problem” perspective are themselves problematic. As seen in the above example, the elites compete to inculcate a certain meaning system in the young and to sell to them a particular lifestyle. Hence, borrowing Durkheim’s concept of anomie, this perspective seeks to show the state of deregulation the youth experience in struggling to reconcile colliding values. However, analysing religious groups when studying social problems
such as juvenile delinquency can prove to be problematic and presumptuous as the approach inadvertently takes religion to be the determining variable. This approach places the researcher at risk of putting the argument before the facts. When analysing the lived experiences of Muslim youth from a class perspective, for example, one might find that the social problems delineated are reminiscent of those from the working class. There are compelling similarities if we look at the relative deprivation and the status of young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney. Paul Willis (1977) in his study of working-class youth confirms that youth from less affluent families end up reproducing the class system by resisting the “elevated” values and lessons in school. The problem with this is dual in nature. Social reproduction maintains inequalities in society due to the transfer of social, economic, cultural capital (language). As a result, inequalities perpetuate themselves.

Bourdieu (1984), in drawing a link between class and culture, provides a more nuanced framework to study how domination is sustained over generations. Taking into consideration both elements of structure and agency, he argues that culture is a focal point of class stability and each stratum has a unique cultural taste with certain systems of taste forming a cultural capital that can be transformed into economic capital. Bourdieu posits that society is stratified in a way that the dominant class comprises of a relatively “autonomous space whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members” (Bourdieu, 1984:260). As such, Bourdieu posits in his works on *The State Nobility* and *Distinction* (1996) that class structures influences mental structures. The social, cultural and symbolic capital that is inherited replenishes the social reproduction of society and embeds inequalities as a permanent feature of everyday living. Since Bourdieu argues that culture is a main source of class stability and taste is an indicator of social inequalities, it will be interesting to ask in the context of this study what role Muslim piety plays as a culture and identity marker and the impact of framing young Muslims of the September 11 generation as a social class in the social stratification process. As Nayak (2003) posits, it is not that class has disappeared but instead it has been reconfigured as a consequence of global change.
As E. P. Thompson (1978) succinctly tells us, “class is not a thing; it is a happening” that is constantly subjected to the temporal effects of change.

Studies of youth involvements in “social movements” demonstrate a conception of social movement as one of challenging political structures and vying for formal positions of power. The thesis departs from the social movement perspective in that it demonstrates that active youth participation in socio-religious organisations, as demonstrated in the study conducted by Geaves on British Muslim youth, is not necessarily synonymous with an indication of increased piety. In studying youth culture, it is necessary that this study also move away from merely looking at formal, legitimate and adult-sanctioned organisations.

In sum, a number of pertinent trends can be gleaned from the established literature on Muslim youth. There is a burgeoning amount of work that explores the relationships between popular culture, globalisation and piety in explaining the formation of contemporary Muslim youth culture (Soysal, 2004; Maira 2008). A number of these studies have also examined the centrality of the notion of space in the formation of the identity. Young Muslims do not just feel a sense of belonging to their country of residence but construct their identity from a globalised source. There is a complexity in the process of deprivatising religion in the modern globalised world, given the politicised nature of religion. To this end, there have been several works that takes a binary and reconciliatory view of Muslim youth piety equating religiosity with a fundamentalist/liberal and a bicultural model.

There is also a tendency to talk about the “Muslim youth” as though they can be conceived homogenously. This neglects the rise of religious pluralism due to the process of the deterritorialisation of Islam in the globalised world (Roy, 2004). Therefore, there is a need to document the diversity and complexity of the groups of people interviewed in their particular contexts. Taken as a whole, another underlying factor that binds most of the studies conducted on Muslim youth is the assumption of the alienation they face (Matiki, 1999; Nachmani, 2009; Esposito, 2010). The studies tend to assume that the youth are somewhat dislocated from mainstream society.
Hence, this thesis will engage in a critical analysis of the alienation thesis and demonstrate how popular youth culture is appropriated, albeit with some tensions, to gain legitimacy in mainstream society.

It is imperative, in focusing on the youth as social actors, not to ignore the larger social conditions their actions are set against; particularly, the role of the state management of Muslim youth culture as a precondition of their disparate or common manifestations of youth culture. The premature notion that technology has equalised the playing field, leading to free, uninterrupted global cultural flow, negates the power relationships between states, transnational youth culture and the inter-ethnic competition within host countries.

**Recovering Muslim Youth Studies in Singapore and Australia**

One might point out, as Bourdieu (1993:94-102) has done, that “youth is only a word” and not particularly useful as an analytical category. Bourdieu privileges the primacy of class as more important than an all-age group analysis. By this, he favours placing the young and the old in one category of analysis because to differentiate them is to lose sight of the fact that both share many commonalities, and to disregard the historical and social construction of youth as a category. However, I will argue that to analyse from primarily a class perspective loses sight of the important factor of generations. To be sure, youth is an elusive category that is difficult to define. And if one were to go to 100 countries asking for the definition of youth, one will probably get about as many different answers. Taking into account the discursive context of youth as a category, it is still a useful unit of analysis to examine a transient social group straddling the life worlds of childhood and adulthood. This section highlights the relevant works on Muslim youth in Singapore and Australia in order to chart the prevailing perspectives in understanding youth in general and more specifically, their relationship with popular culture.
Singapore

In Singapore, the suspicion and the apprehension of “youth as a category” and, more so, “youth as an idea” has a historical precedence that can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1907, the Kaum Muda (Young Generation) established the first modern madrasah in Singapore, the Madrasah Al-Iqbal. It can be considered ‘modern’ because it was in line with the idea of a madrasah in recent times both in the structural and organisational sense. In truth, the idea is not “new” in the Islamic concept of knowledge, since Islam does not differentiate between worldly science and doctrines of faith. The reformist version of school was “new” to the Malays then due to its organised system of educational institution as well as inclusion of “non-religious subjects” in the curriculum compared to the traditional Muslim educational systems such as the Qur’anic schools and pondok which focused primarily on Islam as religion, detached from the daily affairs of life. The reformists were labelled as Kaum Muda as against the Kaum Tua (Old Generation) whose members were in favour of all that was traditional, unchanging and secure. A majority felt that Kaum Muda’s ideas were contradictory to Islam due to their emphasis on rationality - a reflection of the mentality of the majority of Muslims in Singapore towards reformism in that period. Today a “new” type of Muslim education system, which incorporated Islam and modern “secular” subjects in its curriculum as was advocated by the Kaum Muda, is the dominant mode of instruction of the madrasah in the Muslim community not only in Singapore but also in Sydney. However, the cautious approach taken towards the “youth” and the influence that their ideas may have on the larger Muslim community remains.

Whilst generally less economically well off and lesser educated, Malays are thought of as “much more religious, musical and sporty” compared to the other ethnic groups in Singapore. Since their exclusion from military service in the 1970s, Malay youth have often been associated with a “deviant” youth culture. Clammer frames this youth culture as a result of associating criminal activities with an excluded social group and treating it as a syndrome of “the uncontrollable psychic energies of youth”. He attributes this to a larger problem of treating young people as
liminal and dangerous in Singapore, especially if they are minority youth and hence need to be heavily socialised. He classified a typology of the Chinese as “short-haired, conventionally dressed, committed to careers in management, computers and engineering and are assimilated into the political structures” while the Malays, who are “long haired, religious, non-materialistic, and interested in social relationships, are not” (Clammer, 1998:144).

Debates on Islam in Singapore have been furious over the past decades. However, a serious academic study of Muslim youth has almost never been done before. A recent edited book on Malay/Muslim youth by the Association of Muslim Professionals (Nawab and Farhan, 2009) is severely limited on a few critical fronts. Whilst discussing the issues of religious extremism, identity, women issues and the environment, the book is very much limited in terms of empirical data. Only three authors cited correspondences with other youth. Of the three, only one author mentioned conducting interviews with the youth (the interviews consist of mainly persons of varsity qualifications and a few diploma holders and defines youth broadly as those between the age of 14 and 35). Another author conducted two interviews (one with the editor of the book and the other with the President of the youth wing publishing the book) and the third author cited conversations with one fellow graduate. It is therefore inevitable that the study suffers from a distorted reality of the empirical field both in terms of educational level and ethnic group. Of the total Singapore population, 15% are Muslims of whom about 93% are Malays with the other 7% coming from ethnic groups such as the Arabs and Indians. Statistics for 2000 show that a mere 2% of the Malay population are graduates; compared to 17% for Indians and 13% for the Chinese. Through a top down approach of looking at the youth, the book inadvertently results in a silencing of the majority of the Malay/Muslim youth which is essentially the authors’ object of study.

There is also a dearth of literature when it comes to the impact of globalisation on religion in Singapore and its contradictions with the secular nation-state. In reality, as religion comes into collision with the secular modern nation state, fractures and fissures can be seen. Issues on the role of the madrasahs, the wearing
of headscarves by Muslim girls and the overall increasing religiosity of the Muslims in Singapore (the same can be said for Muslims in Australia) have been topics raised in the public sphere over the past few years in a country where talk of religion is almost taboo. Nonetheless, Islam remains a possible force behind demands for social justice. Indeed, the recent 2002 headscarf issue was contested closely along the lines of human rights. This is a theme that has since been picked up time and again.

**Australia**

Unlike Singapore, there have been more studies done on Muslim youth in Sydney, in particular, and Australia, in general. In the most elementary forms, there have been attempts to document the needs and sentiments of Muslim youth in particular social settings. Asmar (2001) documents the basic needs of Muslim varsity students such as a prayer place, halal food and a Muslim counsellor, as well as the stereotypes stemming from prejudice that is often conferred upon Muslim female students. Putting on the hijab and other Islamic clothing often triggers discriminative behaviour from the public. Female students talk about the misconception that the adornment of the hijab is a signifier of their oppression. With the strong social networks built both locally with national and Muslim associations and internationally with speakers invited for speeches, the notion of space in the universities is continuously challenged. It becomes appropriate to ask the question of where the university begins and ends and to note that the dichotomy of minority/majority communities is increasingly blurred. Asmar also documents the possible tensions caused by a meeting of Muslim students – local and international. She also recounts the usra (discussion meetings) on campus at the Muslim students’ associations (MSAs) as a medium through which Muslim students of various backgrounds mix and how international students can come to influence the way Islam is practised on campus, such as on issues of male-female segregation. MSAs were enacted in a significant number of universities in Australia (see Chowdhury, 2006). In addition to the MSAs, the 1980s and 90s also saw the establishment of many Muslim youth organisations in Australia’s capital cities including the *Federation of Australian Muslim Youth* and the *Young Muslims of Australia* (Saeed, 2003:90-91).
Academic works have also been geared towards understanding the relationships between migration and identity formation for the Muslim (youth) community. Ali (2006) elucidates that Muslims migrating to Western countries are confronted with threats to their identity in the face of secularisation and the pressures towards assimilation. At the front of these battles is the fear of losing the youth to these foreign influences. This in part explains why “newer Islamic movements” as coined by Lars Pedersen (1999), like the Jamaat Daawah Islamiah and Tablighi Jamaat, which are revivalist movements that are transnational and non-ethnic based in nature, are popular amongst many Muslim youth in Sydney. Ali sees an Islamic revivalism amongst Australian Muslim youth. He cites the examples of women wearing the hijab or burqah and Muslim men wearing the kameez (long baggy shirt), shalwar (baggy pants) or the jubah (Arab gown), growing their beards and seeking prayer provisions in workplaces and schools as indicators to support this claim (Ali, 2006:178). The author further demonstrates that the khuruj (preaching tour) culture of the Tablighi Jamaat which is becoming popular amongst unmarried men and teenagers has become a sort of religious response to the youth culture of Sydney (Ali, 2006:233). Seniors encourage the positive impact the group’s activities have on their youth such as solving issues of delinquency and late marriages and hence encourage the youth to frequent the mosque after khuruj. Early marriages are seen as a barrier against the sinful promiscuity of Western youth culture. The Islamic values inculcated through the practice of khuruj garners a strong Muslim identity from a young age and act as the foundation for social interaction within the larger social fabric of Australian society (Ali, 2006:233).

Studies have also ranged from discussing the phenomenon of increasing religiosity amongst Muslim youth, to the social problems involving the young. For the former, the youth’s strict abidance to Muslim practices and the rise in the adherence to the hijab in university campuses have been cited as proof that Muslim youth in Australia also exhibit the increasing religiosity experienced by the larger Muslim community (Bouma, Daw and Munawar, 2001:70). The predicament facing Muslim youth in schools in many advanced industrialised nations, Australia included
(see Mansouri and Wood, 2008), is that although the schools are officially secular, the school system is underlined by an adherence to Judeo-Christian values which forms a hegemonic aspect of curriculum. Hence teachers have to be cautious not to put Muslim youth in a position where they are in breach of their faith, such as consuming non-\textit{halal} food and forcing female students in physical education classes to expose their \textit{aurah} (Wyn and White, 1997:129).

A study of youth gangs in Western Sydney was conducted in 2000 whereby four researchers undertook interviews with about 20 youth, a number of Lebanese immigrant parents, Lebanese community leaders and police officers in addition to carrying out observational fieldwork, media and policy analysis. Amongst the problems that arise in the management of Muslim youth is ethnic stereotyping and racial profiling in policing (Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar, 2000:183). The study revealed that the media’s “racialised” coverage of criminal activities was one of the major problems in deviantising the social group. Friendship groups became the perennial form of coping mechanism amongst the youth where a heightened masculine and ethnic identity around the notions of “toughness, danger and respect” as a means to project a presence, provide protection and make up for their low social status as a result of economic depression (Collins et al., 2000:150). As such youth claims of affiliations to gangs tend to be symbolic, serving more as a way of impression management and are less indicative of a life of crime. In an updated study done post-September 11, the four researchers discuss how media vilification against the backdrop of the American-led war on terror, cemented the view of the “Arab other” as a dangerous being. This ultimately led to heightened disparagement of the Muslim youth in Sydney as witnessed physically in various discriminatory acts by the wider public (Poynting et al., 2004). These works on Muslim youth in Sydney are further developed by Poynting and Noble (2004; 2005; 2006) working on themes from the Cronulla riots of 2005, the marginalisation of Muslim youth rugby fans and the concept of “respect” among Muslim boys.

Interestingly, a comparative study of youth in Singapore and Australia had been done once in 1987 by Poole and Cooney, sampling Australian youth from the
city of Sydney. This quantitative study sought to capture the sentiments of youth living in an urban city setting and their aspirations for the future. The study showed that Singaporean youth are more greatly concerned with national issues and saw their future as being tied to the country while their Sydney counterparts tended to take a more global worldview. To add, the study alleges that Singapore youth tend to place a higher focus on education, work and political aspects whilst Sydneysiders emphasise environmental concerns, lifestyle and psychological issues. Nonetheless, whilst the study was a comparison between Singapore and Sydney youth in general, this thesis will focus specifically on Muslim youth. More importantly, however, it departs from the simplistic assumption of the authors that youth in the two countries are necessarily pitted against each other along an East versus West binary.

**Research Method**

These observations necessitate a comparative sociological approach. This is the first study whereby Muslim youth of diverse ethnic backgrounds are compared across two countries in the Asia Pacific. Previous comparative studies of Muslim youth have examined the evolution of diasporic groups, such as migrant Turkish youth living in North Western countries. To a lesser extent, comparisons have also been attempted in the study of youth belonging to a particular ethnic group, for example Arab youth in Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008). Furthermore, the majority of works that engage in national comparisons have primarily utilised data published by international agencies or official government records. Comparative sociologists have tended not to collect original data in the countries that they seek to study. Amongst studies that have attempted to gather fresh data, the survey method seems to be the most popular. Hence, there is a scarcity and a void in the qualitative aspect of research in comparative sociology which the thesis aims to fill.

Secondly, the method employed by the thesis does not give primacy to either a macro or a micro point of view by locating ethnographic data within the processes of state interventions and global cultural flows. By utilising the youth as an entry
point into how Muslims can be studied, the thesis gives agency to social actors on the
ground rather than focusing entirely on the structures that impose themselves on the
youth. I further stress that the thesis does not claim to portray a comprehensive view
of Muslim youth culture, much less a homogeneous one, which does not exist. But
every attempt has been made to tease out the various and diverse responses of
Muslim youth groups in the forthcoming chapters. This thesis seeks to examine
Muslim youth both from an ethnographic perspective and also at the level of
structural processes that shape the everyday lives of these youth. Taking the category
of youth as a unit of social analysis, the research does not merely embark on a testing
of established sociological theories. Instead, through the collection of original data,
the thesis aims to build and form new concepts that cast light on the social conditions
facing the Muslim youth today.

By illuminating the workings and interdependence of the key processes of
globalisation, state management as well as the form and degree of participation in
popular youth culture in both societies, this study draws out the nature of society as
we live in today. The thesis also includes illustrations from the two cities with the
specific aim of generating theory. The social setting for this comparative study is
diachronic in nature (Lammers, 1978:485). It does not vary merely in space but in
time. As such, the thesis goes back a few decades in order to elucidate the different
global as well as local processes.

Textual/Content Analysis

The research was undertaken in a series of integrated approaches. The first
phase involved a textual analysis of academic works, news media and publicly
available documents from both the Singapore and Australian governments and non-
governmental organisations. National databases that are accessible for public
consumption and do not make any references or identify particular individuals such
as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Singapore proved particularly
useful. This information was collected for the purposes of determining trends,
patterns as well as sequences across gender, class and religiosity.
The author also engaged in an excavation of newspaper archives over the last 20 years. The reason for this is not only conceptual but empirical. For the Australian example, articles relating to Muslim youth fizzle out as one traverse back into the 1980s. This has to do with both global events that affect local communities and also the immigration patterns in the country. The 1990s to the present day was taken as a marker of comparison between the two societies.

Besides these more conventional sources, it is important when researching youth, to acknowledge the spaces which the youth utilise to express themselves. To this end, the cyberspace is becoming a very powerful medium for youth to voice their opinions, openly or anonymously. Muslim youth are also spending a significant amount of their time on networking sites. As such, online forums, personal blogs, social networking websites such as Friendster, Facebook, YouTube and MySpace are becoming an invaluable research site for a discerning social scientist. For example, the Muslim Village website, which is a subset of the IslamicSydney.com site, draws up to a million hits a month from Muslims between 20 to 40 years of age. In order to appropriate these spaces, sociologists need to realise the viability and validity of the cyberspace as a critical site for fieldwork. The social function of the Internet as a tool for free communication is especially significant for a migrant society as relatives, both immediate and extended, update their loved ones on their everyday lives. Hence, with the central role of information technology and interfaces, we see a shift to the cyber-ummah as the primary source of knowledge. Here, one sees the differential responses of the youth between those who feel the need to contextualise and “glocalise” Muslim youth culture and those who see themselves as an extension of these global processes.

There can be challenges in utilising the cyberspace as a source of data. Anonymity and the lack of ownership are ready obstacles for a researcher that is interested in engaging in an ethnography of everyday internet practices of communities and individuals (Miller and Slater, 2000) or what has been called “virtual ethnography” (Hine, 2000; 2005) or “netnography” (Kozinets, 2010). However, rather than circumvent the relevance of new media as a valuable resource
of youth activity, it can be utilised to complement the ethnographic data that has been garnered through more conventional means such as in depth interviewing and conducting surveys. Although virtual methods are often not deployed in exclusivity, it has become an increasingly influential component of a mixed methods approach in studying youth, as the method is increasingly tested in a number of diverse case studies (e.g. Hine, 2000; Dicks et al., 2005). Inevitably, these sites provide rich ethnographic data and provide the sociologist with an opportunity to conduct participation observation either by observing the unfolding of online debates or being an active member of discussions.

**Interviews and Participant Observation**

The second phase involved conducting interviews with Muslim youth residing in Singapore and Sydney as well as conducting participation observation of common youth meeting places. By pursuing both these approaches, a comprehensive understanding of the topic was achieved. Fieldwork was carried out in both cities to get an intimate feel of the ground. The thesis also employed the qualitative method (through in-depth interviews and participant observation) in conducting the research and in gaining knowledge of the ground. I spent six months in each of the sites for fieldwork purposes. It is the intention of the research that original ethnographic data can be gathered for the purpose of this study. In this study, youth is defined as those aged 18 to 25. For the purposes of the study, I interviewed both male and female respondents. 26 young people were interviewed in each city. There are slightly more males than females interviewees in both cities as the study of tattooing within a youth gang culture involves predominantly males. The information gathered from interviews with participants pertained to their experiences participating in popular youth culture in a secular, multicultural and globalised setting. Much of the information gained was in the form of personal stories and experiences of close ones. Personal information was also collected from the participants, related to things like their occupations, marriage status, educational qualifications and parents’ socio-economic background. These factors are relevant insofar that the views and observations expressed by participants have to be contextualised vis-à-vis their
position and status in society. All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. I considered using national and private surveys but decided much of these are accessible through existing research. Therefore, focusing the study on in-depth interviews and participant observation would yield newer perspectives. A brief profile of the respondents for the in-depth interviews conducted is tabled in the Annex.

While this study sets out to interview and sample Muslim youth from a whole spectrum of socio-cultural background, it does not claim to have mapped the entire complex demography of Muslim youth. The interviews documented in this study were pivotal in enabling the researcher to shape his arguments. It is critical at this juncture to mention that the data collected shapes the arguments, theories and concepts put forward henceforth and not vice versa. Interviews were purposefully set along a number of loosely strung questions devised to allow respondents to reflect and contribute as befitting the individual’s social background. As such it was the intention of the researcher to elicit responses that are candid and spontaneous. The interviews were solely conducted by the author who is competent in both English and Malay and interview conversations were held in these languages. All interview questions were drafted by the author.

The research sample takes into consideration that Muslim youth do not exist as a monolithic bloc but are fractured along various fault lines such as gender, age, religious orientation and occupation amongst others. The researcher took note of the socio-cultural diversity of Muslims in Sydney and Singapore. Muslims in Sydney especially, derive their origins from a proliferation of lands such as Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Indonesia and even Singapore. As such, youth from the Lebanese, Indonesian, Iraqi, Egyptian and Indian communities were interviewed. Issues linked to women presented some cultural nuances among different Muslim communities and also within the communities.

Some female respondents were not comfortable or might not have wanted to be interviewed by a male interviewer. Hence female participants were allowed to
bring along a female friend or a male from her family to attend if she wished. It was also imperative that the researcher was aware of the social background of various participants and the unique discussions pertaining to young Muslims in the context of each society. This is to ensure that the researcher did not fall into stereotypical lines of questioning and replenish particularistic ethnic myths during interviews that would antagonise his respondents such as associating the Arab other with being Muslim or youth of Middle Eastern appearance with juvenile delinquency or associating the Malays with a laid back attitude.

Participants were contacted initially through the organisation. Letters were sent out to representatives of various youth organisations explaining the project and requesting interviews. Organisations were furnished with an information sheet stating the brief objectives of the researcher's project. The organisations then requested for volunteers from within their individual setup to participate in the project. The interviews were conducted face to face in private at a mutually agreed location, time and duration. Respondents were presented with a form and a letter which included all details of the research project and the relevant information about their rights to refuse to participate, to withdraw participation and to anonymity. Interviews, in general, lasted for about one hour. The questions were not pre-determined but spontaneously asked depending on the answers and direction of the discussion. In order to negate a class bias in the study, I had not only solicited interviews from university MSAs but also grassroots Muslim organisations and the youth wings of mosque establishments. Muslim youth were sampled from all across Singapore and Sydney and were not centred on a particular locality within the two cities. It was necessary to send out the requests to participate in the research to as many social groups as possible to capture the ethnic diversity of the Muslim community in Sydney.

The researcher took down notes during the course of the interview. The interviews were not audio recorded but instead captured in short-hand writing. The choice to avoid taping the interviews was carefully thought out to avoid respondents from being apprehensive about vocalising their spontaneous views. It was also an attempt to allay the anxieties of the respondents by making the interviews as informal
and as casual as possible. This is critical as some of the interviews include participants deemed to be from the illegitimate or deviant spheres. Indeed, such an interview strategy has been well practiced in the field as “before tape recording made such a method seem by comparison impressionistic, this was the commonest sociological practice” (Thompson, 2000:232). The informants were encouraged to provide their views and insights and not to feel restrained by the questions. A follow up interview was sometimes arranged after reviewing the information provided, if the participant was willing.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, the researcher also employed the participant observation method of qualitative research and engaged in a covert observation of the participants in their natural setting. Consistent with trying to seek out youth spaces virtual and real, the author “hung out” with Muslim youth at skate parks, various promenades, mosques, music gigs, cafes and shopping malls amongst other youth rendezvous. Such an approach in this research involved a participant observation of youth in various locales. As such participants remained anonymous in my study and there was no invasion of their privacy. When participants are observed un-intervened, the researcher can be led to pick out certain traits that might not be apparent to the social actors themselves given that the familiarity of the subjects with the setting might lead the social actors to assume a number of things. It was important for this study to document the inter-group and intra-group dynamics amongst young Muslims in public settings in which social interaction is a crucial part of the formation of group identities, networks of support and information exchange. Alerting the participants of the researcher's watchful presence might lead the participants to engage in “impression management” thus allowing the researcher to only observe what the participants would want the researcher to see.

The author had protracted conversations with his research subjects. In the event that this was not possible, the researcher observed closely overt Muslim identity markers that were evident in some social groups. These markers might take the form of dress codes such as Islamic tattoos, the veil or skull caps. Other markers include conversational styles. These might come in the form of giving salam
(Muslim greeting) and expressions such as God Willing (Insya Allah) and All Praise be to Allah (Alhamdulillah). There are gains and losses in taking this approach. As an observer, I was not be able capture all facets of Muslim expressions of religiosity but this does not in any way compromise the integrity of the research.

My research with young gang members was conducted over a one-year period using participant-observation and in-depth interview techniques. On the contrary, respondents in this category were mainly recruited through a snowball sampling technique (Watters and Biernacki, 1989). I worked on referrals made possible by the interviewees’ personal contacts besides going through agencies that work intimately with high-risk youngsters. Meetings were often spontaneous and took place in a wide variety of locations, and none were held in closed institutions. I spent time with the young gang members in the streets, on their park benches, at coffee shops, in the void decks, and in their homes. I sought out to achieve two aims in my interviews with youth gang members. The first is with regard to personal and familial information, self-reported delinquency, and any previous contact with the criminal and juvenile justice system. Secondly, the respondents were asked in a series of open-ended questions regarding their choice of tattoos, the gang's history, its organisation, day to day activities, respondents’ roles within the group and interaction with family, the community, and police.

Initially, it was common for me to come across respondents who were cautious such as one who states, “You cannot blame us if we think that you are a SSB (Secret Societies Branch) police officer. You want to do this kind of thing; you got to be prepared for the consequences that things can happen to you. You are around us and things happen. Usually people doing research will do it in a proper manner. Like go through the police or the Ministry. The people there will give you access to the files of gang members”. However, rapport and trust was established incrementally and seemed to improve in the subsequent meetings, perhaps because nothing bad had happened to any of them arising from their contact with me.
I established close relationships with some gang members and was at times invited to their rendezvous. Some would talk to me individually while others never spoke to me privately. The deployment of bottom-up, participatory methodologies, enables the researcher to create an environment of trust by engaging in meaningful discussions on the social capital of young people involved in gangs. This participatory approach confers upon social actors, rights, resources, and positive capacities. It enables the researcher to glean the social roles played by youth gangs in the socialisation of young Muslims who find themselves under conditions of relative economic deprivation, educational backwardness, inequality, and social exclusion.
CHAPTER 3

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: RETHINKING MUSLIM YOUTH IDENTITIES

This chapter seeks to contextualise the young Muslim subjects in question. It is impossible to begin to comprehend the participation of youth in popular culture without taking into serious consideration the dynamics of Muslim youth identity formation. By examining the roles played by the state and the youth within the context of a global and evolving youth culture, this chapter advances a fresh approach to the understanding of youth identity construction. By way of quantitative and qualitative analysis, it aims to explicate the social milieu which gave rise to dominant narratives about young Muslim minorities, as well as illuminate the attempts by the state at managing young Muslims. In the process, I will interrogate the problems embedded within what is commonly referred to as the “alienation thesis” as well as any arguments that are in corollary to it.

In rethinking the necessary social conditions of production that defines the habitus of Muslim youth in globalised Singapore and Sydney, it is also essential to consider the class position and other forms of solidarities which these young men and women belong to. That is to say, minority status, social class, the notion of space, the sense of belonging to a particular unique generation and the idea of piety are the very elements that contribute to the cultural and symbolic capital which young Muslims in these two cities employ in the constitution of their identities. These complex yet intertwining processes will be the focus in this chapter.

Minority Status

Singapore

The 9th of August 1965 marked the bestowing of sovereignty on the tiny island of Singapore and with that came the previously inconceivable concept – that
of a Singaporean. They were no longer part of Malaysia and overnight, the Malays in Singapore were transformed into a minority community living in a predominantly Chinese community. For the Singaporean Malays who were predominantly Muslims, this also meant a massive break from the epicenter of Islamic authority. The Singapore constitution provides for the protection of the interest of the Malays and their minority status. Article 152(2) of the constitution states that the government is required to “exercise its functions in such a manner as to recognise the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore” and “to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language”. Nonetheless, Article 152 has never been evoked, challenged or questioned in a court of law. Its existence is more symbolic than real as there are no policies to back affirmative action for the Malays. Furthermore, as this chapter will demonstrate, this special position of the Malays is not a view based on consensus (Vasil, 2000:103). Hence we clearly see a disjuncture between what is textualised in law and what the social reality is (Kamaludeen, 2007).

The minority status of the Muslims in Singapore has remained fairly constant for over three generations. The table below presents the ethnic and religious breakdown of resident population.

*Table 2: Ethnic Composition of Resident Population, 2010*

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<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Total ('000)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2,713.2</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>490.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>319.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,608.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2010 Advance Release
Table 3: Religious Affiliation in Singapore, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taoism</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Singapore Department of Statistics (2001:4)

No statistics are readily available on the demographics of Muslim youth in Singapore. The best substitute for this would be to examine the Malay demography which makes up 93% of Muslims in Singapore. In 2003, there were 269,000 male and 306,300 female Malay youth aged 15-24, representing about 13.7% of a total population of 4,185,000. This represents a fall in the number and proportion of youth, from 275,800 males and 282,300 females in 1993, representing 17.1% of the total population. Different from the general demography of Singaporeans, the contours of the Malay population exhibits a wide-based pyramid. A report released in 2005 states that more than 37% of Malays are under the age of 20. This inadvertently makes the Malays a community with the biggest pool of youths amongst the major ethnic groups in Singapore. Such figures become even more significant when juxtaposed against Singapore’s greying society and falling birth rates. Having said that, Malay birth rates have also fallen dramatically from 2.7 in 1990 to about natural replacement rate which is about 2.1 in 2004 which explains the higher youth base today. Hence it is projected that in the next decade or so, the proportion of Malay youth to the general Malay population will be narrower in ratio. This makes the contemporary Muslim youth in Singapore an important social group for analysis for it is unique both in terms of the larger proportion of young Muslims compared to the other dominant communities and also because it is a phenomenon that is dwindling significantly even within the community itself due to the drastic fall in birth rates among Muslim families.
The Muslims have always been a minority community in Australia. The presence of Muslims has been documented in Australia since the Afghans first came in 1860 as camel drivers for the intention of exploration into the vast hinterland. Other Muslim groups who then emigrated included “Koepangers” (Indonesians) who worked in the pearl industry, Javanese cane cutters in north Queensland (1880s) and Indian Muslim hawkers and drapers (1890s). Global and local events such as the economic depression which gave rise to high unemployment rates and the rise of Australian nationalism in the late 1890s brought about a more closed Australia. The enactment of the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901, commonly recognised as the “White Australia” policy, put up further obstacles to non-white migration resulting in a decrease of Muslim settlers. In the 1920s, a number of Albanian Muslims though, being European, managed to migrate to Australia in the face of a shortage of labourers particularly land clearers. Although the ‘White Australia’ policy was unofficially withdrawn in the 1950s, it was not officially repealed till 1973. A policy of multiculturalism was practiced leading to an increase in the number of Muslims of varying ethnic backgrounds (Kabir, 2008).

Muslims make up the fourth largest religious community in Australia after the Christians, those who professed to have “no religion” and the Buddhists. The 2006 Australian Census places Muslims at about 1.71% of Australian society with about 340,392 adherents. The percentage is significantly higher for Sydney as shown as in the table below. In fact, the highest percentage of Muslims in Australia resides in Sydney.
Table 4: Religious Affiliation in Sydney, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Question Blank</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yearbook 2009-10, Australian Bureau of Statistics

When it comes to the youth, what is again particularly striking is the youthful demography of the Australian Muslim population. As seen in the table below, nearly 50% of Australian Muslims are under the age of 25 which makes this hugely significant given that non-Muslim Australia only see a corresponding figure of 35%.

Table 5: Muslims and Non-Muslim in Australia by Age Group (%), 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>0-4</th>
<th>5-14</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Australians</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Muslim Australians</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2006 Census Tables, Australian Bureau of Statistics

It was further reported that 70% of Muslims in Sydney were less than 30 years of age (Snow, 2007). To add, further statistics show that there are about 100,000 Australian-born Muslims of which about 86% are aged 24 and below.¹ The number of Australian Muslim males slightly outnumbers females 53% to 47% (compared to 49 per cent male and 51 per cent female for the whole Australian population).²

² Source: ABS, 2001 Census, Unpublished data.
Muslims in Australia are also characterised by diverse backgrounds. Most Muslims are born in Australia with Lebanon and Turkey being the next most prevalent native countries.

Table 6: Muslims in Australia by Country of Birth (%), 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran, Fiji, India</td>
<td>2 each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various other Countries</td>
<td>Less than 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 2006 Census, Special Tabulations

Social Class

Social class is an important element to look at in the study of youth and the construction of their identities. The first reason stems from the frequent relation made between class and social problems amongst youth. Scholars such as William Greider (1997:40) painted a bleak picture of youth when he argued that “marginalized youth”, who are finding it extremely difficult to land a job, are “the true incendiaries of this age” of a crisis between capitalism and labour. According to such perspectives, such youth are supposedly detached from their communities with no particular direction, skills and prospects and destined for life on welfare due to the dearth of educational opportunities and difficulties in finding sustainable employment. The resulting sense of powerlessness manifests itself in social problems that are experienced globally in the form of drive-by shootings, xenophobia, soccer hooliganism, job riots and the destruction of public property. It was further postulated that these negative experiences tend to turn these youth to other positive indicators of adulthood such as immersing themselves in religious activities, acquiring material goods and taking on parenthood.
Secondly, as the family institution forms the basis for the attainment of economic and other forms of capital necessary for the transition into adulthood, it can be argued that the relative deprivation faced by the family can lead to adverse consequences for the youth. It is therefore essential to get a sense of social class amongst the Muslim youth in both Singapore and Sydney as being minorities in both cities; Muslim youth are disadvantaged with regard to economic and social capital. Furthermore, as seen in the quote below, understanding an individual’s socio-economic status is crucial in making sense of the dynamics within a particular social group. It is one of the primary social indicators of social networking and a factor in galvanising group solidarity.

Some friends are close. It all depends on the class factor, I think. My friends usually come from the same class background. It makes many things easier. For example, when we go out, it is easy because most of us can afford the same things. For example when we go out for dinner and all, it makes things easier.

Hazrul, Male, Singapore

Given that culture is a primary determinant of class structures, it is integral for a study of popular youth culture to explore the liminal boundaries that are peculiar to the generation of Muslim youth that we are discussing.

_Singapore_

In 1966, upon Singapore's independence, Malay income was documented to be about 15% below that of the Chinese community (Pang, 1982:64). In the socio-economic arena of Singapore, the number of Malays in the higher occupational echelons, both in the public and private sectors, is conspicuously small. A 1990-91 Report on the Underclass in the Malay-Muslim Community sanctioned by Mendaki revealed that half of the families receiving aid in various schemes had a monthly salary of under $400. These make up those who are living in conditions at the level
of poverty and below poverty level. A majority of the household breadwinners were women and a third of the male breadwinners had never been to school.

It is important to cite the socio-economic condition of the Malays in the early 1990s as it provides the social background against which the youth today grew up. The table below shows that although the median Malay household income has almost quadrupled from 1980 to 2005, the income gap between Malays and other races has widened concomitantly.

Table 7: Median Monthly Household Income from Work Among Employed Households ($)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>4,240</td>
<td>4,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>2,560</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2,260</td>
<td>3,130</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>4,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>3,330</td>
<td>3,990</td>
<td>4,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics

Note:
1) Data consists of only employed households.
2) Data for 1980 is not directly comparable to subsequent years.
3) Data for 1985 is not available.

The same point can be better illuminated if we look at the field of education. Statistics for 2000 shows that there are a mere 2% of Malay graduates if compared to the 17% for Indians and 13% for the Chinese. “Barely half of all the Malay students who sat for the O-level examinations made it to the A-level, and less than half of the A-level Malay students managed to get into the local universities, NUS and NTU” (Hussin, 2005:56). The 2000 population census showed that a mere 25% of Malay workers met the minimum educational requirements that Mendaki projected for those joining the workforce. 37.4% possess less than a secondary education. AMP chairman Mr Imram also pointed to overrepresentation of Malays in prison and in low-income jobs.
Table 8: Resident Working Persons Aged 15 Years and Over By Highest Qualification Attained (%), 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Qualification</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnic</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Secondary</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics

Table 9: Occupational Distribution of Resident Working Persons Aged 15 and Over (%), 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative &amp; Managerial</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical &amp; Related</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales &amp; Services</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production &amp; Related</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners &amp; Labourers</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics

Compounding this situation is the elitist nature of job recruitment amongst the ruling elite (Mauzy and Milne, 2002:53-55; Barr, 2006). A study of Singapore’s top 100-plus officials by Cherian George and Jason Leow called “Who runs Singapore?” (The Sunday Times, 26 April 1998) revealed that high-achieving scholars dominate the top echelons of the public sector. The PS 100 list is a snapshot of the elite individuals holding full-time office in the executive, the civil service, the uniformed services, statutory boards, and government-owned corporations. More than half have made it through the scholar route and the proportion is rising, as younger individuals rise into the top positions. Thus, among those under 50 years of age who would have been of A-level age in 1965 or later - scholars make up three quarters of the list. Already by 1993, there were thirteen scholars among the 14 permanent secretaries under the age
The success of the scholarship schemes has tended to make Public Service 100 and the administrative service more homogeneous (Barr and Skrbis, 2008).

Economic and educational backwardness of Malay youth, compounded with social problems such as drug abuse and high divorce rates, have taken the attention of the Singaporean regime since its declaration of independence (Kamaludeen, 2007). The main problem facing the Muslim community is that of dysfunctional families living in relative poverty. There is a disproportionate number of Malays in these families which is characterised by high rates of teen pregnancy, delinquency and divorce. These result in an increasing number of single parent households. In mid-2007, it was revealed that half of the 495 new-borns who were born out of wedlock had Malay mothers and a third of the 495 mothers were under the age of 19. Drop-in centres and hotlines are some of the state strategies to arrest these problems among the Muslim youth. The Malay Youth Literary Association (4PM)’s Youth-in-Action Plus programme provides the youth with mentors and also hold camps, soccer clinics and motivational talks. In 2008, the Prime Minister called on Malay/Muslim organisations to instil frugality and discipline among youth (Loh, 2008).

Of late, the issue of Muslim youth radicalisation has also been added to the list of “Malay Problems”. This was reflected in the various websites such as http://invoke.sg, http://radical.mosque.sg and www.youthonline.com.sg that were created by MUIS and various grassroots organisations to try to address the issue. The latter website was formed after being inspired by a website run by a group of Muslim youth in London.

Sydney

Muslims in Australia also mainly belong to the working class. When one looks at income per capita, the issue of income disparities at both ends of the strata comes to the fore. According to the 2001 Census of Australia, a staggering 43% of Muslims are earning a weekly income of under $200, compared to 27% of
Australians collectively, and only 5% of Australian Muslims earn in excess of $1000 a week, compared to 11% the general Australian population\(^3\).

*Table 10: Highest Level of Educational Attainment (%), 2006*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Non-Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 and below</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cert/Dip/Assoc. Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/Post grad</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 and below</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cert/Dip/Assoc. Degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/Post grad</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 2006 census, Special Tabulations.

Note: 11% Muslim and 14% of non-Muslim males and 11% of Muslim and 15% of non-Muslim females did not provide adequate data.

Contrary to the popular imaginings of the poor destitute migrant (Edgar, Doherty and Meert, 2004; Malanga, 2006), Australian Muslims are more likely to possess higher academic credentials. According to official statistics, there is a bigger proportion of Muslim youth living in Australia who attends university, compared to Australian youth collectively. Of those who are born outside Australia, 18% of Muslim men and 13% of Muslim women have at least a bachelor degree. In general, among the Australian Muslim workforce aged 15 years and above, nearly 22% have at least a bachelor’s degree. Nonetheless, the Australian Census of 2006 shows that Muslims as a whole are economically disadvantaged when compared to other Australians. Australian Muslims find themselves underrepresented in the higher echelons of society.

Table 11: Occupational Structure of Muslim and Non-Muslim Australians, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Muslim (%)</th>
<th>Non-Muslim (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Managerial</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Blue-Collar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales, clerical and personal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 2006 census, Special Tabulations.

Note: occupations “inadequately described” not included.

Unemployment is particularly high among certain Muslim ethnic groups especially for those who are unskilled and not proficient in the English language (Saeed, 2003:2). Within the Australian Muslim population, those who are foreign born find it more difficult to gain employment. Granted that part of the problem might be due to some overseas-born Australian Muslims acquiring their degrees at foreign institutions not particularly held in high regard by Australian employers, these statistics are still illuminative of the disjuncture in social status experienced by Australian Muslims.

Table 12: Weekly Income of Muslim and Non-Muslim Households, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income ($)</th>
<th>Muslim Households (%)</th>
<th>Non-Muslim Households (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative/ Nil income</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$649 and less</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$650–$1199</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1200–$3499</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3500 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 2006 census, Special Tabulations.

Note: 15% per cent of Muslim and non-Muslim households did not provide income information.

The argument that migration is the determining factor that relegates Australian migrants to an underclass can be overstated. Take for example Australian Muslims from Lebanon. A recent study by Betts and Healy (2006) posits that...
Lebanese Muslims, who form the largest group of Muslims in Australia, have it a lot worse than Lebanese Christians although they were both migrants and native born. “Lebanese Muslims earned a median weekly income of $152 per household member, compared to Lebanese Christians, who earned $253. The national average was $302. Taking men aged 25-64 as a group, 47% of Lebanese Muslims were either unemployed or not in the workforce, compared to 28% of Lebanese Christians and 21% of all men in this age group”. This is despite the relatively larger Muslim household compared to their Christian counterparts. The unemployment rate in the Sydney suburbs with a significant Muslim representation such as Bankstown, Auburn, Blacktown, Campbelltown and Fairfield is between 9 to 11 per cent, more than twice that of the national average.

It has to be pointed out that although the national census shows that Australian Muslims are above the national average in terms of academic qualifications, the statistic presented does not provide an ethnic specific breakdown within Muslim groups and across other migrant groups. As Betts and Healy’s study also shows, Lebanese Christian males are more likely to have better qualifications than Muslims. This case study presents a legitimate and sound educational rationalisation to explain the unemployment and low household income discrepancy between the two social groups. However, taking into consideration the many studies conducted that show real discriminatory practices against Muslims in Australia (Dunn and McDonald, 2001; Klocker, 2004; Poynting and Mason, 2007; HREOC, 2004; Poynting and Noble, 2004; Pedersen et al., 2005), the low socio-economic status among a significant segment of the Muslim community can lead to a heightened perception of discrimination (Schildkraut, 2011).

**Conflation of Identity – Of Arabisation and Malayisation**

There is overwhelming evidence in both cities whereby respondents feel that there is a conflation between “race/ethnicity” and that of “religion” when discussing Muslim youth identity. Practical knowledge of the Muslim Other follows a kind of reductionist tendency.
This conflation of identity in Singapore and Sydney can also be argued to be a juxtaposition of the “global” on the “local”. The generalisation that both the “Arab world” and the “Malay world” comprise primarily of Muslims is duly applied to the minority communities in the two cities. As seen below, in the case of Australia, the statistical data reveals that this is not the case. As for Singapore, even though the reduction works to a large extent, this conflation is still vulnerable to being manipulated for political gains and comes at the expense of the different Muslim ethnic groups.

**Singapore**

Muslim doesn’t mean have to be Malay; in fact my race is not Malay. Therefore I would prefer and proud to say that I’m a Muslim Singaporean because to me, race is not an issue.

Siti, Female, Singapore

I don’t see racial cultures to be that important but being in spore, some Malay cultures and Islamic cultures do cross paths rather significantly so it would be a great benefit and importance if we continued these practices.

Zaki, Male, Singapore

In Singapore, the two categories of “Malay” and “Muslim” are often collapsed given that virtually all Malays are Muslims, and the Malays make up 93% of the Muslim population. There is also a vast amount of literature that talks about how the small minority of Muslims from other ethnic groups becomes integrated and assimilated into Malay life, its traditions and culture.

This racial and religious entanglement of the term “Malay/Muslims”, which has its roots in Singapore and Malaysia’s shared history before their separation, continues to serves a political function in the island state. With the entanglement of the Malay/Muslim category, it presupposes and institutionalises religion as the overriding category over race when it comes to the Muslims in Singapore. This is unheard of in all other fields and domains of life in Singapore as racial categories pervade and permeates all facets of community life. These translate into special
circumstances and criterion for the selection of leaders in the Muslim community. To label “Malay Members of Parliament (MP)” without the “Muslim” suffix is to lose sight of the intricacies of the Singapore politics. There are the categories of Chinese, Malay/Muslim, Indian and Other races with Muslim being the master identity. The entrance of a Muslim Member of Parliament into the political realm hinges upon a religious consideration and not an ethnic quota.

Therein lies the contradiction of multiracialism whereby the Muslim political elites, by virtue of the ethnic quota are voted into power by a majority non-Muslim population who were not particularly concerned with Muslim issues. In the Singapore context, Islam as a marker in determining the Malay identity has a reverse consequence of perpetuating the notion of an exclusive minority community. Coupled further by the stress on language and culture, Lily argues that the Malay identity as defined by both the Muslim and non-Muslim power elites in Singapore has departed from its trans-national historical precedents. Through the combined formula of Islam, language, culture and class as markers of the Malay identity, the stage was set for the Malays in Singapore to be categorised as one of the most backward minority races to be marginalised by the polity.4

Sydney

I see myself just as a Muslim. Some Muslims identify themselves as Arab first. It depends on how nationalistic they are and whether they are strict with their culture. But there is this tendency here in Australia to actually stereotype us, with Middle Eastern appearance as being Arab. And the stereotype of being Arab here is that you are Lebanese. And if you are Lebanese, then you are Muslim.

Sarah, Female, Sydney

Although I am Kuwaiti, people just see me as the “Middle Eastern guy”. They will ask me, do you speak Lebanese? You just have to look at the news and listen to what they say.

Rafiq, Male, Sydney

4 Ibid., p. 25.
Much in the same way that we can talk about a *malayisation* of Singapore Muslims, one can speak of an *arabisation* of Islam in Sydney. Respondents in Sydney point to a tendency in the Australian media and general public to conflate the ethnic categories of “Arab”, “Middle Eastern appearance” and “Lebanese” with the religious category of “Muslim” (Grewal, 2007). Actually, the majority of Arab communities in Australia are not Muslim. In fact, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reflects that of the number of Australians born in Muslim countries in 2001, only 41 per cent of the Lebanese, 31 per cent of the Iraqi and 34 per cent of the Iranian communities are Muslim. A majority of the respondents hold the mainstream media responsible for this conflation of identities. As we will see in the next chapter, a number of young Muslims involved in the production of hip-hop music have also used the genre as a vehicle for them to articulate these misrepresentations. An in-depth discussion on youth strategies to counter the influence of mainstream media will also be embarked on in Chapter 6.

**Identity and Space**

In terms of total population, Sydney and Singapore have a comparable number of dwellers. However, in terms of physical size, Sydney’s urban area which houses more than 88 per cent of its population is two and a half times bigger than that of Singapore’s. What is interesting and counterintuitive as will be further discussed is that, despite the disparity in size, Muslims in Sydney can be generally locked down to a spatial element whilst their counterparts in Singapore are dispersed all over the city.

*Sydney*

Sydney is Australia’s biggest and most populated city with a diverse population originating from numerous places around the world. The 1970s and 1980s saw a huge number of financial institutions being located in the Sydney CBD marking the city’s status as the country's unrivalled financial capital (Elias, 2003). As of 2001, Sydney's urban area is recorded at 1,687 km². The 2006 census documented 4,119,190 residents in Sydney with 3,641,422 living in Sydney's urban area. For
Muslim Australians, it would seem that the economic rationality prevails in their choice of the ideal residential location. As most Muslims come from the working class, they have chosen to settle mainly in the vicinities of Lakemba, Bankstown and Auburn (Saeed, 2003:72) which are located about 15 to 20 kilometres from the Sydney CBD.

There are no statistics available on the size of Muslim houses. However, the fact that almost half of Muslim households are on a rental arrangement coupled with the lower Muslim household income and higher fertility rate is illustrative of a more physically compact living environment.

**Table 13: Housing Tenure of Muslim and Non-Muslim households (%), 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure Type</th>
<th>Muslim Households</th>
<th>Non-Muslim Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fully owned</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being purchased</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented: Private</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented: Public</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 2006 Census, Special Tabulations

Despite this, it is interesting to note, that many of the Sydney respondents, when describing themselves and fellow Muslim youth, point towards a “state” or “district” identity.

There is a difference if you look at the geography of Sydney. The Sydney area is segregated. Muslims are concentrated in the Bankstown, Lakemba and Auburn area. In Minto and Campbelltown, you will find the South Asians and in Cabramatta, the Vietnamese. The Northshore area is overwhelmingly white. People coming from the eastern suburbs are more high class and the people from the western suburbs are from the working class. And the Muslims from the Northshore area are generally more high class than the ones living in the southwest.

Mizan, Male, Sydney

Muslim life is different in Perth compared to Sydney. There are more variety there and not as many Lebanese. There is a whole range and people don’t all look the same. The spirit in Perth is more Australian
and less ethnic. I guess it’s because there are fewer Muslims in Perth so as an outsider, people will try to fit in. However, it is easier to be a Muslim in Sydney. The Muslim community is more accepted here.

Aishah, Female, Sydney

It is interesting to reflect on how the Muslim youth reflect upon “ethnic Australia” in general and “ethnic Sydney” in particular. What is pertinent however is that the youth duly notes that as one moves across states in Australia and districts in Sydney, one encounters a heterogeneous and evolving experience of Muslim identity. Several contributing factors can be delineated that shape the dynamic of identity in this instance, namely, the number of Muslims in the area, the proportion of various Muslim ethnic groups and the general class profile of the area.

After having lived there, i would not want to live again in the chullora/ greenacre/ bankstown area. Its very busy, IMO overcrowded, dangerous and kinda crummy to be honest. The "young guy" culture that X [sic] mentioned is very prominent and includes drug use/theft/robbery/assaults etc and in general its not a pleasant atmosphere for living in my opinion. It does have some advantages large muslim/arab community and facilities such as halal butchers etc, but these benefits also exist in varying degrees in nicer-to-live areas and some of those areas are quite nearby. If it were me i’d live a suburb or two away from the 'muslim' part of sydney and then it’d still be easy to travel to what you need (butchers, mosques, etc) but you might be in an environment which is a little less crowded, less noisy, safer, more aesthetic, etc. I also lived in condell park for a while and I must say, it was a much nicer place to live than greenacre/bankstown/chullora area. streets are wider, much quieter (traffic noise/etc), less crowded (not cars taking up every inch of the curb space in your street [i.e opposite of much of greenacre/bankstown]) , nice parks, feels very much safer etc. If i were you i’d live in an area outside of these areas but close by, something with a bit more of an socio-economic-ethnic mix of people. I'm not sure what rent is like in strathfield which fatma suggested but in my experience strathfield seems to have good schools (and many of them) and there doesn't seem to be the dangerous youth culture that you find in some of the more "muslim" areas…

Anonymous Blogger, Female, Sydney
As the quotation in a popular Sydney youth forum shows, the varying youth culture of different areas is a factor behind Muslims planning to relocate. Whilst preferring to stay relatively close to Muslim amenities, the writer also advises against settling in Muslim concentrated areas that she perceives to be associated with a strong criminal youth culture. As such, the data gathered resonates with the works of Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005) who posit that even in urban and modernised cities, residential space is still a crucial form of elective belonging in which people define their identity and social status.

**Singapore**

Singapore is a city-state of a main island and sixty-three offshore islands which adds up to a land area of 682.3 square kilometres. It is generally an urban space with a negligible rural sector of 9.8 square kilometres which make up farms. Hence Singapore is not bothered with issues of rural-urban migration. Singapore’s compactness and high degree of urbanisation have aided the policy-making process in a number of ways. First, its small size is advantageous for policy formation and implementation since communication is seldom a problem and serves to facilitate political control by the leadership. Second, the city-state’s compactness enhances the responsiveness of public officials. And, Singapore’s diminutiveness has contributed to a highly centralised public bureaucracy, immune to the problems of a federal bureaucracy and its subsequent interactions with the state or provincial bureaucracies (Quah, 2003:107). In 2010, Singapore had a total population of 5,076,700 persons and a resident population of 3,771,700 making Singapore the third most densely populated place in the world after Macau and Hong Kong.

It is important to note here that unlike the Sydney scenario, the “Muslim Youth Problem” cannot be locked down to a spatial element. Muslims are now spread evenly throughout the island. This can be attributed to the government’s policy of imposing ethnic quotas on public housing where about 90% of Singaporeans live. Hence we can see the doing away of particular communities living in ethnic enclaves for example Chinatown (for Chinese), Geylang Serai (for
Malays) and Serangoon (for Indians). Although the state has done its best to disperse the various communities into various residential areas to do away with the colonial legacy of ethnic enclaves, the success rate of integrating the Malays within the larger social setup can be said to be limited. It can be argued that the reason behind the lack of success in nurturing the Malays into the predominantly Chinese Singaporean community is because the motivation behind this dispersion in the first place is not integration but regulation (Tremewan, 1994). It is to regulate the political clout of the Malay community and to keep the Malays in check. However, if the intention is regulatory, then it is difficult to argue the case for dispersion according to territorial location. Because the collective conscience of the Muslims, or any society for that matter, the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the members of that particular society exist in the minds of its members, devoid of geographical space. The collective conscience forms a determinate system with a life of its own.

It is undeniable that the key to managing religious harmony in Singapore has been by maintaining a rapid economic development. The Home Ownership Scheme was introduced in February 1964. Closely linked with the government’s economic policy, the PAP government went on a major resettlement programme and provided the population with high-rise public housing. This initiative of the government gave legitimacy to their political programme on top of serving as an avenue for social engineering. The state utilised the Housing Development Board (HDB) to inculcate social values such as those of filial piety through encouraging young couples to live near their parents. To prevent the creation of racial enclaves, in March 1989, measures were also implemented on ethnic ratios in HDB flats. The social distance amongst Singaporeans was narrowed as they experienced each other’s racial and religious practices such as weddings and funerals. The HDB today houses about 90% of Singapore’s population. This is in stark contrast to the 9% who lived in public housing upon Singapore attaining self-government. Quotas were on the proportion of races in every HDB neighbourhood and apartment blocks were introduced as such: Chinese 84% (neighbourhood) and 87% (block); Malays 22% (neighbourhood) and 25% (block); Indians and others 10% (neighbourhood) and 13% (block).
Table 14: Distribution of Type of Dwelling among Resident Households (%), 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Dwelling</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Housing</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Rm and Exec HDB Flats</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Rm HDB Flats</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Rm HDB Flats</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- &amp; 2- Rm HDB Flats</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics

Note: Others include other HDB dwellings, non-HDB shop houses, attap/zinc-roofed houses and other public flats.

As seen in the table above, 70.2% of Malays live in flats with 4 rooms and below compared to 56% and 59.3% amongst the Chinese and Indians respectively. I argue that smaller homes coupled with the relatively higher family sizes among Muslim households is a contributing factor to the lepak (loafing) culture among urban minority youth. Hence, greater physical visibility among urban Muslim youth in public spaces is also often a direct function of social class.

As mentioned in the first chapter, this thesis will posit that there is not actually a “loss of piety” among urban Muslim youth, but rather a transference of pietal-rationalisation to what has traditionally been understood as secular and profane objects. An interesting study has been conducted to illuminate the varying levels of piety between Muslim youth in different localities in Malaysia. The research reports that rural youth dwellers exhibit higher levels of religiosity in every aspect. It was postulated by the writers that this is due to the urban youth’s contact with a wider range of cultures that are not greatly determined by the more traditional worldviews of their rural countrymen (Krauss et al., 2006). However, contrary to the Malaysian study, Muslims in Sydney and Singapore are not segregated along an urban-rural divide having mainly settled in an urban environment.

(Re)Sinicisation of Singapore’s Public Space

The Sinicisation of Singapore's public space adds to the marginalisation of Malay presence in the public arena. The chain of events can be traced back to 1978
when a Report on the Ministry of Education warned that the huge migration to English medium education will lead to deculturisation. As a result, the government launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979. The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools were launched in 1980. Under the SAP, 12 Chinese schools teach English as a first language but offered a high level of Chinese. The Religious Knowledge curriculum was initiated in 1982 and was made compulsory in secondary schools in 1984. Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, Bible, Hindu and Sikh studies were introduced. However, the government in October 1989 announced that they were scrapping this curriculum amidst fears that it had, contrary to its intentions, actually emphasised the differences between religions. It was to be replaced by a civics/moral education programme. The construction of a National Ideology in 1989 was followed by a White Paper on Shared Values in 1991. By 1991, the Chinese language based university, Nanyang, converted to the English medium and was henceforth called Nanyang Technological University. From 1989 to 1993, there were concerns amongst the Muslims over an increasing Sinicisation of Singapore society. This revolved around the issue of Confucian values and debates ensuing from the 1991 elections vis-à-vis the Chinese educated who felt aggrieved by their increasing marginalisation. Then Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, brushed off this issue in September 1991 as stemming from mostly economic concerns.

In a survey conducted in February 2000, it was discovered that many Singaporeans were of the view that inter racial relations have improved compared to the last 10 years. However, less than one in two will put their lives in the hands of someone of a different race in the event of a racial riot. It was found in the same survey that about 20% amongst the Chinese Singaporeans declared that they did not have friends from another race (*The Straits Times*, 18 March, 2000). This is as compared to 10% among the Malays and 7 % among the Indians.

An important aspect of the re-Sinicisation of Singapore society can also be attributed to the state’s liberal policies on Chinese immigration (Sim, 2009). The number of foreign-born resident population from Malaysia rose steeply from 194,929 in 1990 to 303,838 in 2000 by 55.8 per cent of which 85 per cent are from the
The notion of space takes on another dimension if we were to analyse the broader geo-political dynamics of the region. The Sinicisation of Singapore is set against the uneasy backdrop of her two immediate Malay/Muslim neighbours, Indonesia and Malaysia. In a recent study, Lily (2009) captures this Sinicisation process through problematising Singapore’s internal relationship between the Chinese-dominated political elite and the Malay community and how this affects its external position in the Malay world. She argues that Singapore’s national identity contains a Sino-centric “regional outsider complex” and predicts the rise of a “new Chinese cultural elite” that is poised to take over leadership of the country (Thum, 2010). This translates into one of the main forms of discrimination cited by male Muslim youth in the process of their compulsory conscription, as cited in the interviews conducted.
The majority of drivers in the army are Malays, but my Malay mate who ended up as the platoon best was greatly disappointed when he was posted to a driver vocation. He wanted to go SISPEC and there are also other Chinese O level holders who became Sergeants at SISPEC...And if Israeli high ranking army officers were to come and visit, and the Singapore army provides the vehicles, the driver cannot be Muslim.

Ibrahim, Male, Singapore

Even in sensitive cargo, like armour cannot be Malay. And Malays cannot be Armskote personnel in charge of dispensing weapons and my Sergeant told me that I cannot go into the room to help even to assist in a busy period whereas other Chinese personnel can. There are no Muslims in the Navy. In fact, I just spoke to a friend last week who was a medic in the army and he was sent to be attached to the Naval Diving Unit a few years ago for a few days and he was told that there was no Muslim food was only given baked beans at the cook house.

Zali, Male, Sydney

In Singapore, all able bodied young males who have reached sixteen and a half years of age are required to undergo National Service. Malays were eligible again for the National Service in 1973 after initially being subjected to limited enlistment to maintain the ethnic proportions in the army. In the years following independence, the Singapore government’s policy to exclude Malays from National Service coupled with reducing their opportunities to enjoy regular military careers led to severe economic and social repercussions within the Malay community. “By not accepting them into the military and police forces, their traditional fields of employment, official policy also contributed to the employment problems of Malay youth” (Pang, 1982:72). This is contrasted to the situation in 1957 whereby almost 20% of Singapore’s Malay male workers were employed in the military and police forces. It has been further argued that Singapore’s national service policy as implemented in the late 1960s through the 1970s contributed directly and greatly to the alienation of the Muslim community from the PAP government and the Singapore state (Huxley, 2000:102-103).
The two statements above present the recollections of Muslim youth who recounted their recent experiences during National Service. Their lamentations stand in stark contrast to the observation made by Yatiman Yusof, a then PAP Member of Parliament, who cited the enlistment of Malays for national service as a significant change, saying “Now our younger people have served NS, meritocracy is a well-accepted philosophy, and Singaporeans, regardless of their race, language or religion, are given opportunities to achieve their highest potential through education, through employment, through engagement in whatever profession they pursue” (Zakir, 2006).

The state also broached the question of the co-relation between low Malay involvement in the Singapore Armed Forces and its distrust of their ability to fight against other Malays on behalf of the Chinese (Wong, 1987). In 1992, 27 years after Singapore gained independence, the Republic of Singapore Air Force saw its first Malay-Muslim pilot earn his wings. No statistics are readily available but it is common knowledge that almost two decades on, there is an overrepresentation of the Malay population drafted into the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence (Tan, 2004:81-82). Educated Malay boys because of being drafted into the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence will remain as junior officers as only those who are drafted into the Singapore Armed Forces can make senior officers in the National Service. Senior officers from the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence during National Service, come from the Singapore Armed Forces (Barr and Skrbis, 2008: 219).

If, for instance, you put in a Malay officer who is very religious and who has family ties in Malaysia in charge of a machine gun unit, that’s a very tricky business. We’ve got to know his background. I’m saying these things because they are real, and if I don’t think that, and I think even if today, the Prime Minister doesn’t think carefully about this, we could have a tragedy.

Lee Kuan Yew, 29 September 1999, The Straits Times

The comment above by the Minister Mentor raised strong reactions amongst the Malay-Muslim community with two groups, Taman Bacaan, a grassroots group and Majlis Pusat, the central organising body for thirty-eight Malay-Muslim cultural
bodies requesting a dialogue with the government. They were brushed aside by the then Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Abdullah Tarmugi, who instead asked such energies to be put into preparing the community for a knowledge-based economy (Chan, 2000:265).

A Generational Perspective of Identity Formation

This thesis will also take into consideration a generational perspective of identity formation. Bourdieu (1984:114) posits that to explore the range of possibilities amongst the youth, the lifelong evolution of the volume of the individual’s capital, the volume of each sort of capital, the composition of the capital and those of the parents and grandparents have to be considered. Hence, it can be concluded that the study of youth culture is indeed also a study of the dispositions of previous generations.

Singapore

In Singapore, it can be argued that there is an internalisation of the discourse of the “Malay problem” (Berita Harian, 20th December 2008; 23rd January 2009) especially amongst the older generation. Hence in a hierarchy of desirable companions, some non-Malay parents are more cautious of the “negative” influence Malay youth might have on their children. The social conditions and the discursive space in which the older generation is socialised into shape their dispositions, progressive or regressive, towards the other ethnic groups.

Most of my Muslim friends are Malays. They are generally similar to us. Just that parents are bit more restrictive when it comes to Malays. Restrictive in the sense that my mum don't really like me having too close Malay friends as she thinks that Malays do not make good friends as they are not very religious and that they are negative influence. Hence, she would want to know where I’m going and will nag if I’m home slightly later than my usual time if I’m out with those Malay friends. She prefers me to be friends with Chinese as compared to Malays, but prefers me to be friends with Muslims as compared to Chinese.

Zakiah, Female, Singapore
Even though Malays are generally Muslims, as in the case of Zakiah, her parents whilst not averse to other Muslim ethnic groups, would rather she befriend a Chinese than a Malay Muslim. As such, as seen from this example, even among Muslims, the Malays have become associated with a low status group. This is contrasted against the desirable position of the dominant Chinese community in Singapore.

The generational conflict also includes the issue of Muslim leadership and representation (Ihram, 2008). This generational gap is a result of the fact that the youth feel displaced in many Muslim organisations hence cementing the generational gap thesis in their minds. The lack of succession and injection of new blood by the elites have led to a crisis of generational gap.

There’s a huge sense of intergenerational gap among Muslim youth in Singapore with many articulating that leaders do not understand what the youth are faced with. This is coupled with a yearning for representation and to play a lead role in discussing the reasons why Muslim youth are becoming radicalised.

Aziz, Male, Singapore

Sydney

Muslims generally do not attach any religious significance to the eighteenth birthday. However, in Australia, Muslims follow the laws in place in relation to the age of eighteen, such as on voting and driving. In Australia, as in Singapore, many young Muslims do not leave home when they reach the age of eighteen. Even afterwards, parents are obliged to support their children until they can stand on their own feet. Usually, many young Muslims only leave home when they get married. Even then, some prefer to live with their extended family (Saeed, 2003:33). Even so, most of the youth respondents expressed a disjuncture between their worldviews and that of the older generation. Especially in Sydney, it is often cited that the older generations often hold more rigid views both of the Anglo Saxons and Muslims of other ethnic groups.
I get most of my religious guidance from the internet. There are very good websites where you can learn Qur’an and the surahs. I also attend a class every Tuesday at a sister’s house taught by a lady who teaches at the mosque. I am more religious than my parents and I am the one who teaches them about religion. My brothers pray because of me.

Nadra, Female, Sydney

The relegation of religion to the private sphere in secular societies is one of the main tenets of multicultural governments. The family then becomes one of the remaining vehicles whereby religion is performed. What is particularly striking is that, as with the first quotation above by Nadra, a significant number of respondents report that, within the family structure, the youth are taking a more active role in the dissemination of religious capital across generations.

Bourdieu (1998: 102-9) purports that the “acknowledgement of debt” is a form of symbolic violence that is reminiscent in relationships between generations. It is the “acknowledgement of debt” that allows for an individual to exercise control over his or her relations. I argue that Bourdieu’s attribution of symbolic violence as transfiguring relations of domination and submission into affective relations assumes a top down application. Whilst maintaining the family as a key site for the accumulation of various capita, in the case of the pious youth who acts as the socialising agent in the family, this process is diversified. Thus, Nadra through her role as the dispenser of cultural capital has managed to elevate her status in the family and exert a degree of influence amongst her elders.

There are differences theologically between different orientations of Islam. But it is also different between generations. I don’t think that there are any differences between different Muslim communities amongst the youth. But they are definitely there for the elder people. Just to give you an example, I was at a Turkish mosque recently and this old guy was smiling at me and talking to me in Turkish. I indicated to him that I do not speak Turkish and when he realised that I was Arab, you can see that the whole expression of his face changed. You know that most of these people are born in the 1940s and 1950s so their memory is still fresh with WWI stories their parents told them about how the Arabs gang up with Allies to destroy the Ottoman
Empire. We youth have no time to learn their culture, our culture and the culture here.

Mustapha, Male, Sydney

It’s not the same with the older generation and us who are born here. They have the language barrier which makes it very difficult for them to interact with the Australians and to experience their culture. That is why the elders are more rigid. They tell us not to mix around with the white Australians. For me, I see beyond our parents’ traditional culture and I think the same goes for the other youth too.

Barak, Male, Sydney

The respondent above spoke of the historical precedence of the Arab-Turkish rivalry as passed down to him by his elder family members. The two respondents also talked about the cautious attitude of their migrant parents towards white Australians. A common denominator can be gleaned from the latter two cases which is the ability to speak the English language as breaking down social distance between different ethnic groups. Both maintained that, if anything, the generation of their parents is the group that is socially and culturally alienated. They state that due to various factors such as historical baggage and the inability to converse in English, their parents’ generation are alienated from the larger society and other Muslim ethnic groups. At times and often to no avail, the elder generation, as Barak describes, also acts as enforcers to ensure that this alienation is maintained. In fact, a recent study of young Turkish Muslims in Australia shows that there is comparatively little difference between the second generation young people and young people born in Turkey who have come to Australia as teenagers, compared with their parental generation. The author alleges that young Turkish-Australians of “both the first and second generation have more in common with each other than they do with their parental generation, whether considered in terms of their sense of identity, belonging and place in the world, or through their use and consumption of media and communications technologies and sense of connection with the Turkish community” in Australia (Hopkins, 2011: 119).
Nonetheless, through the data gathered, it is apparent that Muslim youth in both Singapore and Sydney are increasingly able to transcend the cultural and social alienation of the previous generations. This could be attributed to various developments at the global level such as the Information Revolution and, particularly significant for Muslims around the world, the aftermath of September 11. Young Muslim respondents readily identified with the perception that their generation is under siege after the September 11 event and this has galvanised them along a global “community of sentiment”. Increasingly, as the subsequent chapters will argue, popular youth culture is appropriated as a medium not only to express solidarity with their supra-national Muslim brethren and to articulate their discontent at the status quo but also to bridge the social distance with other ethnic communities.

The September 11 Generation

This thesis is necessarily an exegesis of the culture and consciousness of a particular generation of Muslims, arguably termed as the September 11 generation (Edmunds and Turner, 2005). It is important to take a broader approach and examine the Muslim youth as a unique generation in itself, in combination with an understanding of social class. This grounds the status and identity beyond a nation-state narrative and allows us to see connectivity on a global platform. Young Muslims of the present generation find themselves increasingly constructed as a transnationalised category of risk and danger as well as being subjected to greater securitization (Humphrey, 2010).

Looking at youth as a collective identity with a collective consciousness is in line with Karl Mannheim’s (1952) work on generations. He proposes that members of a generation galvanize themselves by the experience of historical events from similar vantage points and that a particular generation can influence society by challenging conventional norms as well as offering new cultural visions when faced with traumatic experiences. Edmunds and Turner (2005) argue that while generations identify themselves in terms of historical and cultural traumas, these are produced within a diversity of social processes by members of national, social, or global
groups. They contend that generations act strategically to bring about change and shift from being a passive age cohort to a self-conscious one when they utilize their economic, political and educational circumstances to innovate cultural, intellectual, and political spheres (Edmunds and Turner, 2005:562). As the thesis will demonstrate in the following chapters, young Muslims react to being part of the September 11 generation differently depending on their socio-cultural contexts and according to the policies of different countries. Mannheim (1952) calls these differentiations “antagonistic generational units”. Although the reactions are produced as a response to an identical event, individuals do not always behave in the same way as they are disciplined according to their spatial location.

The war on terrorism has affected us greatly. After the terrorism related arrests in 2004 in Sydney, my father got a letter from his mailbox saying stuff like “get out of here”, “fucking Lebanese”, “fucking Arabs”… And this is all because we share the last name of one of the guys who were arrested when in fact we don’t even know these people and they’re not our relatives. These idiots must have gone through the phonebook or something and picked out our names.

Mustapha, Male, Sydney

I don’t get cursed at when I walk on the streets with my ‘Muslim’ outfit. But when you start to do things like go and pray when you’re at school or at work you get different views from the non-Muslims. Some would be curious and start to ask you so many questions. Some would think you’re an extremist freak. What saddens me is that despite Islam being a ‘popular’ religion in Singapore, many are still not aware that it is compulsory for us to pray five times a day and do our Friday prayers. They think it is optional or that if you do it you are an extremist. All they know about Islam is that they must have beards and they are all terrorists. Having other religions or races acts as a sense of drive to work extra hard because you know you are at a losing hand here in the work force, especially ever since September 11.

Zaki, Male, Singapore

Heightened Islamophobia and ethnic profiling as illustrated above bring about a myriad of practical implications for Muslim youth (Poynting and Mason, 2007; HREOC, 2004; Poynting and Noble, 2004). Youth respondents have frequently
lamented about how their Muslim identity and ethnic appearance can affect their life chances. In Sydney, there is a significant number of Muslims who go by pseudo English names and are hesitant to publicly declare themselves as Muslims. Hence, it is common for the researcher, during the course of fieldwork, to encounter “Bob”, the Iraqi electrical appliances manager or “Michael” the Indonesian convenience store owner. It’s only when relations have gone beyond the professional and upon knowing that the researcher is Muslim, do they reveal their real identities. When probed, they talked about their discomfort at being labeled a terrorist. There are also cases of Muslim youth who change their names and their address of residence in order to land a job. A Muslim youth with a degree in Information Technology shared his frustration.

I have applied to many jobs and was not even called for a single interview. But after I changed my name to my middle name, which is not so Muslim sounding and changed my home address from Greenacre to my friend’s address in Strathfield, I got a call for an interview. So what does this tell you?

Adi, Male, Sydney

It is evident that September 11 and preceding events related to it is entrenched in the consciousness of the Muslim youth. Following this, I will delineate two overt identity markers, namely the hijab and the madrasah, whereby urban minority Muslim youth are seen to be at the forefront in negotiating their Muslim identity within their secular multicultural environment. To be sure, the hijab and the madrasah have garnered much global attention in the aftermath of September 11 owing to the greater scrutiny placed on young Muslims in secular cities. Besides this, they are also chosen because, as I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, contrary to popular rhetoric on the fundamentalisation and radicalisation of young Muslims, these explicitly ‘sacred’ symbols of Islamic identity do not hinder a segment of young Muslims from actively immersing themselves in popular youth culture.
The *hijab* is a Muslim identity marker that has been a cause for contention among members of the secular multicultural societies in extending the welcome of integration among Muslim women. It is a battleground for the armies of those who are out to purify Islam or demonise it. In Morocco (*Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity*), Tunisia (*Cultural Diversity within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia*), Iran (*Power, Ideology, and Women’s Consciousness in Postrevolutionary Iran*) and Turkey (*On Changing the Concept and Position of Persian Women*). The fear of the veil being used as tool for political upheaval is not only an issue of concern in Muslim majority countries but has been exacerbated globally after September 11. Joppke’s (2009) recent comparative study on the “threat” of the Islamic veil in Europe, for example, illuminates the three different approaches taken by Germany, France and Britain in managing this overt Muslim identity marker.

Many young Muslim women wearing the *hijab* in Sydney have struggled to find work with reports lodged of verbal abuse at the workplace, in schools, public spaces such as malls and parks, public transport and roads, where objects were thrown from passing vehicles, attempting to crash cars and pedestrians and public transportation not making themselves available to women in *hijab* which has led some Muslim women to have a phobia of public transport and of being in their own cars (Dreher and Ho, 2009; Aly and Walker, 2007; Scott and Franzmann, 2007; Dunn, Klocker and Salabay, 2007). A significant number of female Muslim youth who don the *hijab* in Sydney have either been the subject of abuse or know someone who has been subjected to such acts. Reports are abundant with Muslim girls being spat at, verbally abused and headscarves pulled and ripped apart. There are also cases whereby husbands have pleaded with their wives to cease wearing the *hijab* for fear of their safety. There are Muslim women who shun travelling on public transport so as to avoid being abused. Some youth have even described themselves as numb and desensitised to the verbal abuse they were experiencing. The stereotype of the larger society is that Muslim youth do not have a choice and are compelled into the *hijab*. 
Interviews and reports show the opposite reality among female Muslim youth. The feeling is one of liberation from Hollywood-style exploitation of women and the stress women face in wearing the right clothes, make-up, having the right figure just to be happy in society (Bullock, 2002; HREOC, 2004).

The issue of the *hijab* in the workplace also challenges the official policy of meritocracy in Singapore. 21 year-old year old Singaporean electronics engineering graduate from Nanyang Polytechnic, Siti Shafrida Sulaiman, was reported to have been told to remove her headscarf by more than ten potential employers who interviewed her. The employers’ rationale was simple: all working attire had to be standardised. For Shafrida, the interviews are demoralising “because the *tudung* has nothing to do with work performance or my ability” (Arlina, 2002). In response to the above-mentioned report, the Minister in charge of Muslim Affairs, Yaacob Ibrahim, warned Muslims against jumping to conclusions. “There are people who find excuses for their lack of competency, that they can't get a job because of this, and we must be on guard against such things,” he said (*The Straits Times*, 29 September 2002). Yaacob’s response has yet to be supported by an extensive research on job prospects of Muslims in Singapore. Be that as it may, if we were to accept Yaacob’s comments as true, then the best explanation would be that Siti Shafrida has devised ways to cope with the disciplinary instruments that had prevailed upon her. In other words, she has transformed the technologies of herself in order to permit the attainment of a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or morality (Foucault, 1988:18). In short, she is unconscious of her own lack of capabilities to attain the job she wanted which, in actuality, did not judge her based on her physical appearance.

On the other hand, if we were to take Shafrida’s comments as true, then the repercussions are even more severe. It would mean then that the Singapore society has internalised the discourse set by the disciplinary instruments: The Mufti, the Malay/Muslim Members of Parliament and the mass media. The stigmatising of the *tudung* has manifested itself into prejudiced and discriminatory practices in the everyday life. According to Foucault (1995:218), “the formation of the disciplinary
society is connected with a number of broad historical processes—economic, juridico-political and, lastly, scientific—of which it forms part”. The gaze of the disciplinary matrices is then internalised by members of society after having been conditioned by such processes. This brings about a panoptic situation whereby self-surveillance becomes the order of the day, leading to the demands placed by employers for “the proponents of the hijab” to be unveiled (Kamaludeen and Aljunied, 2009).

Piety and Identity: Madrasah (Islamic Schools)

In the aftermath of September 11, nation-states have also turned their focus on the role of the madrasah as a primary agent in the radicalization of young Muslims (Khan, 2006:165-169). This heightened scrutiny is set against an environment whereby madrasahs are gaining popularity among Muslim minorities. Zine (2006:239) posits that “within this troubling socio-political context, Islamic schools continue to be safe havens where these girls find freedom from racialized and Islamophobic stereotypes”. A report prepared by the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales 2005 shows that 10% of Muslim students go to Islamic schools and expects the number to rise (O’Hagan, 2006). There are about 24 Islamic schools in Australia (Aisbett, 2004). Although the madrasah in Australia are mostly run by private and autonomous groups, like the madrasah in Singapore, they are registered with the NSW Department of Education and are integrated into the general curriculum of public schools (Humphrey, 2001:41; Fleming, 2001:72). In Singapore, the madrasahs come under the purview of the Education Act and under sections 87 and 88 of the Administration of Muslim Law Act which means that control of Muslim religious schools is vested in the hands of MUIS (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009:72-73). About 5% of Muslim students are enrolled in madrasahs. There were more than 1000 applicants competing for just 400 places at the Madrasah Al-Junied in 2004 (Suzaina, 2005:13). This is an increase over the reported 800 applicants vying for the same 400 places in 2000 (The Straits Times, 3 June 2000).
It is overwhelming from the data gathered that many of the Muslim youth feel a strong sense of injustice towards the secular states’ management of the madrasah. Debates however have taken on differing dimensions in Singapore and Sydney.

**Singapore**

…about madrasah’s future, but the future of Muslim children … ‘Do you want them to grow up all being religious teachers and religious preachers, or do you want them to be trained in IT, to be engineers, doctors, architects, professionals? If the madrasah were training 100 or 200 students a year, I think we can live with that. But if you are training 400, 500, 1000, 2000 in full-time madrasah or in full-time religious education supplemented by some secular subjects, what will be the future of the Malay community? … I cannot say, however, that some madrasah may not close because we want to have standards.

Goh Chok Tong, 1999

The then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong expressed his concern about the economic viability of madrasah students in his National Day Speech of August 1999. Goh proposed that students were to be subjected to compulsory education from Primary 1 to 4. A committee was swiftly assembled in December to deliberate upon this proposal. Goh added that students from the madrasahs will have to stay in national schools till Primary 6 once compulsory education is launched. If the madrasahs want to be excused from this programme, they will have to meet the minimum standards as delineated by the Ministry of Education. In May 2000 Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated that the concern should not be centred on the madrasahs’ future but over the future of Muslim children. He reassured the Muslim community that the implementation of compulsory education does not equate to the madrasahs’ closure. To add, in addition to the 6 full-time madrasahs, there are 27 part-time madrasahs that are run by mosques.

In short, madrasah were perceived by national leaders as a burden to the Singapore economy and society. Predictably, Muslims in Singapore were enraged by the governmental discourses on the ineffectiveness of the madrasah. Upon effective resistance from civil society groupings within the Muslim community in Singapore, a
somewhat unprecedented compromise was reached, in that *madrasah* were to be exempted from the Compulsory Education Act provided that the minimum standards for PSLE (Primary School Leaving Examinations) are met within eight years (see Dayang Istiaisyah, 2003).

In truth, there are quite a number of Muslim youth from the *madrasah* who have made the transition to national tertiary institutions. The different youth culture and norms of socialisation that exist ensures that the shift does not come without any impediments. The youth who have made the transition continue to yearn for a more “Islamic environment”.

Peer pressure is the most revolting challenge in my current school that it actually made me break into tears for the first few weeks when I entered the school. Maybe the reason for this was social rejection. But I am currently coping quite well. Academically, I don’t really face that much of challenges cause help is quite easily available here and there. Another challenge that I faced and is still facing is practising my beliefs openly. My school doesn’t even have a certified Muslim organisation.

Shila, Female, Sydney

I made my own choice to go to a national school with of course some advice from my parents. I made this choice because I think there is a need for me to experience something that is totally different from what I have experienced for the past 11 years in *madrasah*. *Alhamdulillah* I think I have made the right choice but of course there is always this yearn for the *madrasah* environment because of the strong peer pressure that I may experience now in public/national school that I think is really too heavy for me but I know I will be able to manage them *Insha’Allah*.

Maryam, Female, Singapore

The stereotype of the increasing religiosity of Muslim youth “thesis” however hits an obstacle when we were to scrutinise mosque attendances and religious classes in Sydney and Singapore. An experienced mosque leader in Singapore, Rhazaly Noentil, posits that about 40 per cent of Muslim youth do not have access to any formal religious instruction. In 2007, a MUIS official revealed that out of the 108
000 Muslim students in national schools, only a mere 40 per cent are getting some form of religious education (Zakir, 2008). Similarly in Australia, informed approximates of mosque attendance places the figure at about 30 per cent (Akbarzadeh, 2006). This means that the majority of Australian Muslims do not attend mosques. In an interview with the press, a local religious educator, Sheikh Khalil Chami of the Islamic Welfare Center, laments the trend of dwindling youth attendances at mosque events (Dennis, 1998). Hence, from a traditional and institutional point of view, there exist among the youth perpetual tensions to reconcile their piety with their everyday lives.

Sydney

I’d like to think that the controversy over the Muslim schools is actually over traffic issues. But the other day as I was driving, I saw a handmade sign at the side of the road which says “Stop the Islamic Schools from Being Built”.

Aleemah, Female, Sydney

I think that the issue with the Islamic schools in Camden, Liverpool and Bass Hill is just plain discrimination. They can open up a Catholic school instead but when it comes to the Islamic schools, traffic is cited as a problem. They even go to the extent of placing pigs’ heads on stakes to offend the Muslims. Is there a difference between Muslim traffic and Christian traffic?

Rahman, Male, Sydney

In Sydney, the debates on the place of the madrasah take on more of a spatial dimension which is often centred on issues of urban planning with plans for the construction of Islamic schools turned down due to traffic concerns and the preservation of heritage sites (The Courier-Mail, 29 May 2008). However, the majority of Muslim youth interviewed referred to the reactions of the locals as revealing and contradictory to the official reasons given by the local authorities for blocking the construction of more madrasahs.
Be that as it may, a few respondents offered a contrarian viewpoint towards the madrasah debate in Sydney. A couple of respondents felt that there was indeed a difference between “Muslim” and “Christian” traffic.

There is a difference between the Arab collectivist culture and the Western culture of individualism. In Arab culture, the boundaries are more flexible. People park on the streets, chat for a few hours… it’s normal in the Arab countries. Personally, I wouldn’t mind if somebody parked in front of my house. But if we do it here, the Australians lose the plot. They’ll say that it is my space.

Jabbar, Male, Sydney

The above comments refer to a clash between the Western ethics of rugged individualism with the more communitarian Arab culture. It is alluded to, perhaps unexpectedly, that the Arab culture has a more liberal, spontaneous and amorphous notion of private space versus public space as opposed to the strict, legal-rational, ‘Western’ approach. Returning to the point above made about a spatially located identity, I postulate that it will also be interesting to map, although this thesis will not be the place for it, whether immigrant populations come from a rural or urban area in their native country. As such, more can actually be said about whether, it is a western-eastern divide or if it is in reality a collision of different spatially attuned identities.

The challenges that the youth face in the post-September 11 era shape their worldview. The increased awareness of their Muslim identity inadvertently influences their consumption of popular youth culture. This is set against the attempts of the state to also manage the formation of Muslim youth identity.

The State and the Construction of the Ideal Muslim Youth Identity

It is equally essential, in thinking about youth culture, to explore governmentality and the state’s attempts to socially engineer the ideal Muslim youth. Indeed, these efforts to construct a coherent Muslim youth identity are contested at an everyday level.
To address these challenges, we should go back to the fundamentals and remind ourselves of what has helped us succeed in the last 40 years - and these have been encapsulated in the Singapore Muslim Identity (SMI). The 10 desired attributes of the Singapore Muslim Identity reflect the many facets of our lives. Muslims here are well-rooted in our faith and adapting to changes well. We continue to be open-minded, pluralistic, progressive, balanced and active participants in a modern world. We must be resilient in the face of challenges where we have no means to control or influence. We must deal with these challenges rationally and put our concerns and arguments within the larger context of harmonious existence rather than confined within parochial interests. Indeed, it is in our interest to protect all religious groups from being attacked. We have also been increasingly called upon by Muslim minority communities abroad to share our progressive way of life and the way we manage our key religious institutions and organise our religious programmes and services. Many of the achievements of the community would not have been possible without a clear understanding and acceptance of the Singapore Muslim Identity. Going forward, I understand that MUIS will continue to reach out to strengthen our understanding of what it takes to be a Muslim.

Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs, 12 April 2008

Evidently, the Singapore government takes a proactive and top-down stance in engineering the notion of an ideal Muslim youth. MUIS has conducted an “upgrading” of religious instruction (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009) via a national syllabus called aL.I.V.E. (Learning Islamic Values Everyday) which was incorporated into the Singapore Islamic Education System in 2010. MUIS has also created a controversial directory to recognise religious clerics, schemes to identify Singaporean Muslim students studying religion overseas and is actively trying to construct a “Singapore Muslim Identity” (Ng, 2006; Rahil and Shaw, 2006; Tan, 2007; Tan, 2008; Bouma, Ling and Pratt, 2010).

In Singapore, a number of individuals below the age of 35 are selected annually for the top youth accolade, the Singapore Youth Award. However, since the year 2000, out of 57 individual recipients, only two Muslim youth have managed to win the individual award and are lauded as exemplars for the community. Not taking
into account that there is a demographic bulge among Muslim youth compared to the other ethnic groups as stated before, this is still about 5 times fewer relative to the proportion of Muslims in Singapore. Decorated and internationally renowned National University of Singapore physicist, Dr Mansoor Abdul Jalil won in 2003. Singer Taufik Batisah, the first Singapore Idol, is the latest to have won the award in 2008. He was credited by the Senior Minister, Goh Chok Tong, for being an “inspirational and musically talented Malay/Muslim youth”\(^5\). I will further elaborate on this when discussing hip-hop music as a form of Muslim youth culture in the next chapter.

\(\text{Sydney}\)

The predicament surrounding the idea is of an “Australian Islam” is best encapsulated by Humphrey (2001, 2005). Humphrey (2001:34) argues that despite Australia’s official policy of “multiculturalism”, “the dominant modernist perspective remains: that immigrants will be assimilated through individualism and secularization”. The flaw of this idea, he contends, is that such a perspective assumes the fall of public religion relegating religious practice into the private sphere, coupled with an essentialised conception of Islam that stems from the global fear of political Islam. Hence, as an extension, Muslims then symbolise a form of cultural resistance to this discourse of multiculturalism. The difficulty in the state’s construction of the ideal Muslim youth in Sydney is best illuminated through the case of \textit{New South Wales Young Australian of the Year 2006}, Iktimal Hage-Ali. Hage-Ali was lauded by the state as “a voice for young Muslim Australians who were feeling isolated and rejected” (McIlveen, 2007). She was chosen as one of two Muslim youth representatives in their roles as advisers to Prime Minister John Howard in his Muslim Community Reference Group and played a role in attempting to repair the relationship between Middle Eastern and Caucasian youth in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots of 2005. She condemned the former Australian Mufti Taj Din al-Hilali’s sermon in which he described women who do not dress modestly as

“uncovered meat” which made them vulnerable to sexual harassment (Madden, 2007). Iktimal also advocates that the government monitor Islamic schools and talked about extremism in Australia and how the extremists appropriate the Qur’an wrongly to cement their views.

However, the Australian government’s construction of Iktimal as a moderate Muslim spokeswoman and a model for Muslim youth to follow and its efforts to construct an ideal Muslim youth suffered a blow when the police Middle Eastern Organised Crime Squad arrested her for use of cocaine in 2006. She handed back her award after the scandal, claiming,

"I'm not ashamed of the fact that I have used cocaine… My concern is that I said I had bought that cocaine for my own personal use ... I know that I took drugs but I still did a good job."

_The Daily Telegraph_, December 11, 2008

This was not the first time that Iktimal was embroiled in controversy with the local Muslim community. Prior to her involvement in drugs which led to her arrest, she was widely criticised for not wearing the hijab and for being photographed drinking alcohol at the Australian of the Year function in Sydney. The majority of those registering their views on the popular Sydney Muslim Village website deemed her as unworthy of representing the Muslim youth, to which she simply responded,

"It's true, I was celebrating. Bloody hell, I had a glass of champagne in my hand – so what?"

_The Daily Telegraph_, December 6, 2006

In another instance, the other Muslim youth representative of the state, Mustapha Kara-Ali also got embroiled with a tussle with the former Mufti, Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali. The ex-Mufti alleged that Mustapha had links to a “radical” organisation and threatened to pull out from the Muslim Community Reference Group if Mustapha was allowed to stay in the group (Kerbaj, 2006; Fife-Yeomans, 2007). I argue that with respect to the management of young Muslims in Singapore
and Sydney, one cannot but extend Becker’s (1963) conception of a moral entrepreneur to include the state. To be sure, the state functions as an active agent both in the capacity of “rule creators” and “rule enforcers”. The state, with the benefit of its hierarchical position is in a position of authority to “create” group norms and “enforce” them. However, this social role of the state is far from a monopolistic endeavour and is subject to constant scrutiny and contestation. Hence, it is evident from the above examples that the state attempts at constructing the ideal Muslim youth is a highly delicate and contentious terrain, with the different moral entrepreneurs such as the media and various lobbying religious groups exerting their own ideal type.

**Conclusion**

The youth present a challenge in every modern society. They are commonly the objects of moral panics associated with a combination of vices such as drugs, violence, and illicit sexuality. Since no society can rid itself of its young, it is no surprise then that these youth are often seen as threats that need to be reined in and socialised to the norms of adult mannerisms and worldviews. As a result, the youth find themselves subjected to multiple authorities, be it in the form of parental authority, school regulations, religious dogmas and state sanctions. All these are ingested by the youth, in their practice of popular youth culture.

These dynamics are revealed in particularly unique ways for Muslim youth all over the world. The moral panic generated post-September 11 with regard to Muslim youth, have pointed to Islamic fundamentalism as posing the greatest threat to multicultural living. Huntington’s clash of civilisation thesis (1996) is revitalised as academics and media observers displace the problem to the September 11 generation. He asserts that Islamic fundamentalism was born out of the failure of Muslim nations to provide economic and political development for their people. However, it can be argued that due to migration, this problem is no longer unique to Muslim nations. It is exacerbated by the demography of the Muslim world, which is generally characterised by a large proportion in the number of youth.
Judging by the social conditions mapped out above, it is easy to comprehend why the case of the alienated Muslim youth is often advanced. Although this study argues against the alienation thesis, as will be further substantiated in the following three chapters on hip-hop, tattooing and cultural consumption, it is essential to map out these social processes as they contribute to the habitus of the Muslim youth. Looking at all these factors in their full complexity bring a more nuanced view of youth identity formation. I will then demonstrate in the following chapters how popular youth culture is used to transcend familial, communal and national processes to provide spheres of solidarity within Muslim youth of particular countries and among global Muslim youth networks, whilst also providing overlapping social groups within the youth of different ethno-religious backgrounds.
Like other youth, Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney engage in multiple and often overlapping forms of popular culture. From the interviews that were conducted, it is evident that Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney are represented in almost all forms of musical genre from “religious” forms of music with a focus on dakwah, to cultural manifestations like the Malay dikir barat and to global underground black metal strains. Moreover, youth are also making statements with the music they listen to and with the fashions they adopt. Whilst they experiment with a range of music, they often immerse themselves in the accompaniments and identifiers that come with a particular musical genre that they are interested in. Fuelling this are retailers who are quick to take advantage of the latest trends in popular youth culture.

As a case in point, the recent effervescence of indie music in Singapore has led to youth adherents dressing in thrift apparel, vintage accessories and drainpipe jeans. Singaporean alternative/hardcore bands playing “hard-edged, aggressive rock music” have been attracting crowds numbering in the few thousands when they perform at the Esplanade and local music festivals such as Baybeats. In Sydney too, it is no longer a strange sight to see Muslim youth moshing and body surfing at these events. In both cities, youth consumption of music also extends to the cyberspace. Band members meet on Internet forums and networking sites such as MySpace sharing musical ideas, recruiting group members and getting fashion updates. Indeed, some of these hip-hop groups have toured the region and even globally for a chance to play and get their albums made in the West.

This chapter discusses the salient nature of hip-hop culture in the everyday lives of Muslim youth in both cities. Through an integrated study involving interviews as well as content analysis of popular Muslim youth forums and popular
Muslim hip-hop groups, this chapter will demonstrate some of the convergent and divergent trajectories in the practice of hip-hop culture among Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney. The choice of studying youth participation in hip-hop is an important one. The key reason is that, hip-hop culture is pervasive, cutting across indicators such as education, gender and levels of piety. Hip-hop music is one of the most common expressions of youth culture and is often used to give a voice to those who are at the margins. Therefore, it would be apt to examine how music is appropriated by urban minority youth, coupled with the attempts by the various moral authorities to manage the youth through music. Nonetheless, youth participation in the hip-hop genre calls for particular attention as hip-hop culture amongst youth has often been utilised as a sphere of contestation for government institutions, political parties, media and religious groups to claim moral guardianship of their societies against the corrupting influences of the youth.

The Hip-hop Generation

There is a growing sociological literature on the influence of hip-hop and rap music on urban minorities as well as the presence of a global culture and its contribution to a global economy (Rose, 1994; Perkins, 1996). It is a genre that crosses analytical boundaries such as culture, ethnicity, class, political orientation and identity, with seeming effortlessness and creates moral, cultural, commercial, and political debates to varying degrees. Todd Boyd, a professor at the University of Southern California, claims that “[h]ip-hop is the best way to grasp our present and future. Martin Luther King's ‘I Have a Dream’ speech is less important today than DMX’s ‘It's Dark and Hell Is Hot’”. Boyd claims that through hip-hop, the rest of America will assimilate with black culture (Boyd, 2004:12). According to a rapper from Public Enemy, “[r]ap music is Black folks’ CNN” (quoted in Gilyard, 2008:98). Such reference to rap music as a figment of social reality can also be understood as a critique of mainstream media’s misrepresentations of groups which exist at the margins of society. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.
Hip-hop originally refers to an African American urban youth culture with its origins in the South Bronx of New York and manifests itself in the form of rapping, graffiti, a particular way of dress and so forth. It was born in the age of post-industrial malaise and since then, has served the function of a social critique of the unemployment and lack of attention given to the youth. The hip-hop generation has been defined as “those young African Americans born between 1965 and 1984 who came of age in the eighties and nineties and . . . share a specific set of values and attitudes” (Kitwana 2002: 4). Kitwana delineated six major driving forces behind the hip-hop generation – “the visibility of black youth in popular culture, globalisation, the persistent nature of segregation, public policy surrounding the criminal justice system, media representations of black youth, and the general quality of life within the hip-hop community”. From the interviews conducted, these factors can in fact be juxtaposed, in varying degrees, to the Muslim youth scene in Singapore and Sydney.

It is timely to discuss at this juncture, the practice of hip-hop as manifested in the lexicon of Muslim black hip-hoppers in the United States. The fluidity and variegated nature of Islamic representations in hip-hop culture in urban America is seen most poignantly in the friction between Sunni Muslims and the Five Percenters. To be sure, the majority of allusions to Islam in American hip-hop spawn from adherents of the Five Percenters (or better known amongst its members as The Nation of Gods and Earths) which was formed in 1964 by Clarence 13X as a breakaway group from the Nation of Islam (NOI). Members of this group include influential figures in the American hip-hop scene such as the Wu Tang Clan, Busta Rhymes and Rakim. The Five Percenters reject the NOI’s notion of Farad Muhammad as Allah. On the contrary, they believe that the black man himself is God and that the ALLAH is actually an abbreviation of “Arm Leg Leg Arm Head”. The group refers to the women as Earth and as three quarters of the Earth is covered with water, so must the female body. As such, it will be no surprise to see the females covering their hair and wearing clothes that do not accentuate the figure of their body. The name Five Percenters is derived from the teaching that 85 percent of people on the Earth are oblivious and will not arrive at the truth whilst 10 percent
who do know, will use their knowledge to reap benefits in exploiting the ignorance of those who are unaware. Hence, only the remaining five percent are conscious of the true nature of the black man as “God” or “Allah”. Muslims view Five Percenters’ theology as blasphemous while the latter views the former as belonging to the 10 percent category. In the main, referring to each other as “Gods” is in direct contrast to the Islamic belief in the one-ness of God.

The Five Percenters’ theology and jargons appropriate many terminologies from the Muslim tradition. For the Five Percenters, Harlem is “Mekkah”, Brooklyn is “Medina”, Queens is “the Desert”, and the Bronx is “Pelan” while New Jersey is “New Jerusalem”. The beliefs of the Five Percenter hip-hoppers are often codified in their lyrics. For example, the phrase “whassup G” refers to another black male adherent and not “gangsta” as is often believed. In addition, popular hip-hop slang such as “represent” and “break it down” can also be traced to the influence on the Five Percenter hip-hoppers. So too do the expressions “word” and “peace”. The popular hip-hop expression “peace” originates from the Moorish Science Temple, an Islamic precursor to the group (Fauset, 2001:42). “Word” is an exclamation of the Five Percenters affirming the truth in the statement of another God (Nuruddin, 1994:127).

It is pertinent to note that even at the level of analysing Muslim hip-hop coming from America, hip-hop’s messages do not essentially convey images or symbols depicting the social reality of everyday life in a post-industrial community. The esoteric messages and insider language codified within hip-hop jargons of the Five Percenter and the NOI, more often than not transcend the comprehensibility of many consumers of hip-hop music. Since “linguistic relations are always relations of symbolic power”, attempting to rationalise merely from a linguistic perspective without taking into consideration the totality of the matrices of power relations makes the analysis unintelligible (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:142-143). The hip-hop language, although borrowed from these groups, has become normalised and is reproduced among the global hip-hop ummah to represent symbols that are detached from their intended meaning. While both the Five Percenters and the NOI have
arguably been the most prominent movements related to Islam and hip-hop, Sunni Islam also serves as a source of musical and cultural inspiration in the hip-hop community. Followers of Sunni Islam (“al-Islam” in hip-hop parlance), such as Q-Tip (Fareed Kamal) and Mos Def, are among the most highly acclaimed hip-hop artists, lauded as representatives of hip-hop's school of “Afro-humanism” and positivity.

Much of Muslim hip-hop has been influenced by the rhetorical style of Malcolm X’s “jihad of words”, which he has been deployed successfully as a “potent political and religious strategy” (Turner, 2003). Malcolm X, who was an eminent civil rights leader and an Islamic activist who started off with the NOI but later switched to the more orthodox Sunni tradition, has since become a central figure in Muslim hip-hop parlance with many hip-hop songs evoking his name and speeches. However, owing to the complexity of his personal background, replicating Malcolm X in global Muslim hip-hop usually comes at the expense of ignoring the structural conditions that make up his habitus.

Provincialising Hip-Hop from its African American roots

Hip-hop's changed, ain't a black thing anymore G
Young kids in Baghdad showing 2 on 3
Holla West Coast?! Naah, West Bank for life
Upside Down, holla for my Moros aightb
Spit rhymes in Arabic on the same level like Jada
You wouldn't know if you should head bang or belly dance
playa
I'm that type of sand nigga type of Johnny Conchran yaw
dig
...Ya stereotype me; I knock you out like Prince Naseem.

“El Moro”, Outlandish

Even in the US, the language of Islamic hip-hop is increasingly used by young Arab-American and South Asian artists to “speak the truth” to power. Muslim rap artists proudly announce their faith and include “Islamic” messages of social justice in their lyrics. The Los Angeles-based Pakistani-American based duo, Aman, in their single “Arabian Knights,” rap about being Muslim Robin Hoods fighting for
justice in a foreign land. In early 2002, Brooklyn-based Palestinian-American brothers, the *Hammer Bros*, “originally from the Holy Land living in the belly of the Beast, trying to rise on feet of Yeast,” released their pro-intifada cut, “Free Palestine,” now regularly blared at pro-Palestinian gatherings in New York (Aidi, 2004). The song above, by a Danish Muslim hip-hop group, demonstrates how the complexion of the genre has mutated and how it is appropriated beyond its African-American origins. Whilst maintaining the symbol as a popular hip-hop jargon, its usage here is closer to the “gangsta” insinuations. The word has thus been done violence to, removed from its theological origins, which was intended to refer to the *Five Percenter* notion of “God”. However, in this instance, it ceases to refer to the struggle of the blacks on the streets, and has instead mutated into a term of reference and a rallying cry to galvanise the young Muslim generation who feel under siege globally.

For the French and British Muslims, hip-hop activism has been an important arena for anti-Islamophobic mobilisation. Writing about England’s *Fun-Da-Mental* and France’s *IAM*, Ted Swedenburg states, “In both countries Muslims are attempting to construct cultural, social and political spaces for themselves as ethnic groups (of sorts), and are massively involved in anti-racist mobilisations against white supremacy”. He added, “*Fun-Da-Mental’s* expressions of pride in Islam appealed to Muslim youth who had been raised on British popular culture yet also felt wounded by British *Islamophobia*”. (Swedenburg, 2001:58). Bennet (2000) postulates that hip-hop culture is popular among non-Anglo migrant youth in cities globally owing to their feeling of alienation and an oppositional image embodied in the genre.

**Hip-Hop and Islam**

Despite the popularity of hip-hop amongst Muslim youth around the world, hip-hop culture endures a tenuous relationship with Islam. The choice to be a Muslim hip-hopper is still marked by tough practical questions, the most fundamental of which: is music *halal* (permissible)?
I try not to listen to music. I only listen to *nasheed* and quranic recitations. But it is difficult to avoid listening to music entirely. Music is played everywhere for example at airports, in the bathrooms of shopping malls…

Rahmah, Female, Sydney

I listen to *nasheeds* like the Native Deen because it is a *halal* form of music using computerised sounds.

Syuhada, Female, Sydney

The religious *fatwa* with regard to the status of music in Islam is diverse, ranging from a total prohibition of music, to allowing musical instruments as long as the song complies with Islamic precepts such as the ruling against uttering profanities. The form of music which is in line with the religious rulings of many Islamic scholars would be *nasheed*. *Nasheed* is an Islamic-oriented composition traditionally sung acapella in tandem with only basic percussion. The new wave of *nasheed* singers, however, has included a diverse range of instruments to advance their craft and this has caused some debates within the Muslim community.

It is understandable then that one of the discussions within the Muslim hip-hop ummah is the contestation between the terms “Muslim hip-hop” and “Islamic hip-hop.” The latter is used in an attempt by Muslim hip-hoppers to reconcile themselves with Islamic religious requirements in music. Islamic hip-hop may restrict the types of musical instruments used, generally does not employ expletives and frequently refers to issues of doctrinal import.

Generally, Muslim youth involvement in hip-hop still comes as a challenge to the religious authorities who do not see the elements present in hip-hop as in line with Islamic values. Hip-hop is largely seen as a sign of Western moral decadence and a state of normlessness. Such tensions are also evident in both Singapore and Sydney. Mr Ibrahim Mohamed Ali, chairman of *Al-Falah* Mosque in Singapore

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6http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/Q_LP/ch4s3pre.htm#Singing
http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Islamonline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503544202)
which is located in an area that is a popular youth hangout, recounts how two mosques tried to hold hip-hop shows at the National Youth Park and were then criticised for going against norms of the Muslim community. “It's a very sensitive balance,” he says. The dilemma facing Muslim hip-hop artists in Australia is perhaps best encapsulated in the online comments reproduced below on a popular Sydney Muslim youth forum. It captures the intricacies and the tensions of the consumption of hip-hop amongst Muslim youth.

I know this is a controversial request, but 3 brothers and myself are Islamic Rappers, we've gotten alot of criticism over the years and we've heard it all...but im gonna ask anyway, coz i believe that what we do is from our heart, our intention is good and we genuinely wanna help the youth, they are more likely to listen to Lyrics that educate them in a 'cool' way rather than some old bloke giving a 2 hour lecture...anyway, my request is....we are looking for a Muslim DJ in Victoria to produce some beats for our flows...we are to perform at a huge Islamic function soon, and we need some customized beats ASAP! if anyone who is reading this knows of any PROFESSIONAL Muslim DJ's who are qualified to produce some krayzie beats please leave a reply

Anonymous blogger, Sydney

A number of social critics have also criticised what they see as a heavy emphasis on “bling bling” (materialism) and “bagging honies” (sexual relations with beautiful women) in hip-hop music and culture, as hip-hop’s concern with other topics, such as social justice, fades to the background. These factors make the fusion of Islam into hip-hop all the more controversial. One sphere of contention pertains to the management of the body.

Our *deen* is not meant to be rocked!...I see these so-called Muslim sistas wearing a hijab and then a boostier, or a hijab with their belly-button sticking out. You don't put on a hijab and try to rock it! Or these brothers wearing Allah tattoos, or big medallions with Allah’s name—Allah is not to be bling-blinged!

Adisa Banjoko, hip-hop journalist and author of *The Light from the East*
As the “Muslim body” is constructed as a site of moral judgement, it leads to the demonising of the performative aspects of hip-hop music such as the sexualised or violent body associated with particular dances and the unruly crowds during public performances. In this regard, hip-hop can be seen as a response to the disciplining of the body within the context of traditional ‘Islamic’ music.

Having said this, there are also significant attempts by Muslim hip-hoppers to “Islamise” hip-hop performances. As the thesis will demonstrate, there are those amongst the Muslim youth who believe that hip-hop can be compatible with one’s Islamic convictions as it is merely a vehicle for self-expression. Hip-hop culture thus undergoes an “Islamisation” process when appropriated by a segment of Muslim youth. Its social commentary and confrontational style is lending voice to the Muslim youth who utilises “hip-hop activism” as a vehicle to battle public misconceptions of Islam. This leads to the global rise of a social group, whom I call the “poetic jihadis”, which fuses hip-hop with Islamic symbolisms. In essence, hip-hop as appropriated by the “poetic jihadis”, is an attempt to reconcile two seemingly colliding cultures. It is a rebellion against the exaltation of misogynous themes in hip-hop and the conservativeness of Islamic music such as the nasheed. The lyrics are still devotional but it incorporates a heavy dose of social reality.

The term poetic jihadis is not coincidental. Notwithstanding the apparent tension between hip-hop and Islam, many Muslim hip-hoppers tend to couch their craft within the rubric of the Islamic tradition. Suad (2007) stresses that poetry has an exalted place in pre-Islamic Arabia; conferring on its practitioners social status and symbolic power. A continuity of this long standing tradition is found in the Qur’an which is viewed by Muslims of all ages as a text of superior linguistic pedigree. In fact, Prophet Muhammad was reputed for his use of poetry as a missionising tool. Seeking to emulate the prophet who is regarded as endowed with the tools that are deemed most appropriate in engaging his audiences, hip-hoppers utilised rhymes and idioms of Islamic symbolisms to engage the youth of today. As one prominent former hip-hopper, Napolean, handsomely puts it, “Moses was sent with magic, Jesus with medicine, and Muhammad with poetry”. Seen in this light, Muslim hip-
hoppers thus see themselves as progenies of the “Muhammadan mission”. I will further discuss how hip-hop has been appropriated by the poetic jihadis to galvanise the concerns of urban minority Muslim youth living as part of the September 11 generation. This is a theme that will be picked up again in the next chapter among tattooed Muslim youth in Sydney.

**Setting the Stage: Singapore and Sydney**

Issues of racism, citizenship and Islam are the cornerstone of Muslim hip-hop music (Gazzah, 2008; Solomon, 2009). Hip-hop in Sydney has always had a multicultural and migrant element to it (Maxwell, 2003). The Western suburbs are touted as the primary historic centre of Sydney hip-hop culture. The area, with its highest concentration of young Muslims, along with its significant concentration of young non-Anglo migrant population like the Italians, Greeks and Vietnamese has taken to “the oppositional features of African hip-hop and adopted its sign and forms as markers of their own otherness” (Margetson, 1999:88). As Miguel d’Souza (quoted in Maxwell, 2003:115) perceptively puts it, “in the Australian context, hip-hop’s movement has come out of the ranks of suburban and migrant youth whose dissatisfaction with the isolation of suburban living, unemployment, racism and the Anglo-Saxon dominance of Australian culture has caused them to identify with similar sentiments coming from African-American rap.”

However, I will argue that unlike the Sydney Muslim hip-hop scene, these concerns are largely absent in the production of hip-hop in the Singapore public sphere. The lack of this facet of critical hip-hop in Singapore is however not indicative of a lack of discontent or awareness among Muslim youth. Rather, the political culture of fear in Singapore has a large impact upon how Muslim youth practice popular culture. In addition, the two aspects that will be discussed below contribute to the divergence in the production of hip-hop in Singapore and Sydney. As a result, critical hip-hop in Singapore which is practiced predominantly among Malay groups is, in the main, inward looking.
The Politics of Space

To be an all-rounded hip-hop artist, I must cover all aspects of hip-hop culture including rapping, breakdancing, graffiti art and DJ-ing.

Saiful, quoted in *The Straits Times*, 25 September 2005

Particular places and associated activities are thought to be morally damaging: these include nightclubs and discos, while public performance spaces such as the National Theatre and the Civic Plaza at Ngee Ann City have the potential to be contaminated if not carefully policed and rationally planned (Kong, 2006). Under the Public Entertainment and Meetings Act (PEMA), a permit is required for virtually any form of public speech or entertainment. Indeed, where it is critical for rationality to prevail during performance, the choice of performance space becomes a strategy of containment.

The constraints facing those intent on propagating hip-hop music and its accompanying art forms can be further demonstrated by looking at graffiti writing. In Singapore, Muslim youth has often found self-expression within graffiti writing, which is traditionally understood locally as a deviant youth culture. It is one form of ‘identity marking’ that is gaining popularity among Singaporean Muslim youth with its own unique subculture. In Singapore, graffiti writing has long been viewed as a form of vandalism and illegal graffiti can carry a penalty with a maximum fine of $2000, with eight strokes of the cane or imprisonment for three years. Many of the graffiti writers in Singapore start out illegally by practicing their craft in hidden, largely invisible spaces such as monsoon drains or derelict buildings. However since 2002, graffiti writing has discovered a new found legitimacy in the Singapore landscape and has assumed a more visible and legal form when the Youth Park, under the auspices of the *National Arts Council*, became the first public space that has been created for the practice of graffiti writing as an acceptable art form. As I will argue later, this is consistent with the government’s strategy to reach out to the Muslim youth who make up the September 11 generation to provide them a space to practice their craft albeit within a controlled and regulated environment.
From the Management of Rock to Hip-hop in Singapore

For instance, some of us may wonder about the effect that hip-hop culture has on our youth. How should we view this? Is it good or bad? Is it a passing phase that some young people go through or is it a symptom of alienation? Is it a negative influence or can it be harnessed to bring across positive messages to our youth? As we explore, we realize it is just not possible to have black or white perspectives on this issue and indeed, on many issues that affect young people. Perhaps, a more useful approach to understanding youth phenomena is to start by finding out how young people themselves view the world, while holding in check our own assumptions and premature judgments. Understanding the thoughts and aspirations of our young people is the first step towards integrating the youth into the community. This Conference is therefore a useful platform that will help us understand the various perspectives and worldviews of our youth. It is only by understanding our youth that we can start finding better ways to engage young people and help them bring out the best in themselves.

Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-In-Charge of Muslim Affairs, 18 July 2004

Despite the reflexive comments of the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs above, it is pertinent for us to recall that this has not always been the approach taken by the state in managing the influence of Western music on the young. It is also crucial for us to critically examine the extent to which this reflexivity has been translated into practice. The former can be best illuminated by examining the contentious relationship between the state and rock culture from the 70s to the 90s.

The affiliation of the Malay youth with rock culture dates back to the 1960s with popularity of the “pop yeh yeh”, the Malay version of rock ‘n’ roll. Along with the music came the short skirts, drain-pipe pants and hairstyles reminiscent in the icons of the day such as Jefridin and Hasnah Harun. Rock music’s ascendance in the Malay community continued in the 1980s and 90s with the idolising of local, regional and Western bands such as Sweet Charity, Lefthanded, Search, Wings, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and The Eagles. A Straits Times article (Mardiana, 1989) carried a detailed description of the “Mat Rok” who are stereotyped as keeping the trademark of unkempt and frizzy mop that goes eight centimetres and more down the ears, bandanas and ponytails; the obligatory tighter-than-tight jeans torn in certain
places, or patched with emblems; black leather jacket well decorated with studs and mock bullets over psychedelic coloured tees shredded at the sleeves or the hems, or alternatively, denim shirts; dangle-earrings for the guys; mean-looking belts and meaner buckles, and high cowboy boots; and a colourful, expletive-laden lingo that he uses to communicate with his cohorts. The rock culture, much like the youth gangs, also has its own hand gestures for example putting out one’s index and little fingers signifying “I love you” and “gangspeak” such as “Gua cayalulah beb” (I believe in you). Intrinsically linked to youth rock culture is the “bikie” culture that gained popularity especially amongst a section of the Muslim youth (called the “Mat Motor” with the term “Mat” being an abbreviated form of the common Muslim name, Muhammad) due to the symbol of rebellion and freedom attached to it.

The stereotypes attached to these youth rockers have often caused them great unease. They were often seen as uneducated, drug abusers and rebels against the religious dakwah movement. Compounding their predicament, government policies in the 1970s were specifically rolled out with the intent to stem all forms of “hippie” culture amongst Singaporean youth. The wearing of long hair, for example, was made illegal for men. Despite some amount of public outcry, the state maintained that this was a necessary measure to maintain social cohesion in Singapore society.

If our citizens are asked to sacrifice a few inches of dead cells (long hair) to keep Singapore safe from the scrounge of hippism, I would not believe for a moment that democracy is dead in Singapore. It is not founded on hair.

Rajaratnam, Foreign Minister, 1972

Acknowledging the pervasive influence of music in the lives of youth, however, various attempts have been made since the late 80s and in the early 90s to appropriate “Western” music as a means to address social problems. These were, however, largely met with tensions within the Muslim community in Singapore. For example, an idea was once mooted by Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, former Singapore Minister of Muslim Affairs, who led the anti-drug task force, that an anti-drug concert be organised, featuring popular Malaysian rock bands such as Wings and
Search. Having created much uproar within the community, he conceded that although he felt that the concert served as a good vehicle to connect with the youth, it was a controversial move to hold rock concerts saying that there are those within the Muslim community who find them un-Islamic or too Westernised (Zuraidah, 1990).

Similar attempts to appropriate music have also been made in the arena of religious propagation. In the 1990s, the Muslim community in Singapore was outraged by an individual who was known as “Ustaz Motor” (Motorbike Cleric). Mohamed Nasir was criticised for his dakwah method of going to discos, bowling alleys and rock concerts to get to Muslim youth. In order to blend in, he dressed in T-shirts, leather jackets and jeans and even headed a motorbike gang called the “Rebel Motor Gang”. With his gang, he would patronise R(A) shows like “Basic Instinct”, which in Singapore was restricted to those over 21 years of age due to its mature themes and sexual content.

That's when all the problems started. The public couldn't accept my methods. Society condemned what I did. That was when they started calling me “Ustaz Controversial”, “Ustaz Motor”, “Ustaz Rock”.

Ustaz Nasir

A number of religious teachers were upset, with some registering their outrage with MUIS which led to Nasir having to clarify his position to the Mufti. MUIS released a statement that whilst “it appreciated every dakwah effort, care must be taken to ensure that the methods used did not run contrary to Islamic principles and beliefs” and that “Ustaz Nasir's view that Islam does not forbid a person to go to a disco or rock concert is wrong”. I argue that the approaches of moral entrepreneurs such as the state and Islamic religious organisations have evolved on almost a parallel trajectory and seen a marked difference over the last decade or so. Despite the general reluctance to demonise rock and pop in the 1980s, the re-emergence in state discourse about the perils of western cultural influences and a re-assertion of “Asian (Confucian) values” (Kong and Yeoh, 2003) form the context for the decision to ban slam dancing in 1992. Inadvertently, the music of the “other” (defined as the “west”) is constructed as immoral.
However, as seen in the post September 11 speech made by Yaacob Ibrahim, there was evidently a change in the state’s approach in managing the consumption of “western music” amongst the youth. In part, this had arisen from the state’s attempts to link hip-hop culture to violence, and more specifically to the fight against terrorism. In 2007, the Singapore government approximates that there are 6,000 websites and blogs that promote radicalism, some of which integrating “rap music and MTV-style editing”\(^7\). It was alleged that extremists have become adept in crafting their message to suit their target audience. These terror websites are flashy, well designed and feature visually arresting graphic content. Many also offer chat rooms, music videos and other features that are obviously targeted at a computer-savvy, media-saturated generation - namely, the young. The messages they receive can be in the form of videos that make use of footages from conflicts involving Muslims around the world, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Muslim men are often depicted as part of an angry crowd resisting Western aggression, hence directly appealing to Muslim youth around the globe to join the jihadi movement. The videos even use hip-hop and rap musicians who extol jihadism (Mohamed, 2008). In a change of strategy, the Internal Security Department is putting on a human face and engaging Muslim youth in colleges and seminars. Hairulanuar Bohari, aged 21, a student from the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) was among a group of youth who feel that musicians can play a central role in quelling extremist ideologies among youth. In a youth workshop, among the suggestions mooted by participants are for mosques to have cafes and music studios to attract the youth (Zakir, 2008).

Hence, the state’s awareness of the potency and popularity of hip-hop culture among urban minority youth has led to hip-hop being co-opted by the state. Along with national trends to liberalise Singapore’s music landscape in an attempt to attract foreign talent and as a response to the youth’s increasing exposure to these genres in the Digital Age, the state and Muslim organisations have immersed themselves in a celebration of hip-hop culture. By extension, local Muslim organisations and mosques have also warmed up to the idea of embracing certain elements of hip-hop

\(^7\) [http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A259_07](http://www.rrg.sg/subindex.asp?id=A259_07)
culture. It is common today to see hip-hoppers alongside nasheed groups at Malay/Muslim community events. In reaching out to the youth, mosques with the support of MUIS also organised a Malay song writing competition incorporating diverse elements including hip-hop and R&B to commemorate the life of the Prophet. MUIS has called on popular young singers such as Imran Ajmain and held arts performances to celebrate their Ramadan youth challenge. Malay/Muslim organisations like the 4PM group organised a “hip-hop battle” to attract young Muslims to attend their various activities.

Contrary to the relationship between the Singapore government and religious authority with Muslim youth and rock music which has been well documented (Fu and Liew, 2009; Kong, 2006; Shirlene, 1992), the dynamics with regard to hip-hop culture are more complex. Hip-hop has been periodically appropriated by the Singapore state to spread national messages and “propagandistic slogans”. This is evident in a number of music videos released such as those made in 2007 by the Media Development Authority featuring its high level Chinese bureaucrats rapping and another released in 2003 featuring local comedic icon Phua Chu Kang, to spread measures to fight the outbreak of the SARS disease. This state-engineered rap was argued to be the state’s “hegemonic player (broadcast media), valiantly co-creating with and co-opting the grassroots through appropriating rap for its presumed accessibility to larger demographics and disseminating this (eventually over the Internet) via a music video (narrow-cast media)” (Tan, 2009).

Even an opposition group, the Singapore Democratic Party, has recently cashed in on the popularity of hip-hop culture with a couple of videos released on YouTube showing the release of two of its Muslim youth activists from prison. With one of the released activist shouting, “Merdeka!” (Freedom!), a banner with the words “Hip-hop Hooray” was hoisted at the background, with the rest breaking into a song. The youth were detained for wearing t-shirts with the picture of a kangaroo in a

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judge's gown on them during the defamation hearing between Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and the Singapore Democrats\(^9\).

**Sydney: 3 Levels of Production/Consumption**

**As Social Integration**

The first level appropriates hip-hop as a popular culture that could act as a social glue to assimilate into mainstream society. A grassroots performing arts group based in Melbourne called *Anti-Racism Action Band (ARAB)* has since its inception in 2004, appropriated music to chip at socio-cultural barriers and to battle anti-Muslim sentiment with youth suffering verbal and physical abuse in the streets for being Muslim. It spawned from a governmental grant to *Victoria Arabic Social Services* to aid in raising the esteem of Muslim youth and to combat youth gang culture in Australia. The State also recognises the potential of appropriating hip-hop. The *Department of Immigration and Citizenship’s Race Discrimination Unit* carried out its outreach programmes in June 2006 with different Muslim social groups in NSW and Victoria. Hip-hop music was used as an icebreaker to bridge the gap with local Muslim youth. This model has also been replicated in Sydney by incorporating events such as *Hip-hop Projections* in the *Sydney Writers’ Festival*.

**As a “Gangsta” Hip-Hop Culture**

The second facet is an unproblematic internalisation of a subgenre of hip-hop amongst a section of Sydney Muslim youth who envision their everyday lives as homologous to their position in social space and as resembling the struggles of the African American “street culture”. There is a particularly strong African American youth culture amongst suburban Sydney Muslim youth.

The problem among the youth in Sydney is the adoration of a criminal culture as seen in their love for the gangsta rap culture. They want that

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\(^9\) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAH17Sqw5nA&feature=channel
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpYzS8Puveo&feature=channel_page
actually and they create the same environment with the black youth in their heads. It is an excuse to be lazy and to be criminals. But the funny thing is that they use Islam to make sense of their identity.

Salman, Male, Sydney

I have a lot of friends in gangs who listen to rappers like Tupac, EZE, NWA... they are all about drugs, cars, money and gangs. Listening to this music justifies their lifestyle. Usually from my friends I see 2 likely endings. Either they end up in jail or they get out of this lifestyle. And the way they usually get out of this gang lifestyle is usually by coming back to the religion.

Farida, Female, Sydney

“Gangsta hip-hop” is a source of moral panic among many media observers and members of the community. New York Times Columnist David Brooks, in his article on “Gangsta, in French” (10 November, 2005), talked about a struggle between “Osama bin Laden and Tupac Shakur” among poor young Muslim men the world over. In the aftermath of the Paris riots, he pointed to the rioters’ immersion in hip-hop and rap culture and their replication of similar black American ghetto gang culture as a form of resistance. A recent video entitled “Muslim Youth in Australia Documentary” released in 2008 by the Islamic Da’wah Centre of Australia cites hip-hop culture as a contributing factor to the social ills within the Sydney Muslim youth fraternity.10

"You see hotted up cars, big jewellery, the toughness, the talking and haircuts. If you speak to any of these kids, they’re into rap and all sorts of things coming from black American society. They’re relating to being victimised just like the black Americans. Once you provide a person with such a mechanism, they’re always on the attack. They think they’re being victimised and that justifies why they get into trouble."

Fadi Rahman, President of the Islamic Centre for Research
(The Australian, 14 December 2005)

I used to hot up my car. It cost me an arm and a leg. Whenever, I go out I will blast my music when I’m driving. Until it comes naturally to me, I have to have my music when I am driving. We relate to the

10 http://www.tubeislam.com/video/2510/Muslim-Youth-in-Australia-Documentary
blacks because they are oppressed and they are outsiders in their society. It comes from the desire actually to be respected. And this very strong sense of masculinity which is actually inherited from Arab culture.

Salman, Male, Sydney

This view echoes those of Muslim youth activists who believe that many Muslim youth are not turning to Australian or even Lebanese or Islamic culture, but instead are mimicking black rap culture (Stewart and Hodge, 2005). There has also been a grassroots movement to address the issue of gang violence among the Muslim youth in Sydney through a total rejection of hip-hop culture. Once touted as a music icon, Napoleon, a former colleague of slain gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur, has a popular following among the “Muslim gangs” of western Sydney. Ever since giving up music out of respect for his Islamic beliefs, Napoleon has been travelling the world to talk to youth about Islam and the pitfalls of hip-hop culture. Napoleon, who until 2005 was singing about praying whilst holding on to a loaded weapon, visited Sydney in 2006 in a bid to convince Muslim youth to lay off their criminal lifestyle.

I come from the lifestyle where we was preaching gangsta music and also we was really doing most of that stuff. The kids on the street they want to go do it, they end up in jail, or killing someone, or on drugs, something like that…There's people in my neighbourhood, they used to be criminals, they used to be bank robbers, they used to be killers. They became Muslim and nobody would even hear a cuss word coming out of their mouth…Music glorifies everything that is totally against Islam. It glorifies lying, stealing, murder, raping. They’re feeding this stuff to our kids. If you listen to this stuff, you get brainwashed into believing it.

Napoleon

As a Verbal Jihad by Poetic Jihadis

The third form is a critical consumption of hip-hop music among the Muslim youth to give those who are at the margins of society a voice. In general, this aspect is parallel to the direction Australian hip-hop insofar that it calls for a rethinking of Australian national identity and embarks on a “project of attempting to build a multicultural national identity in place of a racist monocultural model that is now
gaining strength in Australian national politics” (Kurt Iveson, 1997:47). An example of this strain of hip-hop is Australia’s Muslim hip-hop group, the *Brothahood*.

I was born and raised here in Australia…I don't listen to Arabic songs and I don't speak the language that much. I grew up as a Muslim listening to hip-hop…The problem I had was that I couldn't relate to a lot of the hip-hop out today with all this rapping of violence, girls and drugs. So I started writing about who I was and what I feel as a Muslim and Australian…We basically try to break down stereotypes and barriers that we face as Muslims in Australia. There is a huge gap between Muslims and everyone else. Muslims stick to each other and non-Muslims are scared of us because of what they see and read in the media. We hope that our music bridges the gap so that non-Muslims aren't so scared of us and can see us as regular people. We noticed our music was attracting a lot of Muslim youth so we decided to use it as a tool for the sake of Allah to remind people, especially youth, but more importantly ourselves about this beautiful deen and way of life. We hope we are able to perfect it so that it eventually becomes an alternative to the negative, material based hip-hop on the airwaves today.


The tracks from the *Brothahood* talk about their piety in the face of everyday life in Australia post-September 11. In addition to expressing their everyday religiosity, the *Brothahood* also articulates a diverse array of issues related to migration, xenophobia, media prejudice, Islamophobia and the exclusionary treatment exacted upon the Muslims in the name of national security whilst also exerting their rights to citizenship in Australia. The results are socially conscious tracks such as “The Silent Truth”.

From beer I refrain - prayers I maintain,
Can't get on a plane without coping all the blame.
People cant ya see that we are all the same,
children of Adam but playin the blame game
its a shame, and that’s the damn well truth,
If i hear another word I’ll ma cut your ass loose
News got you scared that i’ll ma knock out ya tooth
so gullible you believe in mother goose huh
that’s cute, but that don’t make it right
Australia is mine too so I’ll ma put up a fight,
u wanna send me back? yo send me back where?
Australia is the place where I let down my hair
you don’t care, but that’s in your nature
they find any excuse they can to rate and then hatecha

The incorporation of a nasheed element in hip-hop has enabled some Muslim youth, who had considered music as haram and un-Islamic, to take a more sympathetic view to hip-hop groups like the Brothahood.

I don’t listen to music, just nasheeds occasionally. But I think that it will do the youth good to listen to the Brothahood rather than they listen to other stuff because now more than ever there is a need for religion to be represented.

Shuaib, Male, Sydney

Singapore: Disjuncture between Consumption and Production

Ah, dats because 80% of the hip-hop supporters are from the malay community!! Also, got one time kiter ader (when we) perform kat (at) somewhere in Geylang then most of the makcik2 (Malay aunties) there got excited lah! They are soo supporting & that minute we know that they are acherly genuine supporters…

Triple Noize interview in anakmelayu.com

Hip-hop has a strong presence among the Singapore Muslim youth. This is a sentiment echoed above by a popular hip-hop group called Triple Noize, winners of a national talent time show held in 2002. Besides cutting albums in Malay, various initiatives have been mooted to cater to the Malay majority hip-hop market, of which one is Beats Society. It is an organisation founded by a Muslim youth, Imran Ajmain, to promote a new breed of hip-hop artistes. The organisation was set up in 2004 to raise the awareness of hip-hop here and manages 13 home-grown artistes and he reports that the “majority of hip-hop listeners happen to come from the Malay population”.

A vibrant “underground” hip-hop culture also exists in Singapore. Yasser (2003) explores how the Internet allows Muslim youth consuming hip-hop culture traverse national and ethnic boundaries by suspending their local identity and adopting a global identity (e.g. through the deployment of Ebonics, the East Coast –
West Coast antagonism etc). These relations may take the form of the appraisal of the aesthetic qualities of musical commodities or the reinforcement of the solidarity of these consumers in some way or another.

However, although a global consumption of hip-hop is present amongst Muslim youth; hip-hop production in the public sphere is mainly localised. In fact, I will argue that even where critical hip-hop exists, it is in the main, one by the Singapore Malay Muslim youth and for the Singapore Malay Muslim youth. Hip-hop in Singapore serves several functions for the community.

**As Internalisation of the “Malay Problem”**

Having borrowed the idea from American youth workers, Muslim organisations such as Clubliya have shifted from merely conducting workshops, to incorporating hip-hop to reach out to troubled Muslim youth.

Our approach to helping wayward youth needs to change. We need to give them hope... In the US, they call them youth at the brink of success. Here, we call them youth at risk.

Muzaiyannah Hamzah, Clubliya President, Singapore

At first glance, such initiatives might seem as attempts at social integration. However, despite the change in approach, the underlying motivation is that of “problem solving” directed towards a particular group of youth. Hip-hop is a strategy used to rehabilitate youth “at risk/on the brink of success”. This can be understood when one looks at the nature of hip-hop production in Singapore.

Hip-hop in Singapore is more popularly constructed from a selective social problem perspective, not engaging in larger issues of citizenship, inter-ethnic dynamics and state-society relations as reminiscent in the Sydney example. Ahli Fiqir (Thinking Group) is arguably the most popular Malay hip-hop group from Singapore. Below is an excerpt of their hit song “Samseng” (Gangsters/Thugs).
ini bukan zaman samseng (ulang*)

bukan zaman banting banting (ulang*)

tiada tempat untuk samseng (ulang*)

ini bukan cara samseng

Yang menang akan jadi abang besar,
tak perlu gusar

dari kanan sentiasa ada orang jaga,
bila berjalan kepak mula dibuka

Yang menang akan jadi abang besar,
tak perlu gusar

keberanianmu itu adalah anak-anak

bangsaku dalam satu ikatan berkongsi kandang bergelar

si banduan

Bukan aku hendak mengata, tapi

sudah nyata

semakin bermahrajalela, semakin

berleluasa

duni demi satu, bangsa ku menjadi layu

gugur di medan perang, ciptaan

saudara-saudara ku

bagaimana hendakku jelaskan, pada generasi baru

duni maju tapi bukan kita nombor satu

duni serba canggih tapi kita masih menagih

duni pesat membangun tapi kita masih mengelamun

salah siapa, lain makan nangka, lain kena getah

lain cari cerita,
lain jadi mangsa,
kerana nila setitik rosak semua susu sebelanga

this is not time for gangsters (repeat*)

not an era for hurling (repeat*)

there is no place for thugs (repeat*)

this is not the way gangsters

Who wins be big brother,
do not worry

people guarding left and right,
wings began to open when you walk
careful do not try to stare,
a warning to all

Your courage is my fellow race

in a stable bond to share
called

the prisoner

I am not criticising, but it’s clear

it has become dominant, become widespread

one by one, my race wither

slain in battle, my created by my brothers

how do I explain to the new generation

world is progressing but we’re not number one

world is sophisticated but we’re still addicts

world rapidly developing but we are still idling

who’s wrong, someone else eats jackfruit, someone else tainted with its sap

someone else looking for stories, someone else becomes victims, because of a drop of iodine, all milk in the pot is damaged

The song mainly focuses on the backwardness of the Malay race, specifically criticising Malay youth who are embroiled in gang life. Besides “gangsterism”, the group also made references to the longstanding drug problems in the community
blaming the deviants for giving the community a bad name. Seen alternatively, this strategy of looking at Malay/Muslim issues can be seen as a way to circumvent the state’s strict laws and “out of bound markers” (Mauzy and Milne, 2002: 141-142; Trocki, 2006: 159) surrounding the issues of race, language and religion.

Along this line, Bennett (2000) advocates that the process of globalisation will not in fact impose homogeneity but rather will illuminate and foster the local. Taking the particular Singaporean state requirements into account, social actors can be seen as reflexive agents who engage critically and creatively with the flow of cultural meaning actualised in a series of musical texts. Bennett argues that their practices assume meaning and social, cultural or structural significance, not solely by virtue of their engagement with dominant social structures such as the state, but by their embeddedness in local politics and social relations. He argues that social actors engage critically with popular music but that they do so principally in the context of the “local”. This is defined throughout the text not as a demarcated physical space but rather as a set of discourses. The specific discursive practices through which the local is called into being are, Bennett asserts, intimately associated with the production and consumption of popular music. Those musical texts that originate elsewhere are routinely read through sensibilities that emerge out of a specific understanding of place. These particular sensibilities are themselves, however, heavily influenced by exposure to musical texts that originate elsewhere.

As Enhanced Striving

The regimented management of the music scene and its “deviant” identity markers has led to Muslim youth in Singapore asserting themselves in national mainstream talent shows. The hugely popular Singapore Idol singing competition for youth aged from 16 to 28, which is a spin off from its British counterpart, Pop Idol, has thrown up a few surprises. Despite comprising only 17% of the population, all three Singapore Idols to date, Taufik Batisah (2004 with 62% of the votes), Hady Mirza (2006 with 70% of the votes) and Sezairi Sezali (2009, percentage win withheld) are Muslim youth. To add, in 2007, a similar singing competition was held
in Singapore for those aged 25 to 65 called *Live the Dream*. The outcome of the show was also dependent entirely on viewer voting through the Short Message Service (SMS). Again, the winners for both the solo and group categories, Affendi and *By Definition*, were Malay Muslim males. Many of these individuals come from a hip-hop background with the first *Singapore Idol* heading a local hip-hop group of his own. Although there are some respondents who take the view that the concept of an “idol” in itself is forbidden in Islam and which relegates the *Idol* competition as un-Islamic in their eyes, among those who hold on to this point of view, only a few in the end shun watching the contest.

The predominantly Sinicised space in Singapore has also led to young Malay Muslim hip-hoppers to ply their craft in national Mandarin song competitions. *Juz-B*, a group formed in 2001, mesmerised audiences on the popular talent show, *SuperBand*, with their powerful renditions of Wang Lee Hom’s songs. Wang is an American Chinese, based in Taiwan. A strategy that *Juz-B* employed in carving a name for themselves in the local scene is to first make a mark in the larger Chinese market. The group competed in an *a capella* competition in Taiwan in 2005, where they managed to impress with a Mandarin song winning four out of seven awards on hand.

I remember we were standing in the queue at the first auditions…People were staring and pointing at us, whispering, “*Zhe ge ma lai ren ah?”* (Mandarin for “Are they Malay?”)…It’s really tough juggling that, along with arranging the songs a capella-style, and coordinating our dance moves…We were touched when a few group members asked us whether we needed any help to translate the judges' comments or the song lists they give to us each week.

Group Leader of *Juz-B*, Khairul Afwan Bin Rohizan

The group was praised on their blog by fans for their immaculate singing. One Jasmin Lim commented that “I am amazed with how well you guys sing,

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11 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G1LuBFXYcE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G1LuBFXYcE); [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjN_xGlbfGU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjN_xGlbfGU&feature=related)
especially in Mandarin. The words are clear and the pronunciation is accurate”. Despite this, the all-Malay group recounted the confusion they experienced in navigating an all-Mandarin competition and learning a new Mandarin song every week. In fact, Juz-B is not the only hip-hop band made up of Malay Muslim youth who face this predicament. Five out of the six members of QI:NOBE, a local hip-hop rock group, are also Malay (Juliana, 2006).

When the judges are giving us comments, we just stand there and smile… It's all plastic. Then we get Samuel (Lau, the group's lead singer) to translate for us.

QI:NOBE member, Jeffrey Zauhari

The success of these Muslim youth in the musical arena has not gone unnoticed and has led to the Prime Minister to comment on the meritocratic and multiracial nature of Singapore society.

"Taufik and Sylvester - a year ago no one knew them but they had talent and grit. They won Singaporeans’ hearts and won contest, they were finalists. Taufik's mother is a cleaner and was not able to attend many performances as she worked long hours, but from that background and his ability and talent, Singaporeans recognised it and you can organise your friends to vote for your favourites. But in the end, the right man won...so Singapore must be a land of opportunity for all of us."

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, December 5, 2004

Amongst the various communities, the Muslim community has the highest youth base. This is an asset that needs to be nurtured. Education remains key. We want to keep as many of our youths in school for as long as possible. Besides this, we must also give them the space to grow and realise their potential in diverse fields. There are many Malay youths who are very gifted in music, art, media communication, sports and so on. I watched some of the Singapore Idol episodes. It was clear to me very early on that Taufik Batisah would be the eventual Singapore Idol. Within the community, there are many more Taufiks in other areas like sports and art. It is important to support them so that they can pursue their dreams.

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, 12 February 2005
However, before we conclude that Malay Muslim males are inherently musically gifted, which is part of the dominant discourse in blogs and online forums, it will be wise to contextualise the results in a wider empirical field and draw examples from Muslim majority neighbouring regions. The winners of the first two *Malaysian Idol* competitions in 2004 and 2005 were Jaclyn Victor and Daniel Lee Chee Hun, an Indian and a Chinese respectively. In fact, Daniel garnered more than twice the number of votes of his nearest competitor, Norhanita Hamzah. The first winners of the *Indonesian Idol* also went to minority youth. In 2004, the competition was won by Joy Destiny Tobing, a gospel singer of Batak descent. Bataks who are in the main Christians, make up less than 3 per cent of the Indonesian population. The Javanese Muslims wield the most economic political power in Indonesia. The 2004 runner-up was Delon Thamrin, a Chinese and the 2005 season was also won by a non-Javanese Muslim, Michael Mohede. Two possible explanations can be made here. Firstly, it can be postulated that these Idol results demonstrate a generational paradigm shift in that the youth are increasingly “colour blind” and look beyond the social categories of religion and ethnicity when judging others.

The other possibility is that, it demonstrates the enhanced striving, ‘sacrifice’ and *jihad* by a minority group to create role models who are deemed acceptable in mainstream Asian society. Amidst the dominant discourse of the Malay problem, the sanitised Idol competition and other national talent shows provide the community an avenue to assert its own clean cut, commercial success.

Why do you think Malay families spent hundreds of dollars voting for two Malay boys in the Singapore Idol singing contest? And do you know that Malays who voted for other competitors were frowned upon by the community?

*Nur Dianah, The Straits Times, August 10, 2008*

Contrary to the poetic *jihadis* amongst Sydney Muslim youth, the Singapore case demonstrates an understanding of *jihad* as more of a personal struggle for excellence. The gaze of *jihad* is thus reversed to the individual. National talent shows thus provide a platform to showcase a meritocratic competition with viewer votes
determining the survival of the fittest. The “struggles” of the *Singapore Idol* during the competition, whereby he managed to fulfil his obligation to fast without compromising on the quality of his performance was much highlighted. After winning the *Singapore Idol*, Taufik was also made an ambassador for the national *Quit Smoking Campaign*, when he went public with his personal struggles to quit smoking. He was also invited to the mosques to talk about the evils of tattooing. This brand of spreading a “*jihad against oneself*” is in line with *MUIS’* ten characteristic of the “*Singapore Muslim Identity*”12 which calls upon individuals to be “a model and inspiration to all”. Like the other Muslim youth winners who come from modest family backgrounds, Taufik’s “success” positions him as an individual who is “progressive (and) practices Islam beyond form/rituals and rides the modernisation wave” and is “well-adjusted as a contributing member of a multi-religious society and secular state”.

**Theorising Muslim Youth and Hip-Hop**

**Homological Imagination**

I argue that the consumption of hip-hop culture by the Muslim youth in both cities gives rise to a form of homological imagination. I understand “homology” in the Bourdieuan sense, as referring to “the source of the functioning of the consecration of the social order” which conceals the power relationships just as it serves to manifest itself under the pretence of neutrality (Bourdieu, 1988:204). Following Bourdieu, I maintain that in imagining a singular habitus, young transnational Muslim hip-hoppers “are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production” whereby “each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and trajectory” (Bourdieu, 1990:60). As Bourdieu perceptively observes, each position comes with a set of “presuppositions, a doxa, and the homology between the producers’ position and their clients’ is the precondition for this complicity, which is all the more

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required when fundamental values are involved” (Bourdieu, 1984:240). Therefore, an individual at any stage of every society deals with a set of social positions which is tied to a relation of homology to a set of activities or commodities which are themselves characterised relationally (Bourdieu, 1998:4-5).

The contribution of hip-hop and the African-American experience is to impart to urban minority youth “a cultural vocabulary and historical experience with which to bond and from which to draw elements for local repertoires of resistance” (Aidi, 2004). Taking into context the mass consumption of hip-hop culture among predominantly Muslim youth globally, the “Islamic” hip-hop lexicon has not only shed its original meaning but has been “violated” to reproduce symbols which have now, taken a “realer than real” feel to them.

In the case of hip-hop culture, this homological imagination is played out through the two structures: (1) the hierarchy of hip-hop culture that could be traced from its specific African American roots to its diasporic manifestations and; (2) the mental structures of its Muslim youth practitioners. It is important to note here that the embracing of hip-hop culture among globalised Muslim youth exhibits a significant degree of homological imagination. This is most evident if we were to examine the evolution of hip-hop idioms.

The homological imagination is not exercised in toto. It is firstly done by mainstreaming the hip-hop jargons to take a more “authentic” connotation both at the level of satisfying Sunni Muslim requirements or even made ambiguous to refer to a plurality of religions. This is seen in the example above on the appropriation and transposing of various hip-hop idioms to take on more global and conventional interpretations. Muslim or “Islamic” hip-hop, as seen from its NOI and Five Percenter beginnings has been co-opted by young Muslims from a movement that is subversive even within the domain of Islamic theology to a more consumerist and palatable medium to voice their discontent.

This is also evident if we were to examine the performativity of hip-hop culture among contemporary young Muslims. The notion of bodily discipline is a
strong feature of Muslim and Islamic hip-hop in contemporary society. Its practitioners strive to conform to a stricter body regimen compared to their counterparts. All male groups such as the *Brothahood, Mecca2Medina* and *Native Deen* perform with less aggressive gyrations are modestly dressed when on stage, and are less likely to be “bling-blinged”, display tattoos, take a shirt off during a gig or “pull a hand on the crotch move”. As mentioned above by Banjoko, even among the female hip-hop fans, Islamic dress codes the place of the *hijab* in such a musical genre has been increasingly debated.

I don't believe in conforming to what TV says hip-hop is about… Hip-hop is a 'very misunderstood art form', often highlighted in the media as 'a form of threat or negativity'. 'But vice can be found everywhere, it doesn't take hip-hop to promote violence, sex or drugs… Hip-hop culture is merely an art form to be appreciated, especially for those with talent and passion. I'm a practising Muslim and hip-hop has not done anything to change that.

Shakirah, Co-founder of www.sghiphop.com, Female, Singapore

Shakirah, who is 22 years of age, performs in gigs in Singapore and Malaysia organising hip-hop events and runs a hip-hop store called *The Cube*. However, her fascination with hip-hop does not extend to the fashion associated with it. Instead, she avoids body-hugging tops in exchange for long-sleeved shirts, slacks and the *hijab* (*The Straits Times*, 7 September 2003).

Secondly, due to sheer magnitude and rate at which Muslim youth globally are immersing themselves and reproducing hip-hop culture, it is inevitable that hip-hop culture takes on a somewhat “glocalised” form. From the examples that I have cited of Muslim hip-hop groups, the nodes of cultural influence in Muslim hip-hop are increasingly dispersed. Furthermore, diasporic young Muslims are not only subjected to their host countries’ official doctrines of multiculturalism that influence attitudes towards migrant status, but also socioeconomic status which is intimately linked to the locality where they reside. As a case in point, Western Sydney, an area where a significant number of Muslim migrants live, has long been stigmatised as unrefined and is distinguished by its high level of social problems. Accents
originating from the particular locality, which is labelled as “woggie” or “westie” accumulate less cultural capital. Hence, young Muslims utilise an amalgamated form of language to challenge the power relationships that are embedded in a predominantly White Christian nation. “Lebspeak” (Cameron, 2003) emerges among second generation Lebanese youth to counter conventional decorum by ingesting hip-hop jargons into their everyday speech. This results in the creation of new jargons like “‘fully sick bro’, “awesome, Habib” (a form of ‘mate’), Yallah (let’s go), as well as the more colourful swearing (‘mo-fo’, for example)” (Butcher, 2008).

Thirdly, turning these symbols on its head, Muslim hip-hop culture can be seen both as a social movement not only to promote multicultural living as well as an attempt to project a ‘real’ Islam in hip-hop through the infusion of elements of nasheed and Islamic devotional music. Hence, what started off as predominantly a culture that challenges the supremacy of the white man over the black male, is repackaged as a global movement for Muslim youth of the September 11 generation to express themselves. What Kitwana has correctly observed as the main driving forces driving the hip-hop generation are also the primary factors fuelling the homological imagination in the hip-hop ummah. The advent of globalisation, the continued visibility of black youth in popular culture and the media representations of black youth resonates with the sense of alienation felt by young Muslims which is further reinforced by what is perceived as a prejudiced criminal system and the concerns of living in an age of Islamophobia.

Language structures the individual’s perspectives of the world and functions as the vehicle whereby these worldviews are communicated. In this instance, the popularity of hip-hop culture can be seen as a facet of what Ritzer has termed “grobalisation”. Hip-hop’s popularity among young Muslims displays the cultural colonising virtues of the Americanisation of everything in our life which even pervades into Islam. This has led certain quarters to advocate an essentialist and reductionist Americanisation thesis in explaining the lived experiences of Muslim youth. The adoption of ‘black’ culture among young Muslims, devoid of any direct
mentorship was thus attributed to the amount of exposure given by the media to ‘black’ music and the glamourising of the lifestyle in the music genre.

The subculture which has developed here owes more to American rap gangsta culture—the music they listen to, the way they dress—more than anything Islamic or Arabic.

Amir Butler, Convener of the Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network (The Australian, 14 December 2005)

However, to take on a reductionist approach in understanding the youth consumption of hip-hop is to lose sight of the global conversations within the hip-hop ummah. Although it might be rather convenient to reduce the influence of hip-hop music amongst the Muslim youth in Australia to the African American experience, the same yardstick certainly cannot be applied to Singapore.

Homological imagination occurs to varying degrees for Singapore and Sydney Muslim youth. In the case of Sydney, I argue that the second and third levels of consumption and production involve a great degree of homological imagination. The structure that imposes itself on the hip-hop arena in Singapore has impeded the youth from developing a global disposition in terms of their hip-hop activism. Due to the co-option of hip-hop by the state in Singapore, however, the Muslim youth’s homological experience is constrained by the structurations of the “local habitus” (Yaeger, 2000:129-131; Spencer, 2007: 88-93; Inglis, 2008: 60-65) which influence the youth’s trajectory and strategies as determined by the local field of power which is vested in maintaining the “out of bound markers”. As a result, when the homological imagination happens transnationally, it largely occurs underground, via the Internet, away from public space and at an immobilised dispersed level which demonstrates a superficial and unsophisticated appreciation of black culture. Two key factors can be contributed to the emergence of homological imagination, (i) solidarity and (ii) sense of persecution.
Solidarity

Not just verbal mujahidins (Alim, 2006), groups like the Brothahood also engage in operationalising Islam. They performed in Free Gaza benefit concerts held in March and July 2009 to lend their support to the Palestinians. On top of all funds on the night being donated to the Palestinians, the Brothahood also performed for the first time, their latest pro-Palestinian track, called “Act on It”. The group’s global message and cosmopolitan outlook is also embodied in their dressing. In a 2008 Islamic concert in Sydney, one of the singers came up on stage wearing a “Free Burma” t-shirt, jeans, zikr beads and a skullcap13.

Hip-hop is something that my friends and I enjoy. We are proud to be Lebanese and hip-hop music is something that brings us together.

Aisyah, Female, Sydney

My friends and I are into hip-hop music. We even play around with it and incorporate it into our traditional dikir barat performance… We, Malays are like the nuclear bomb. Once we come together, we are very powerful.

Mahmud, Male, Singapore

Besides claiming solidarity with the ummah, hip-hop culture also functions as an identity marker within urban minority youth in Singapore and Sydney. Here, ethnic pride becomes conflated with hip-hop culture. However, although hip-hop is used by Sydney Muslim youth to express their local, national and transnational grievances, hip-hop music as produced by Muslim youth in Singapore tend to focus on social problems within the local Muslim community.

I’m into alternative music, blues and jazz. I hate hip-hop… It’s so mainstream. The songs have no creativity. It justifies violence and its attitude towards women is just dreadful.

Hafsah, Female, Sydney

13 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXNNd7VWFmo
However, any attempts to equate hip-hop music with Muslim youth as a whole will be doomed from the outset. Some Muslim youth, more predominantly among the females, still see hip-hop music as representative of misogyny and aggression.

**Sense of Persecution**

Hip-hop culture is very popular with the Muslim youth. It’s the sense of trouble, rebellious music that we relate with. For example, if you listen to the lyrics of Tupac, he is always talking about the law. Unfortunately, together with the music, come the guns, cars and attitude towards school. The music influences the youth that success comes by adopting the lifestyle of these rappers.

Rahman, Male, Sydney

All of us are fully aware that there are prejudices against Muslims. So if a Muslim excels academically, it’s something to wow about. But if the Chinese does well, it an oh-so-common thing. And in the internship application, the only question in the form pertaining to religion was to tick a box where the question was: Are you a Muslim, YES or NO. So this is one of the criteria that companies look into before deciding to hire you or not.

Zakiah, Female, Singapore

The notion of justice for the minorities is central to this homological imagination. As evident in the quotes above, Muslim youth associate with the “siege mentality” amidst the sense of persecution that they feel is confronting them. Words like “outlaws” and “outsiders” are used by the Muslim youth to describe their status vis-à-vis the larger Australian society. This is a double edged sword in the sense that it might be precisely the shared social conditions that endeared hip-hop music to the local Muslim youth or it might also be the discursive constraints within the hip-hop vocabulary that necessitates the Muslim youth to subscribe to an “us versus them” mentality in the process of immersing himself or herself to the music. For Singapore, as evident in the lyrics of *Ahli Fikir* above and the many ministerial speeches (Lily, 1998), the sense of persecution largely stems from the internalisation of the Malay
Problem and is to be located within the shortcomings emanating from the local Muslim community themselves.

The youth body regimen is also constructed as a site of moral judgement, with policing extended to the body. The performativity of music also tends to be demonised: the sexual body that is associated with hip-hop music, and the violent body that is associated both with particular dances, and crowds during public performance. In this regard, performative hip-hop can also be seen as a response to the traditional disciplined bodies of “Islamic music”.

**Conclusion**

The consumption of hip-hop brings along with it various presuppositions that cannot be taken for granted. By moving away from generalised assumptions concerning cultural responses to given musical styles that takes little account of the highly different socio-cultural situations in which music is appropriated and used as a form of collective expression, this chapter has demonstrated is the nuanced way that hip-hop is consumed within Muslim youth. Youth participation in hip-hop culture is structured both by national and transnational factors. As Back (1996) has correctly pointed out, the cultural importance of a musical style is only significant insofar that it converges with the unique socio-cultural conditions of a particular locality. Hence, the significance of the musical style has to be contextualised to the Sydney and Singapore scenes. While the global genre of hip-hop music is adopted by young Muslims, the substance and significance of its appropriation is directed towards a localised form that is targeted at the national and communal audience respectively.

However, the ability of music genres to muster new forms of ethnic identity, especially as reactions to forms of racism and racial or religious exclusion can be overstated. As can be clearly seen in the chapter, socio-cultural circumstances aside, one can certainly make a case that the case of the consumption of hip-hop culture among young Muslims is an attempt to replicate the structurations of the habitus as expressed in the struggles of not only the African American experience specifically, but the hip-hop ummah as a whole.
Through a discussion of the salient nature of hip-hop music in the everyday lives of Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney, this chapter has demonstrated some of the convergent and divergent trajectories in the practice of hip-hop culture among Muslim youth in both cities. The manifestation of hip-hop culture amongst urban minority youth is also a response to a dialectical relationship with the attempts by moral entrepreneurs to manage the youth through music. Nationally, youth dispositions have to be contextualised to the local field and take into consideration its contestation by government institutions, political parties, media, religious groups and the youth themselves, to not only assume claims of moral guardianship but to redraw existing moral boundaries. Following Bourdieu, these practices do not exist in dualisms such as the conflict between structure and agency, but rather accentuates the consequence of the youth’s living in a structure. Youth attain their dispositions, consciously or unconsciously, from a structural framework. The challenge remains for the youth to reconcile his or herself with the seemingly colliding social norms. This can be conceptualised to the degree and mode of homological imagination that is employed. In essence, Muslim youth have bridged the gap between the seemingly colliding genres of nasheed and hip-hop, with the notion of jihad, central to their endeavours.
CHAPTER 5

TATTOOING THE MUSLIM YOUTH BODY

From examining one of the most common expressions of popular culture among Muslim youth, I move on to one of the more controversial forms: tattooing. This chapter will extend the arguments in the previous chapter on how Muslim youth in the two cities attempt to gain entry into mainstream youth culture with varying degrees of success as various moral and cultural gatekeepers who are diffused throughout society seek to maintain a “puritan” view of youth culture. This results in some Muslim youth existing in the interstices of local youth culture which increasingly conflict with the globalising and multicultural realities that youth in Singapore and Sydney face today.

I examine the role of body modification among Muslim youth immersed in gang culture and hence consider tattooing as an important aspect of social membership in the ambiguous cultural context of a multiracial society. For these youth, tattooing is important not only for their self-definition but in expressing allegiance to gang culture. Muslim youth have adopted tattooing primarily as a personal identification within the context of strong group solidarity. By specifically examining young Muslims involved in gangs, the chapter also situates the youth’s social class and status as paramount in shaping his or her identity. As with hip-hop culture, I will also explore attempts by these youth to rationalise and reconcile a strand of popular youth culture with their piety.

The chapter will make three broad observations. Firstly, a youthful body regimen is being produced in a secular multicultural social environment. Secondly, disciplined bodies are shaped through a systematic consumption of symbols and controlled participation in various spheres of social interaction. These forms of bodily control need to be considered not only in relation to consumption but also to various relationships of domination. Thirdly, the data on tattooing reveals that there
exists uncertainty within Muslim youth about the consumption of tattoos as a result of the growth of religious commodification and secular consumerism. Contemporary research has shown a widespread development of global religious consumerism (Kitiarsa, 2008) and modern tattooing has an ambiguous relationship with both religious and secular forms of consumerism.

**Tattooing and Islam**

Tattooing in Islam is expressly prohibited since any decoration of the body is considered an abomination. In the main, Muslims reject tattooing on the grounds that God has made human beings perfect and therefore it is a blasphemy to change the human form. The *Qur’an*, in *An-Nisa* 4:119 considers these body modifications to be inspired by Satan who "...will command them (his devotees) to change what Allah has created...". A number of specific *hadith* (narrations of the Prophet), has documented that the Prophet Muhammad has cursed both the tattooer and the tattooed. Muslims are however divided between two dominant traditions – Sunni and Shi’ite. While Sunni Muslims believe that Islam necessarily prohibit tattooing, the Shi’a scholars (such as Ayatollah Sistani and Khamenei), who do not necessarily accept the traditional *hadith*, believe that there is no authoritative prohibition on tattoos. Muslims in Singapore and Sydney are, however, predominantly Sunni.

Young Muslims are exposed to many discourses with theological discussions being only one of them. Hence, it is crucial for us to consider other factors influencing their habitus. As Olivier Roy (2004) has eloquently argued in his book *Globalized Islam*, the role of “Islam” in re-Islamisation is often overstated. To be sure, in the realm of tattooing, following my discussion on hip-hop culture, cultural influences and relationships of domination function as crucial factors behind the motivations of Muslim youth immersing themselves in body art.

Take, for example, the well-documented problems of premarital sex, teenage pregnancies and early marriages among Muslim youth, which have been linked to high divorce rates (Zakir, 2007; Chairul Fahmy, 2008). If religion per se had been the overriding factor influencing their decision to marry despite their young ages, the
lack of family planning and financial restrictions, those involved would not have indulged in premarital sex to begin with since the act is prohibited in Islam. Since they were not governed by religion in the first place, their subsequent arrival at marriage as the solution for unwanted pregnancies could not have been borne out of religion. Rather, it is borne out of social stigma. Hence, the Muslim community, right down to the Muslim individuals who are made up of parents, friends, neighbors, teachers, etc., takes over the mantle as custodians and guardians of the religion (Kamaludeen, 2007).

**Blowing Hot and Cool over Tattoos**

Despite the potential for transgression within a modern religious framework, tattooing has been a customary practice since ancient times. Tattooing can be traced back to the Upper Paleolithic era and has been common in Eurasia since Neolithic times. For example Otzi the Iceman dated circa 3300 BC had 57 tattoos on his body. Mummies have also been found to have tattoos. Some tattoos are thought to have had therapeutic value in the treatment of arthritis and rheumatism. Tattooing was especially widespread in the Philippines, Japan and Polynesia and the word “tattoo” or “tatau” comes from Tahiti. Captain Cook’s Science Officer acquired a tattoo and many sailors returning with Cook had acquired tattoos in the Pacific Islands and this early naval practice was the origin of a long-standing custom for British sailors to have tattoos. In pre-modern societies, tattoos were permanent and they often carried specific ritual information about the individual. We might say that in pre-modern societies, body modifications were involuntary and irreversible. In modern societies, tattoos have become voluntary and as fashion items they may often be temporary (Turner, 1999).

Tattoos can take many forms. Criminal tattoos are common in Japan, Russia and Vietnam where they are signs of identification and membership and they often carry information about the status or skills of the criminal person. Tattoos were particularly popular among sailors in the 1920s and 1930s when Charles Wagner of Columbus Ohio was probably the most famous artist at the time with a large
following in the military. Tattoos also became popular among teenagers much to the annoyance of their parents and in 1933 the New York Assembly made it illegal to tattoo a teenager under the age of 16. Despite attempts at restrictions, tattooing continued to be popular among people working in the circus or on the popular stage (Govenar, 2000). Celebrity tattoos have in modern times somewhat reversed the stigma of the criminal tattoo with the fashion for tattoos reaching its zenith with David Beckham. The tattoo expert Louis Malloy flew from Britain to the USA to give Beckham the winged cross on the back of his neck. Kosut (2006:1043-1044) observes a change since around 2001 with respect to mainstream media’s reporting of the tattoo phenomenon. She notices a common thread that binds the reports which is an emphasis on a “differentiation between how tattoos used to be and how they are now”. Today, tattooing is part of mainstream popular culture and removed from its deviant past. David and Ayouby (2002:139) posit that, in recent times, young Muslims have adopted the “tattoo craze that has been sweeping American culture”. They argue that “although the form is American, the content is undeniably Arab and Muslim”.

In recent ethnographic work on the clients of professional tattoo artists, Michael Atkinson (2004), while recognising the connection between tattooing and self-injury, at the same time wants to see such activities in a more positive light. He claims that tattooing is regularly undertaken as a rational form of identity expression and as a conservative gesture of conformity to norms of self-restraint (Atkinson, 2004:130). He argues that tattoo enthusiasts refer to tattooing as a method of sketching or etching their emotional experiences onto their bodies. In a society where young people often feel vulnerable, tattooing is both an example of self-definition and armour against the outside world. The tattoo, at least subjectively, indicates the body is no longer a weak vessel and the person no longer simply a victim (Atkinson, 2004:138).

Although this ethnographic research is illuminating, Atkinson’s discussion of tattooing makes no reference to the social context of young people and does not consider the fact that tattoos are important as a statement of membership, especially
belonging to youth gangs. A similar approach was adopted by Susan Benson (2000) who described tattooing as “self-inscription”, which of course it is, but tattooing has a social context and function. It is typically a self-inscription that only has meaning in defining the self against an outside world and at the same time inscribing the individual onto the social group.

**Tattoos and Gangs**

In a modern urban setting where neighbourhood and family ties are weak and fragmented, youth gangs provide a social network and gang membership confers a certain level of prestige for young men who often find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy in mainstream society. Gang membership, which is predominantly male membership, is typically denoted by tattooing and other body modifications as marks of social identity. It is difficult to reach a consensus on a definition of youth gangs but for purposes of analysis, it is instructive to understand a gang as a social group whereby its members congregate with some regularity and membership is selected by the group in line with a set of regulations determined by the group. This understanding suspends any pejorative connotations to the notion of gangs. Any attempts at categorising the youth as immoral and violent, especially when equating gang culture and the practice of tattooing with a particular social group, has to be seen within the context of trying to locate the problems within the youth themselves. Such generalisation not only masks the critical differences behind group memberships but also results in an internalisation among the media, police and policymakers that glosses over the motivations of youth actions. Inadvertently, these perspectives result in justifying racial profiling as a tool for social control. Whilst tattooing within a gang culture has often been linked with deviance and criminality, this chapter makes the interesting observation that young Muslim gang members are increasingly factoring in their religious identity as they mark themselves. This is the case among respondents who are part of predominantly non-Muslim and all-Muslim gangs.
Literature on youth gang members has always linked the phenomenon with boys from the underclass; those coming from lower working class backgrounds and minority communities (Miller, 1958; Messerschmidt, 1993; Spergel, 1995). Cohen (1955) posits that this stems from the “status frustration” they experience owing to their difficulty in meeting middle-class standards. Unprepared for challenges in school, they reject middle-class values and form groups that subscribe to an alternative set of social norms as the cornerstone for group solidarity. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argue that lower working-class boys rationally turn to deviance as a result of limited opportunities, both legitimate and illegitimate ones. Hence, the mannerisms of young men have also been linked to the competitive struggle in poor communities (Jankowski, 1991). As an extension, in the face of shrinking legitimate opportunities, scholars have pointed to the material benefits of being in gangs (stemming from drug trade, illegal sales of copyrighted materials, etc) as one of the main reasons behind gang recruitment (Skolnick et al., 1989; Taylor 1990; Jankowski, 1991). However, this view has been contested by others (Hagedorn and Macon, 1998; Moore, 1991; Waldorf, 1993) who are skeptical of gangs as lucrative business enterprises. I am also more inclined to believe that the motivations behind youth gang membership are more complex as gangs still thrive without necessarily providing members with economic well-being.

Instead, in the context of this thesis, I put forth the argument that tattoos, as a form of marked social difference, confer upon marginalised youth a form of symbolic capital that they have been deprived of in the educational, economic and familial fields. This symbolic capital is created in a competitive environment to signify an alternative social order through the creation of a new system of classification. The introduction of new images with an exclusive set of social meanings not only bestows a sense of status to its practitioners but also serve as a challenge to established symbols in the social space.

Scholarly works in the last two decades have attributed the youth gang culture to theories of masculinity and their access to power and economic resources (Connell, 1987; Messerschmidt, 1986, 1993). Young minority males in economically
depressed communities who “are typically denied masculine status in the educational and occupational spheres, which are the major sources of masculine status available to men in white middle class communities and white working class communities” (Messerschmidt, 1993:112) construct cultural ideas of hegemonic masculinity—that is, dominance, control, and independence. Their inability to access legitimate resources serves as a contributing factor to heightened forms of aggressive masculinity. To add, in their struggles to define the self within the cultural ambiguity of a multiracial society, some respondents, in discussing the rationale behind their tattooing, accepted the notion of scarring the body as a dangerous practice. In this sense, tattooing can be a vehicle whereby masculinity is performed. I will argue that these displays of masculinities, or what Katz (1988) has called “street elite posturing”, which involve exhibitions of toughness and parading is manifested in the body art employed by Muslim youth as a vehicle to signify self-respect and status. Hence, the “street” becomes a battlefield and a theatre dominated by young minority men who practise their masculinities (Connell, 1987).

While this chapter focuses mainly on young Muslim men, it is interesting to note the perception of their female counterparts with regard to a certain strand of tattooing. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is perhaps pertinent to acknowledge that “henna tattooing” is very much a part of popular youth culture among Muslim girls. Kapchan (1993: 29) considers the henna to be antithetical to the tattoo. Whilst the latter is religiously prohibited, the use of the henna is even encouraged by the Prophet, and its popularity is on the rise, especially in Muslim majority countries. It is considered a halal form of tattooing due to its impermanency, natural ingredients and the fact that the ink does not cause a layer on the skin. These criteria are tied up to the Muslim ritual of purification, called wudu’ (ablution), that individuals perform before their daily prayers. For “henna tattoos”, the water penetrates the skin making the wudu’ valid, while in the case of tattoos, the water does not.

Although this chapter seeks to understand tattooing among young people as typically an aspect of modern gangs and youth culture, it is also important to situate
such body modifications within a consumer society. Whilst henna is considered by young Muslim women as a form of “temporary tattoo”, it has also been fused into popular culture in the West. Besides being on sale across Europe in posh fashion outlets with American companies such as Mehdni Mania, Temptu, and Body Art adding do-it-yourself henna “kits” to their range of tattoo products, celebrities such as Madonna is also seen touring the United States and Europe adorning the “temporary tattoo art” in the video for her single, Frozen. The marketing of henna as “temporary tattoos” is calculated to reconstruct “henna tattooing” as a feminine, painless and temporary alternative to tattoos while appealing to the current fascination by the youth with body art. As a case in point, the American Museum of Natural History opened an exhibit, “Body Art: Marks of Identity,” in 1999 by showcasing a video clip of a “henna party” staged by the Mehndi Project. To tap on the popularity of the henna, the museum prescribed a space for the sale of henna gears and fashion with henna designs with some coming under the brand of the Museum itself (Maira, 2000). The embracing of “henna tattooing” into Western popular culture thus not only feeds but shapes and further lends credence to young Muslim women seeking to practice the form of body art.

The fact that tattoos are simultaneously rejected as haram and accepted as aspects of popular youth culture needs to be examined. In this research into Muslim popular culture, I am concerned to understand the expressive functions of tattooing in a multiracial and highly competitive urban environment. Sociological research has shown a widespread development of global religious consumerism (Kitiarsa, 2008) and modern tattooing has an ambiguous relationship with both religious and secular forms of consumerism. Muslim youth have adopted tattooing primarily as a personal identification within the context of strong group solidarity. These forms of tattooing can be thought to resemble the sub-cultural uniforms worn by skinheads and other “deviant” social groups in Europe in the 1960s and 70s (Clarke, 2006; Hebdige, 1981). Many contemporary scholarly works have pointed to body art as becoming more “mainstream” and embraced as part of popular culture, practised by many high
profile celebrities in the entertainment and sporting world. Predictably, tattooing has also found its fair share of admirers within the Muslim youth fraternity.

i secretly really like little tattoos. This website is making me like them more (sic) and more and i know its relaly (sic) bad but just, they're sooo hot!! i really really want one! is there any way in the world it can be halal????????? i know the answer is no..... but..... i so want one!

Lily, Female, Sydney

I think tattoos are cool and I actually admire them. If not for it being haram, I would have a few already. Some have them due to peer pressure. Others just don’t see the ‘big deal’ of it so they just go get one. Some do not have strong faith or a good background so they deem it O.K. to have a tattoo. Just like how some people are O.K. with missing their prayers and not fasting while others constantly take good care of them. It’s also somewhat like smoking. You have a Muslim who says there’s nothing wrong with smoking, some say its makruh and others say its haram.

Zaki, Male, Singapore

As seen in the quotations above, even among those who refrain from tattooing, there is a significant group who cited their piety as the only disciplining factor. Amongst other factors, the youth cited the media and friends as the primary socialising agents behind their admiration of tattoos. There are, however, several difficulties with characterising practices such as tattooing as fashionable per se, in part because of their status as permanent, or “semi-permanent”, modifications to the body (Curry, 1993:79). Indeed, for writers such as Polhemus, “any permanent body decoration . . . is as anti-fashion as it is possible to get” (Polhemus, 1994:13) with “true fashion” defined as “a system of continual and perpetual . . . change” (Polhemus and Proctor, 1978:25).

In this chapter, I explore the practice of tattooing among male Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney. In general, although tattooing traditionally exhibits an association to “gang life”, there are variations to the practices of tattooing among Muslim youth in the two cities; with the interesting observation of the adoption of “Islamic tattoos” in Sydney and Chinese and European tattoos in Singapore. Given
that the management of the Muslim body take place simultaneously at the level of the state and at the level of various legitimate and illegitimate social groups (Kamaludeen and Aljunied, 2009), these practices are sociologically interesting because they demonstrate how Muslim youth use body modifications as strategic instruments to navigate multicultural living in urban secular environments.

The State of the Body: Regulation of Tattooing in Singapore and Sydney

In Sydney, the body art industry is subjected to Section 51 of the Public Health Act 1991, the Public Health (Skin Penetration) Regulation 2000 and Section 28 of the Children (Care and Protection) Act 1998. The latter legislation makes it an offence to tattoo a child under the age of 18 before getting written consent from a parent.

In contrast to more liberal western countries, tattooing remains an unregulated practice in Singapore. In a country where one needs to be 18 years of age to drive an automobile and purchase alcohol or cigarettes, the tattooed youth in Singapore is not subjected to any legal controls. This is surprising considering that tattooing has always been seen as taboo and strongly associated with gang culture. Whilst there had been no formal enactment of laws governing tattooing in Singapore within the last decade, tattoo parlours were instructed to keep records which could be inspected by the police (Kanagalingam, 2009). Increasingly, the evolution of tattoos in local popular culture as a form of body art has not only led to a “decriminalisation” of the tattoo industry but to the promotion of tattooing, as seen in the official support by the Singapore Tourism Board for the first international Singapore Tattoo Show held in 2009.

The absence of any state presence in the tattoo industry in Singapore has raised some public discussions about the need for more government regulation. Tattoo artists are, for example, concerned about the health and safety issues that may arise from un-sterilised tattooing. This issue was discussed in the parliament in

\[14\] Regulation of Infection Control in the Body Art Industry in Australia and New Zealand: A Summary, National Public Health Partnership, January 2002
Parents in particular have raised questions about the absence of an age criterion to protect immature children from early tattooing. They expressed fears of the possibility that their child may either be mistakenly identified as a gang member or have their future careers jeopardised by their tattoos even where these may be regarded as fashion items. In a recent survey, it was discovered that out of 20 females interviewed in Singapore, 15 were successfully hiding their tattoos from their parents. Meanwhile, tattoo parlours reported that business has been good and that from around the year 2004, they have noticed a significant trend for young girls between the ages of 18 to 21 acquiring tattoos whereas previously there was no such trend among females (Nur Amira, 2006).

The minimalist role of the state in the tattoo industry also means that a license is not required to practice as a tattoo artist. In contrast to liberal western countries such as the UK and Australia which has made it an offence for those under the age of 18 to be tattooed, the youth in Singapore is only subjected to the extemporised moral impositions of their chosen tattoo parlour. This laissez-faire approach towards tattooing leaves the principals of individual schools to deal with the issue of tattooed minors. Their responses range from tolerance, to opting for a total ban, or to only imposing sanctions when tattoos are in areas where they are left exposed by the school uniform. Indeed, the regulation of tattooing does not automatically eradicate tattooing amongst minors as the act of tattooing is also done informally through friends and the tattooed themselves.

Sydney: Muslim Gangs and “Islamic Tattoos”

Gangs have a long history in Australia. However, recently, the categories of “Islam” and “Muslims” in the Australian gang scene have made a significant imprint in the imagination of the Australian public and the Australian Muslim community, arguably due to the role of the media (Perry, 2007; Fife-Yeomans and Lawrence, 2009). Longstanding Australian “bikie” gangs have reported an increase in Muslim membership over the years. This is in tandem with media reports of the rise of new

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“Islamic youth gangs” such as the *Muslim Brotherhood Movement (MBM)*, with a reported membership of about 600 recruited mainly from the Muslim concentrated south-western Sydney. Police have also brought to light the *Asesinoz* and *Brothers for Life* gangs, comprising Muslim youth who utilise the video-sharing website, *YouTube*, to promote Islamism and anti-Australian actions such as flag burning (Kennedy, 2009).

The Muslim youth gangs in Sydney have also supposedly taken after the Sunni-Shiite ideological as well as geographical divide. The dominant Sunni population locates itself mainly in west and south-west Sydney, with the Shiite population settling in the St George vicinity. In early 2009, the Sydney Muslim community was shocked by a police pronouncement of a Shiite versus Sunni “bikie” war. Amidst a storyline that involves shootings and bomb explosions, a senior police source proclaimed that there was “no love lost” between the *Comanchero City Crew* and a new group, *Notorious*. The President of *Notorious* is a Sunni Australian. The President of the *Comanchero*, a Shiite Australian, was televised together with members of the *Bra Boys* after the Cronulla riot and the Maroubra reprisal in a bid to alleviate the conflict (Welch, 2009). Despite the 28 year-old leader of *Comanchero* denouncing the idea of a religious war, claiming that the club had only four Muslim members, the authorities and the media were eager to make that link with the senior police source. Whilst unable to establish evidence of purported *Notorious* criminal activities, media headlines read, “They're just bloody crazy” (Welch, 2009).

The portrayal of Muslim youth in the Australian media has been a subject of much contention. This negative depiction has very much escalated, in the aftermath of both global and local events such as the Sydney gang rapes (2000), the September 11 attacks (2001), the Bali bombings (2002 and 2005), the Cronulla riots (2005) and the subsequent arrests that followed a crackdown on terror suspects.

"There's about 1000 young men, typically between 18 and 30, who are basically running Sydney at the moment... It's not the Government
running Sydney, it's not the police running Sydney, it's about 1000 young men."

Peter Debnam, NSW Opposition Spokesman, 18 October 2003

The above comment was published in The Australian newspaper reporting on the then Mufti of Australia, Sheikh Taj Hilali’s Friday sermon to about 5000 people, in response to a carload of balaklava-clad men allegedly spraying bullets into a family home in Sydney, killing two Muslim men. He called for the Muslim community to cooperate with the police and hand over Muslim criminals to the authorities. The report also touched on the tenuous position of the Mufti in fending off radical elements intent on winning over the youth. Making a clear reference to the Muslim youth, there is no denying that the New South Wales Opposition spokesman might have sensationalised the situation for political gain, but this was how he painted the situation in Muslim concentrated south-western districts at the point in time.

Whilst the formation and rise of Muslim gangs seem to reflect a criminal subculture, a recent study by four academics (Poynting et al., 2004) revealed that the mainstream media’s “racialised” reporting of illegal activities and demonising of young Muslims in the aftermath of September 11 play a crucial role in conferring a negative labelling effect. Therefore, young Muslim males turn to friendship groups in an attempt to parade their masculinity and to assert themselves in a socio-cultural space where they are not perceived favourably (Collins et al., 2000:150). Therefore the authors argue that Muslim youth claims to gang culture incline towards being symbolic and a means of impression management, rather than reminiscent of a criminal lifestyle.

My interviews with Muslim youth in Sydney confirm previous research that Muslim youth gangs tend to be means “to affirm social presence, ensure mutual protection and to compensate for a generally marginalized economic and social position” (White, 2006:170). However, it is pertinent to note that the social reality of the young Muslim respondents in this study sits uncomfortably between the two categorisations of youth gangs as friendship groups and one that is criminal in nature.
A few interviewees who admitted to being part of “youth gangs” see themselves as “good boys” and shared that their gang membership served the purpose of protection more than anything else. Whilst the youth respondents revealed that they as well as other members, have gotten into problems with the law with regard to offences such as drug consumption, possession of weapons and rioting, they reaffirmed that the gangs they are in are not set up to participate in organised crimes. Some of these “youth gangs” even include Muslim youth from the madrasah background.

We formed a gang in case there [is] any trouble. We do not let anyone step on us. You will be surprised that some of the members in our gangs are actually from madrasah. They went to the madrasah because basically they are forced into it by their parents not because they choose to. They have memorised the Qur’an but you will see that they are very into the black culture. And because everyone classifies us as black because of our skin colour, we just conform to it. The music, the clothes…I think this multiculturalism talk is just bullshit.

My friends and I used to call ourselves part-time gangsters… 9 to 4 gangsters… when we’re at home, we’re good boys.

Mizan, Male, Sydney

As evident, attempts to reduce Muslim youth in madrasah as replenishing fundamentalist thought and those in gangs as having strayed from the essential tenets of the religion are almost always flawed. It can be gathered from the interview above that the sacred and the profane are not easily decipherable. Owing to diverse reasons from generational conflict to a self-fulfilling prophecy stemming from being labeled, having a background in religious studies does not preclude an individual’s participation in popular youth culture. Whilst not exactly seeing a paradox between their religiosity and their involvement with gangs or their adoption of black street culture, young Muslims do feel a contradiction between their private and public persona. Although they do not flaunt their religiosity in the public sphere, in the private confines of their homes, as the respondent above alludes to, youth gang members feel compelled to abide by the regulations and expectations set by family members. Hence, the respondent’s classifying of their involvement in gangs as being “part-time”.

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This section has shown how Islam is frequently weaved into the rhetoric of “youth gang culture” both at the level of media portrayal of the Sydney Muslim community and the responses of Muslim youth practicing popular youth culture. It is also important to note that the “Muslim-speak” in the national media and among politicians have served to create a larger than life image of Muslim youth participation in criminal activity. It is my argument that the imagery of Muslim youth gangs in mainstream media has a direct impact on their projections of popular culture on the street in general, and in particular, the body art forms they have predominantly adopted.

“Islamic Tattoos”

Granted that the portrayal of Muslim youth as folk devils has fuelled a moral panic amongst the larger society, it has to be asserted that Islamic piety and a Muslim identity do play a central function in the forming of these youth groups. In Sydney, this goes beyond the mobilisation of a group of young men rallying behind the banner of an “Islamic group”.

During the fieldwork phase, it became apparent that Islamic tattoos are the latest trend to have taken over Muslim youth in Sydney. It is not uncommon to see Islamic slogans and scriptures such as “Warrior of Allah”, Arabic inscriptions of “La Ilha Ha illAllah Muhammad ar Rasulullah” (There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger), and “Mujahedeen” (People of Jihad) inscribed on the bodies of Muslim youth. In response to the motivations behind their adoption of Islamic body art, one youth commented,

The Prophet and the sahabah were strong, I want to be strong too, to be feared…I see the Prophet and his companions as my role models. I really look up to characters like Khalid ibn Walid, Salehuddin and other Islamic warriors. They, to me, define the true meaning of bravery…And I am not ashamed and I am proud to express myself through my religion.

Yasser, Male, Sydney
“Wearing Islam” permanently on their body, and the sacrifice undergone, manifested in the pain and blood spilled in spelling out their allegiance, not only alleviates their masculinity but as pointed out by the youth, also symbolises a form of religious pride. Ironically, the media vilification faced by young Muslims in Sydney can act as a double-edged sword. Firstly, it can be argued that this leads to young Muslims forming disparate solidarity groups in the midst of a hostile environment. Secondly, the continued emphasis on the Muslim identity of gang members in the press could give the impression that this is the norm, thus reinforcing and leading to a more pronounced Islamic identity being flouted in the identity market. Here we see among a section of Muslim youth adopting Islamic tattoo, a trend of “using Islam to fight back”. The youth uses religious piety as a rationalisation behind tattooing. As with the Muslim hip-hoppers discussed in the previous chapter, young Muslims with Islamic tattoos see themselves as flag bearers of the Muhammadan mission. Summoning the images of courage from personalities in Islamic history confers upon the youth a symbolic status and an “authenticity” derived from a connection with a glorified Islamic past.

The response of Muslim youth to tattooing practices of other Muslim youth in general, and the “Islamic” body art adopted in particular, are far from monolithic. It is crucial to recognise that the Islamic tattoos do not necessarily evoke negative perceptions. The empathetic view of the youth above echoes some other respondents who feel that tattooed gang members are not necessarily a marker of suspect character. On the contrary, some educated Muslim youth even admire the qualities displayed by these “deviant youth”.

To me, tattoos are ugly and gross. Why would I want to alter my natural self? Anyway, it just looks nice when you’re young. There is the situation today where even the Muslim youth are putting on tattoos. I know that the Shia allow it but there are also Sunni boys who have them. Some of them have tattoos of Qur’anic verses on their arms. That’s just disrespectful! And it’s just contradictory. How can you apply the words of God to something that He disallows? It’s just
like you gamble in order to donate the winnings to charity. It just doesn’t make sense.

Adi, Male, Sydney

The members of the gangs are mostly uneducated and they come from a huge range of religious beliefs and identities. I am quite close to a number of Muslims in these bikie gangs. I have friends who have Islamic tattoos on their bodies like Allah and Bismillah. One of them has tattoos of the Quran all over his body. I also came across a Muslim man with the holy Quran tattooed across his neck. They have them because the tattoos look good and it makes them feel powerful. I feel that they are the most beautiful people. They are loyal and respectful.

Farah, Female, Sydney

The responses above illuminates the varying sentiments Islamic tattoos evoke even among non-subscribers. Islamic tattoos are seen by the respondent above as a sign of power and deep loyalty to what they believe in. On the other hand, there is a segment of Muslim youth in Sydney who view Islamic tattooing as symbolic of the cultural confusion facing the youth of their generation. They cite the difficulty of trying to straddle both an Australian and a Muslim identity.

A lot of my friends who get tattoos are in a state of cultural and racial confusion. They find themselves trying to be Australian and Lebanese and find that they cannot be both. So they are at the intermediary stage where they don’t know who they are.

Shuaib, Male, Sydney

The varying responses to the practice of tattooing reflect the surfacing of a generation of Muslim youth with different tastes compared to those of previous generations, thus threatening traditional norms. This collision of social norms between Islamic teachings and Western popular culture has brought about a state of deregulation whereby the youth are left to their own devices to straddle the two. It is within this space of ambiguity that the youth seek to re-evaluate their relationship with tattooing.
Singapore: Muslim Youth, Chinese Gangs and “Antipodal Tattoos”

Muslim gangs and Islamic tattoos are not a part of Muslim youth culture in Singapore. In Singapore, gangs were traditionally called “secret societies”, with their origins in the underground Chinese triads that organised prostitution, gambling and loan-shark activities. Historically, these groups provided social support and some welfare services for Chinese men arriving in colonial Singapore mostly as low-skilled workers. The Chinese gangs were remnants of Chinese life under colonial rule. Providing social support and a networking system to Chinese migrant labourers during British rule, the Chinese gangs were prominent in resisting Japanese occupation in World War II. They started to recruit members from other ethnic groups after Singapore achieved its independence. The decade after Singapore’s independence saw violent clashes between rival gangs over issues of territoriality. The 1990s saw a significant number of Malay youth joining Chinese gangs. Malay gangs being relatively smaller and unstructured, Malay youth were enticed by the opportunity to join their more established counterparts such as the predominantly Chinese 369 gang.

Singapore has strict laws on gang activities. Youthful gang members who chant secret society slogans can be jailed for the duration of between six months and two years (Chong, 1998). Nonetheless, secret handshakes, gang songs, passwords, hand signs, gang poems and chants continue to be part of “gang-speak” glorifying the unity of the “brothers” and serve as a way whereby gang members show solidarity; thereby demarcating a clear ‘us versus them’ mentality. Laws on illegal assembly, amongst others, have encouraged youthful gang members to find anonymity and protection through the use of the Internet - at times to their own detriment. It was reported that a nineteen-year old Chinese youth was arrested for creating a website of the notorious Chinese Ang Soon Tong gang, which also boasts the inclusion of Muslim youth. The website which portrays secret society tattoos and songs was suppressed by the Singapore authorities even though the website was hosted in the US. Despite attempts to control websites, one can still find these youth gangsters posting their anthems on video-sharing sites. In a show of strength, youth
gangs have even put up videos of brutal beatings conducted by their members. As a case in point, youth gang members claiming to be from the Malay OMEGA gang formed in 1989, have uploaded a video clip of a savage beating at a public basketball court (The New Paper, 4 June 2007).

The OMEGA gang is the most significant Malay secret society in Singapore and it is clearly an example of a deviant gang subculture in Singapore. Its members are often wanted for drug offences in Singapore and as a result it is thought that they have relocated to Malaysia in an attempt to re-group and gain a foothold elsewhere. The gang, which was set up more than a decade ago in a now-defunct prison in Yio Chu Kang, was involved in drug peddling and typically employed women as couriers to traffic heroin. “OMEGA” is an acronym of “Orang Melayu Enter Gangster Area” with the Malay words “Orang Melayu” meaning “Malay People”. A former Singapore law-enforcement official disclosed the “bureaucracy of the gang” when he described the OMEGA gang as loosely organised into four geographical districts in Singapore - north, south, east and west - each with a leader or “branch manager”. Duties were carefully divided among members. Some were responsible for logistics such as providing cars and weapons, others for rustling up members for gang fights.

In the main, Malay youth are also recognised as members of predominantly Chinese gangs, such as the 369 gang. In an attempt to reconcile both a Muslim identity and a subscription to a Chinese gang, an innovative Arabic inscription of the numerals salakau (“369” in Hokkien) have also been posted on YouTube as part of a tribute to the gang (John, 2007). Malay gang members have also displayed with pride, their body adornments such as jade pendants which are traditionally associated with the Chinese community in Singapore, and posted photographs of themselves with tattoos of Chinese gang emblems on popular social networking sites such as Friendster and Facebook.

Unlike the case of Sydney where the issue of Muslim youth in gangs is predominantly brought to the fore by the media, the “disturbing” trend of Muslim youth in gangs is often raised by the Malay/Muslim leaders. In 2007, Malay Muslim
leaders expressed concern about a disturbing trend among young Muslims in the community. Malay youth were seen to be turning to “gangsterism” in disproportional numbers and in some areas they were thought to have replaced the dominant Chinese gangs. One study showed that a significant 34 per cent of juvenile rioters were Malay even though Malays only make up 15 per cent of the Singaporean population. It also showed that, when placed in Singapore’s demographic profile, relatively more Malays (24 per cent) were joining youth gangs (John, 2007). These indications of juvenile delinquency among young Malays are consistent with the fact that the educational attainment of Malays is well below that of both Chinese and Indian Singaporeans. Hence, the issue of Malay gang membership is well compounded with the “Malay Problem”.

There is relatively little research on gang culture in Singapore but existing research results suggested that while gang membership is primarily defined by ethnicity, much of the works done on gangs in Singapore are limited to the study of Chinese secret societies. The only exception documented the disproportionate number of “lower class ethnic Tamil minorities” involved in “street corner gangs” (Ganapathy and Lian, 2002:142). Ganapathy and Lian posit that there is a symbiotic relationship forged between the Chinese secret societies and the police which deals with the policing of problem areas and activities such as illegal money lending, prostitution, coffee shops, hawkers, massage parlours, karaoke bars and contractors who might not be served by the full extent of the law or run businesses that necessitate constant surveillance. It is within these crevices that Chinese secret societies play a social function by offering their services in exchange for territorial exclusivity and control over the legal and illicit activities within their territories. The headmen of the Chinese secret societies are “registered” with the Criminal Investigation Department and have to abide by the “rules” underscored by the police. They argue that this translates into a reversal of the state policy from zero-tolerance during the days of pre-independence to today’s “accommodation” stance. It also shows the secret societies as an important facet of Chinese communal life which provides stability and solidarity within a criminal subculture which provides an
avenue for Chinese youth who are marginalised from mainstream society to access illicit opportunities. To add, the exclusive working relationship “between the police and the institutionalised secret societies (emphasis added)” not only ensures social order in the criminal underworld but also repels uncooperative headmen and prevents new gangs from breaking into the scene hence disturbing the already established symbiosis.

Capturing the sentiments of a number of Muslim youth members in Chinese gangs reveals the relationships of domination vested within the gang hierarchy.

There are all Malay gangs and there are gangs whereby it is of mixed races. But in the mixed race one, the top are still Chinese. The bosses of these rival gangs actually drink coffee together. The founder of the OMEGA gang is held in ‘five five’, a detention center in Tanah Merah prison. When you are caught in secret societies you are listed under whether you are a fighter, head, founder etc.

Haikal, Male, 18

When I actually think about the hierarchy of the gang, it is actually a lot like the Singapore government. The top leaders are all Chinese. This is the problem. When we get caught by the police the Malay officers will ask us. Don’t you feel stupid fighting for the Chinese? I feel like asking the police officer, then why are you working for the Chinese?

Fazly, Male, 19

We Malays are quite stupid. But actually, it’s because we do not have money. Other gang members like the Chinese pay us to beat their enemies. If we get like a hundred dollars, we will fight.

Hamzah, Male, Singapore

The double marginalisation faced by Muslim youth in Chinese gangs is an issue that is highlighted by the respondents above. In a sense, they are the marginalised of the marginalised and the true underclass given that these young men are deprived of social status in both the legitimate and the illegitimate spheres.
Antipodal Tattoos

The adoption of tattooing amongst Muslim youth in Singapore is more eclectic in nature, without the salience of tattooing forms which reflect their religious or ethnic identities as in the case of Islamic tattoos in Sydney. However, having noted that tattoos are seen as transgressive in both the Islamic and Malay culture, Western and Chinese motifs are still free appropriated by segments of the Malay Muslim youth. I will argue that in Singapore, the tattooing culture among Muslim youth involved in gangs is marked by its “antipodal” nature. The binary oppositions of the Chinese-Malay and East-West dialectic are appropriated in order to assimilate into ‘mainstream’ youth culture. The “aesthetic” that is espoused by Muslim youth in the form of Western and Chinese symbols is a dominated “aesthetic… which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics” (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, the body is employed to reconcile a social position whereby the individual is diametrically opposed to, hence associating with the social status of a higher power.

However, unlike in Sydney, all-Muslim gang members in Singapore do not adorn Islamic tattoos. Although seen by its members, as champions of Malay and Muslim rights (Nafis, 2008), the OMEGA gang are marked with tattoos on their arms, usually of the Greek letter, “omega”. They refer to each other as “jam tangan”, which means “wrist watch” in Malay (Chong and Arlina, 2008). A prestigious symbol of an elite consumer society, an expensive watch, has been ironically chosen as the gang’s code name. The Swiss symbol connoting high culture is thus inverted to refer to marginalised members of an illegitimate sphere. This is reminiscent of Hebdige’s (1981) study of youth culture in which he utilised the concept of “bricolage” - a term he borrowed from Dadaist surrealist painters of the early 1900s - in which the youth depict familiar mundane objects in fresh and unusual contexts to give them surrealist meanings. Other bodily indicators of the Malay gangs are also often reproduced in the designs that group members carry on their motorbike helmets. Some of these “gang designs” include “a dice or a man’s face in the shadows, or tribal designs of the group's name... And all the group members have
helmets in the same colour scheme, like black and yellow” (Lim, 2007). Bennett (2000) suggests that this drift towards the eclectic and bricolage as seen within popular youth culture is revealing of a desire among the youth for a more fluid consideration of the relationship between the individual and the collective that might be considered 'neo-tribal'. The 'underground' character of the local youth culture is read as a form of resistance to those who exercise conventional political and commercial power in the city.

Muslim youth have also acquired tattoos to claim a sense of belonging to Chinese gangs (John, 2007). Among these young men, it is common to see “Chinese” motifs and inscriptions such as dragons and Chinese poetry tattooed on Muslim bodies. Some have even gone through initiation rites that involved paying homage to Chinese deities (George, 1993). It could be speculated that this development is one reason explaining an unprecedented 0.1 percent of the Malay community professing Buddhism/Taoism as their official religion in the Singapore Population Census of 2000.

Gang tattoos, whether with Chinese or western themes, can be seen as a “rite of passage” that constitutes membership of a particular gang. In these struggles to define the self within the cultural ambiguity of a multiracial society, some gang members, in discussing the rationale behind their tattooing, implicitly accepted the notion of scarring the body as a dangerous practice. These bodily marks serve a dual social function in not only denoting the individual’s affiliation to the social group but also marking the individual’s location in the group’s hierarchy. For example, amongst gang members, tattoos are also enshrined on knuckles and foreheads to signify that they are “fighters” and to indicate their readiness to go into battle. It is also interesting to explore how the choice of whether to adopt Chinese inscriptions could reflect on how these Muslim youth define themselves.

The Chinese tattoos are actually characters that tell people about my personality.

Fazly, Male, Singapore
Where these youth have adopted Chinese motifs, a common response was that the tattoos are merely characters expressing the personality of the individual or more accurately the personality he wants others to witness and accept.

Mahmud, Male, Singapore

Some respondents mentioned that despite tattooing being a key ritual in their socialisation into gang culture, the tattoos engraved are also individualised. Whilst the Chinese language confers upon them the authenticity and symbolic power, the meaning of the characters is a form of impression management and self-expression (Johnson, 2006). Ferreira (2009:299) posits that youth tattooing practices can also be seen as signifying individual distinction and connoting a lifetime commitment to the self. These “autobiographical statements” can thus be described as “personal objects, symbolic expressions of personality, biography, interests and individual fantasies” and not merely as “ideological loyalties and social commitments”. While tattooing in general can be seen as a rite of passage into gang-hood for these young Muslims, it is evident that they still assert a certain degree of choice over how they want to be perceived.

This can be seen from the fact that not all Muslim youth in Chinese gangs adopt the tattoo of the Other as a pledge of group solidarity. It is important to note that, in the apparent chaos of symbols surrounding body art, a system of classification of the sacred and the profane is still maintained.

I put on tattoos because it is art. Nowadays we do not put on Chinese motifs like the dragon or koi. Usually that’s the old timers. And I abstain from Chinese tattoos like having Buddhist inscriptions on my body. Panas (Scorching), babe … At night cannot sleep.

Brahim, Male, Singapore

In this case, one of the respondents rationalised abstaining from tattoos which have a Buddhist influence. While associating the Buddhist faith with the majority Chinese population in Singapore, he went on to describe Chinese tattoos as a matter of taste or fashion and as a category within the sacred realm. While managing to reconcile
the adoption of tattooing as popular culture, the youth gang member recognised a dividing line between his Muslim body and a different religious tradition.

It is not surprising that tattooing practices are often met with negative responses by other youth. For these youth, religion remains the key reason they have abstained from tattooing. In interviews conducted, young Muslims who refrain from tattooing described their feelings towards the practice. Reasons cited by the youth are diverse, ranging from the Islamic prohibition against tattooing to viewing tattoos as a status symbol to their own personal preferences and taste.

I think tattoos are disgusting and sick. They only make one’s body looks awful. Personally, I hate tattoos as much as I hate *khamar* (alcohol) ‘cause Islam disallows it. And I think once Islam disallows something, there is always a reason or *hikmah* (wisdom) to it. Most probably youths have tattoos ‘cause they think tattoos are cool and show the artistic side of them. Last but not least, I think media plays a pretty major part in influencing these youths and bring them to a conclusion that tattoos are fashionable.

**Shila, Female, Singapore**

I do not put on tattoos because of family and also religion. I tell myself not to take after my brother who has tattoos all over his body.

**Dani, Male, Singapore**

Quite a number of my friends have tattoos. I find that those who have tattoos are just showing off, to make themselves look cool, and a way to convey a message to others that they have power and do not mess with them. Apart from that, they are actually nothing.

**Jali, Male, Singapore**

Furthermore, there are members of Chinese gangs who manage to avoid gang tattooing altogether and successfully negotiate an identity around this cultural marker. In many instances, their avoidance of the tattoo comes from their appeal to higher values that are held with great esteem by other group members, for example, the allusion to bravery and by extension, the ability to account for themselves well in gang fights. In exhibiting an internalised sense of identity, being a gangster is defined
by these respondents as what you “are” and not how you portray yourself. In this instance, an opposition is thus drawn between “being a gangster” and “doing gang-work”, the latter implying a superficial adoption of styles and codes rather than a genuine mode of life. This corroborates with Muggleton’s (2000) study in which he argues that the practice of youth culture has more to do with a philosophy of “personal freedom” than an adherence to a dress code, musical playlist or even favoured drug. For these gang members, the motivation and attitudes behind their choice of not to be tattooed are diverse. In one interview, a youth gang member who does not wear a tattoo described some plausible motivations behind the tattooing of his friends.

It’s not because of religion that I don’t put on tattoos because if we want to talk about religion, then beating others up, taking drugs and consuming alcohol is also against the religion. I do not put on tattoos because it’s not our interest although we do feel left out amongst other gang members who don them. But there are other ways for me to prove myself in the gang such as showing my courage in fights. I don’t have to prove that I am daring just by putting on tattoos. But at the end of the day, it is about yourself. We have the power to make our own choices. Like for me, I don’t drink when all of the other gang members drink.

Hassan, Male, Singapore

It is clear that religion and familial concerns still present themselves as frames of reference in the everyday lives of these Muslim youth and that these more traditional values can be seen in the dilemma they experience in grappling with such issues as tattooing and alcohol consumption in the gang set-up. Having recognised this dilemma, it is evident however that, on the whole, the individual gang member’s commitment to the group can be measured largely by how staunchly he embraces the group’s sub-culture and the ways in which he presents himself within the group. Despite group pressures, these visual traits and mannerisms vary from one individual to the other.
Theorising Muslim Youth and Tattoos

salam alaykum. I’ve seen a growing trend in people I know from my area—getting tattoos. I’ve heard some say they are haram and some not, so could anyone provide a range of rulings on them. Even more alarming, the number of people I have seen with tattoos of Qur’an or anything Islamic have also skyrocketed. My best friend has one with “la illaha ill Allah” on his shoulder. What is the ruling especially on tattoos with Qur’an or Allah’s name in them?. I have spoken with older people and the first thing they mention is that when someone is in a state of janaba it becomes a major haram if they have Qur’an/Allah’s name on their body at the same time. They also cite the hadith where the Prophet (saw) told one of his companions to remove his ring before going into the bathroom, because it had Allah’s name on it. I thought that was common sense enough to stop people, but I see so many idiots getting Qur’an tattoos these days it’s really annoying me, and whilst doing this.. they also going clubbing and purposely wear clothes that will show off their Qur’an tattoos! If this is not riya’ then I don’t know what is. Please contribute as this is a massive modern problem with our youth. Jazakum Allahu khayrun

Rohul, Male, Sydney

Two observations can be made with respect to the adoption of tattooing in gangs. Firstly, tattoos are used as a tool to portray a sense of homogeneity and congruency within the gang set up. Secondly, the choice of tattoos reflects the young Muslims’ attempts to rationalize their tattooing in terms of their religious identity. The above quotation in a popular Sydney Muslim youth forum highlights the theological debates within the Muslim community with regard to tattooing in Islam. My study of the “body practices” of predominantly Malay Muslims in Singapore indicates a double deviance as they cross both a religious and cultural prohibition by tattooing and joining Chinese gangs. For Muslim youth in Sydney, the transgressive nature of tattooing makes the emergence of Islamic tattooing even more fascinating. Bryan Turner in The Body and Society (1984) provides us with a useful framework to understand a sociological theory of the body. He posited that all societies are faced with four tasks in which a sociology of the body should take into consideration: (1) the reproduction of populations in time, (2) the regulation of bodies in space, (3) the restraint of the “interior” body through disciplines, and (4) the representation of the
“exterior” body in social space (1984:38). These four axes are insightful into understanding how Muslim youth in secular settings negotiate their bodies in their everyday lives and particularly, in understanding the expressive functions of tattooing in a multiracial urban secular setting.

From the two case studies, it can be extrapolated that the categories of the “interior” body and the “exterior” body are reconciled for Muslim youth who present their bodies with Islamic tattoos in social space. The adoption of “Islamic tattoos” amongst Muslim youth in Sydney reflects how the youth have chosen to juxtapose their “inner” Muslim self to full public scrutiny by appropriating Islamic symbols as a strategy to negotiate the social space. For Singapore Muslim youth participating in Chinese gangs, there is often a restraint of the “interior body” as sacred and uncontaminated. Although emblazoned with Chinese and even Western tattoos, the refusal to imprint themselves with foreign religious symbols show a clear demarcation between the “interior” and “exterior” body.

At the same time, youth tattooing practices present a response to moral guardians who proscribe tattooing such as religious authorities, potential employers, family members, and also pose as a challenge to the norms of what constitutes acceptable tattooing. Despite the increasing visibility and mainstreaming of tattoos, many respondents spoke of the social stigma that is still attached to the craft. Rarely does the symbolic capital garnered from tattoos translates into economic capital in the workforce, with many citing the negative job interview experiences they underwent. Hence, the body art practices of Muslim youth respondents in Singapore and Sydney illuminate the tensions between the effort to reproduce youth body regimens and their regulation in the social space.

Tattooing as a Global Popular Culture

Youth adoption of tattooing can also be seen as a form of globalised Islam that witnesses a re-reading of Islam by the youth through the lenses of popular youth culture. Whilst this chapter has predominantly presented tattooing as a typical aspect of modern gangs and youth culture, it is also important to situate such body
modifications within the context of a consumer society. With many Muslim youth having discovered or are discovering a youthful, popular and chic “Islam” that is a potent mix of Muslim themes and global consumer culture, it has become increasingly plausible to reconcile a formal rejection of tattooing as *haram* as well as an implicit acceptance of tattooing as another aspect of popular youth culture.

In the course of my research, respondents have spoken of tattoos as social memory and in “decorative” terms when rationalising the primary motivation behind the adoption of body modifications. In interviews conducted, respondents often speak about how their tattoos embody a lasting reminder of specific events in their lives. For example, a respondent Ajat, mentions that “I have some of these tattoos to remember my brothers who have fallen in gang fights”. These body marks thus function as mechanisms of social memory where significant events are etched permanently on the body and hence they constantly reinforce allegiance to the social group. For example, it is not uncommon to see Malay gang members engraving tattoos representing teardrops on their cheeks, a practice also adopted among gang members in America. It signifies that they have lost fellow members in a fight and indicates a form of mourning for their loss.

To add, tattooing which used to signify a tough street gang culture is also seen to be conflated and peripheralised in the rationalisations of some gang members as they decenter tattoos from their gang activities in exchange for solidarity with the global trends of tattooing, skateboarding and graffiti as popular culture. Even among youth who do not engage in tattooing, not all see tattooed Muslim youth in a negative light. As evident from the quote by the respondent, Farah, tattoos also signifies a notion of loyalty. Tattoos, seen in this light, due to their permanence and the sacrifice that an individual undergoes to have them both in terms of physical pain endured and social stigma faced from the larger community, is seen as the tattooed individual’s commitment and loyalty to his beliefs and compatriots.
“Competitive Tattooing” Versus “Assimilative Tattooing”

At this juncture, it is also pertinent for us to take a step back and rethink the governmentality of Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney. I argue that the common perception of Singapore as an authoritarian state and Australia of a more liberal Western model does not apply to my study of tattoos and the gang subculture. In the first instance, there is a working relationship between the state and the gangs in Singapore which allows for a delegation of some of the state powers in liminal spaces between the legitimate and the illegitimate. Therefore, although physical space is scarce, police presence does not attempt to sanitise the entire public sphere from gangs and body art. Here, Singapore’s nationalisation of gangs is contrasted against Sydney’s perfect competition among gangs. State non-partisanship and non-patronage in Sydney allow for the mushrooming of self-styled gangs competing in marketplace of signs and symbols.

The demographic landscape of the two global cities also plays a function in the evolution of Muslim youth culture. As mentioned in Chapter 3, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census of Population and Housing, in Muslim concentrated Sydney districts of Lakemba, Bankstown and Auburn, which make up some of the most multicultural localities and where Australian Muslims have tended to settle, the Muslim presence can be as high as 30%. As such, it comes as no surprise that Muslim youth culture coming from these areas has taken on a more Islamic flavour. In other words, religious identity becomes conflated with a sense of belonging attached to a geographic space. As such, “Islamic gangs” are both a response to a perceived sense of a Muslim community and a locality under siege. Hence, we also see a proliferation of Muslim youth street corner gangs in Muslim concentrated Western Sydney going by names such as Parra Boys, Bass Hill boys, and Granville Boys.

Sydney Muslim youth culture is also a direct response to the media portrayal of Muslim youth as problematic. Hence, the forming of Islamic gangs and adoption of “Islamic tattoos” in an age of Islamophobia can be seen as a counterculture against
the dominant strain. Islamic tattoos can then be understood to be a rejection of the dominant cultural values and an act of defiance against the stereotyping of Muslims in the larger society. Amidst a mainstreaming of the tattooing culture and popular religious imageries such as the Southern Cross tattoo in “Christian Australia”, the entry of Islamic body art into the landscape ought to be seen as a form of “competitive tattooing” in what Baudrillard has termed “a carnival of signs” (Sweetman 2000; Fisher 2002). To be sure, it has been reported that the number of youth taking on the Southern Cross tattoos has increased significantly as an aftermath of the 2005 Cronulla riots. Tattoos then become a tool of exclusion and a display of patriotism. Hence, it can be argued that in a competitive sphere, the signs themselves are a postmodern phenomenon, divorced from their religious denotations and have come to signify the re-interpretations embedded in it by the youth.

In the case of Singapore, tattooing is often an important aspect of Chinese gang membership in the ambiguous cultural context of a multiracial society. It is worth noting that in a country like Singapore where access to legitimate resources in the market is held by the dominant Chinese majority, ethnicity is still the dominant currency for the exchange of illicit resources. In my attempts to get the Muslim youth to reflect upon their Chinese tattoos and their appropriation of other Chinese symbols, these youth frequently made reference to the power structure of the gangs they are in.

In the context of Malay youth in Chinese gangs, the ritual sacrifice of tattooing is done in solidarity with members of other religious groups to form a supra-religious entity rather than the taboo being a token of intra-religious solidarity. The embodiment of Chinese tattoos can be argued to constitute a sacrifice that the Muslim youth undergo to bring about a greater sense of solidarity and coherence with dominant members of the group. In addition, this practice stands against the rhetoric of the racial division in Singapore, because exhibiting tattoos with a foreign or western design is often done with some degree of pride.
I argue that since power is one of the main indicators of prestige, and culture is the primary source of group solidarity, the dominant Chinese members act as gatekeepers to the gang culture in Singapore. In order to negotiate social mobility or even to exercise solidarity with the rest of the group, the Muslim youth gang members embrace this alternative cultural identity marker. As the cultural domain is also stratified within the group as a means of maintaining social stability, cultural capital then becomes a prized entity with the capacity to confer prestige to an individual. Clifton Sanders (1988:395) argued that “the tattoo is both an indication of disaffiliation from conventional society and a symbolic affirmation of personal identity”. In this sense, tattoos are used to establish a new communal affiliation for the individual. In rebelling against the status quo, the body is used as a site to indicate to the community that a change in social status has taken place.

In the case of Singapore Muslim youth in Chinese gangs, a transformation of their identity does not automatically lead to an enhancement of their social status. Ironically, the bodily inscriptions could also be interpreted as signs of subservience and a pledge of allegiance to an alternative social order. Following the arguments made by Gana and Lian (2002), this situates the Malay gang members in a double bind. The “status frustration” experienced by these members extends into the illegitimate sphere. On the one hand, exclusively Malay gangs such as the OMEGA have been clamped down on by the state and deemed by the authorities as no longer operational. On the other, these youth are still likely to experience social immobility if they were to participate in Chinese gangs.

However, as we also see from our interviews, some Muslim youth gang members consciously recognise the internal and external conflicts that they face in affiliating themselves with these Chinese gangs. In this instance, a classification which divides an inside and an outside of the body collapsed as the respondent, making inferences to his Islamic faith, also described metaphorically how Chinese tattoos would carry pollution to his “inner self”. While managing to reconcile the adoption of tattooing as popular culture, the youth gang member recognised a dividing line between his Muslim body and a different religious tradition. In this
sense, religious commodification is resisted and the body can be multiracial but not multifaith.

Conclusion

What emerges very strongly from the transcribed interviews and participant observation is a sense of ambiguity and liminality, a rejection of identifying “uniform” and a playing-down and a re-interpretation of obvious visual signifiers. What is worthy of note is that in modern countries like Australia and Singapore where the path towards becoming modern demands that each and every citizen subscribes to the ideals set by the ruling regime and the larger society, the manipulation of self-identities has become a means by which young Muslim gang members ensure their survival. However, it is important to note that, in the apparent chaos of symbols surrounding the practice of tattooing, a system of classification of the sacred and the profane is still maintained, albeit often implicitly. This is often done through a renegotiation of the two categories. This chapter has demonstrated how a youthful body regimen is being produced in a multicultural social environment. Disciplined bodies are shaped through a systematic consumption of symbols and controlled participation in various spheres of social interaction. These forms of bodily control need to be considered not only in relation to consumption but also to various relationships of domination. The data also reveals that the Muslim youth consumption of tattoos exist within the interstices of religious commodification and secular consumerism.

Detached from Islamic principles and the historical evolutions of Chinese and Western tattoos, these Muslim youth tattoos can be seen as part of a post-modern statement that refers to nothing but themselves. This is not because of the lack of external referentiality but rather, as demonstrated through the data presented, this referentiality in popular youth culture is increasingly eclectic, contested and reinterpreted. Hence, as Baudrillard (1988:4-5) argues, it is not the object of the sign that is being consumed, but the simulated implicit meanings. As such, tattoos on Muslim bodies if taken as a manner of historical external referentiality are
increasingly redundant. They are part of sartorial strategies of resistance, which are increasingly added into a free-floating “carnival of signs”. Hence, these signs need to be studied in and of themselves within the field and habitus of their production.
CHAPTER 6

YOUTH RESISTANCE THROUGH CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

The hip-hop and tattooing culture amongst Muslim youth that were discussed in the previous chapters can indeed also be seen as practices of resistance by young Muslim minorities in negotiating their everyday lives in urban, secular and multicultural environments. In this final empirical chapter, I take a closer look at youth resistance through their consumption practices, which will be useful in demonstrating the nascence and evolution of Muslim youth strategies of resistance in Singapore and Sydney. I will present a rich discourse whereby a collective action of passive resistance attempts to re-draw the moral boundaries of popular culture.

At first glance, the consumption practices of Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney, like that of other youth, are a manifestation of global cultural flows. In general, the Muslim youth could be one who wears American jeans, goes to McDonald’s for lunch and Starbucks for tea, uses French perfume, listens to the Latin group Il Divo along with Qur’anic recitations by Arab recitors on their MP3 and go for Chinese-Thai seafood and Indian briyani at a Malay restaurant. Much of received literature has established youth as vassals that are susceptible to shifting fashion trends and the latest commodities found in the market. We live in an age of the “cult of the youth” whereby the focus is not only on being young, but learning to be one. The media machinery with its relentless campaigns on acting young and looking young has made youth and youthfulness the order of the day. To be sure, huge companies have geared their marketing campaigns to specifically target the youth group in order to tap their big spending power.

This chapter will demonstrate that youth often make rational choices in their consumption patterns, which are also often informed by both national and global affairs. In the process of conducting fieldwork, these practices manifested themselves
in at least two forms. Firstly, Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney make informed and critical choices in their consumption of mainstream media. It is crucial to examine Muslim youth resistance in the context of the advent of the Digital Age. Indeed, the information revolution creates many networked youth societies among urban minority youth. Being youth in the Digital Age easily paves their way to alternative sources of opinions, even where religious instructions and education are concerned. Secondly, Muslim youth also find themselves in a position where they need to reconcile their piety with their choice of consumer products. The notion of boycotting emerges, characterised by the intense mobilisation at the community level and marked by huge debates among the Muslim community. The Internet and the new media in turn become the medium in which the youth disseminate information on their activism. It is crucial for the thesis to explore these two dimensions as they have the effect of shaping and directing popular Muslim youth cultures in the two cities.

We have to understand this chapter of critical consumption in conjunction with the previous two chapters on hip-hop culture and tattooing practices among young Muslims. I argue that the critical consumption of young Muslims with regard to the media and consumer boycotts is the result of a combination of an increase in piety and a rise of Islamophobia in the aftermath of September 11 which has in turn formed the basis of a Muslim consumer ethics. This chapter is hence not interested in unpacking the economic efficacy of boycotts but rather is an attempt to examine the vibrant discourse amongst Muslim youth surrounding boycotts.

Cultural Consumption – Youth as Critical Consumers

The consumerist youth culture as promoted by the mass media has its limitations (Short and Hughes, 2006; Matthée, 2008; Arrow, 2009). Studies have revealed that while youth tend to spend on a wide array of goods, they are not merely preoccupied with leisure activities. This image of the carefree youth can be misleading as youth also contribute to the household income in terms of making steady contributions to their parents, settling loans and even saving for their present
and future education (Shanahan et al., 1996). Available literature on the youth consumerist culture is also impeded by a lack of focus on youth as conscientious consumers who are, first of all, critical of mainstream media and secondly, when convinced, would even engage in the boycott of consumer goods as a display of protest.

In the first instance, as this thesis has demonstrated in the previous three chapters, there is dissatisfaction within a majority of young Muslims with regard to the mainstream media’s representations of Muslims and Islam generally, and its depictions of young Muslims more specifically. This growing discontent has heightened as a result of September 11. As this research has advanced, young globalised Muslims have taken their struggle into the realms of popular youth culture. The Internet then becomes a powerful medium in which these battles are fought out.

The growing role of the cyberspace in the everyday lives of young people, who theoretically have the freedom of space and place in the Internet, has thrown into disarray the efficacy of state regulation of conventional media such as the television (Brown, 2005:151). Although it is exactly this fear of unknown places and spaces that has been driving states towards regulating the Internet space, any attempts at curtailing the autonomy of the youth is all the more problematic given the nature of the Internet as “global”, and cutting across “national boundaries” (France, 2007:123). Gary Bunt asserts that a primary role of the Internet is to carry on the dialogue where the traditional sources stop. To add, these globalised respondents in the Digital Age also discuss their participation and the salience of the media in their lives; leading to an unprecedented awareness of their individual and collective relationships with the different forms of media available. In the context of global cities, “the application of the Internet is having an overarching transformational effect on how Muslims practice Islam, how forms of Islam are represented in the wider world, and how Muslim societies perceive themselves and their peers” (Bunt 2009:3).
I spend a lot of time surfing Islamic websites. I particularly like *Islam Online* and *Islam Q&A*. I also go on the Internet to download videos... On the most part, I get my religious guidance from the Internet, books and my father. I go to sites with *fatwas* online to find out what various *sheikhs* think about certain issues.

Arafat, Male, Singapore

I still get my religious instruction from Egypt through satellite TV that my family subscribes to. We have the *Al-Nas* channel that we can send questions to either by writing or calling and they will respond on television.

Shuaib, Male, Sydney

Bunt’s description of the generation of *iMuslims* and the digital *ummah* is also clearly visible as many Muslim youth – Singapore and Sydney youth included – are seeking religious guidance through the Internet at exceptional levels. “Important new issues, with no immediate basis in traditional sources can be discussed. Opinions can be disseminated rapidly, but are not necessarily observed or followed by readers, who may visit another site to solicit an opinion more in line with their personal requirements.” (Bunt, 2009:136) Young Muslims then adjust their consumption of the Internet according to what Bunt has referred to as “personal requirements” in the cyberspace which “include anything from which branch of Islam s/he identifies with, to language, geographic location, level of education, social class, gender, personality, and previous life experiences” (Akou, 2010:336-337).

The decentralisation of Muslim authority and the spiritual renewal of self and society which accelerated in the post-September 11 era cannot be better represented by the recent advent of global televangelism in the Muslim world as popular alternative outlets of socio-religious guidance (Howell, 2008; Esposito, 2010). Similar to the rise of televangelism and the proliferation of American politico-religious movements claiming to be Evangelical or Fundamentalist in the 1970s whose ultimate objective was to influence political decisions in order to re-Christianise America, Bayat (2007) argues that the new Muslim televangelists push for a Muslim “born again” identity and a return to “true” Islam.
These assertions of Muslim identity amongst youth have led to the emergence of the practice of boycotts in their consumption choices. The numerous websites that have been set up for this purpose\textsuperscript{16} and the vibrant discourse within all strata of Muslim society is a testament to this. Boycotts can be seen as an “art of the weak” (de Certeau, 1984:37) to describe forms of resistance utilised by marginalised groups who are not able to systematically organise themselves owing to a sustained close scrutiny. They are improvisations aimed at redirecting and deflecting lines of movement into unscheduled detours. It is essential then that we analyse the idea of boycotting from the perspective of a counterculture that utilised as a vehicle to shape and direct popular Muslim youth culture.

Jasper (1997:253) evinces that the success of a boycott depends on a strong collective identity with a general consensus over “moral expectations, goals, and outrage, with a rich cultural life as well as the ability to punish those who broke the boycott”. In linking the economic, the moral and the social, Werbner (1990) argues that the economic activities of these individuals function not merely as an avenue for financial accumulation but ultimately serve as an organising framework that defines the individual’s social and moral environment. Seen from the vantage point of the thesis, this dual function of economic activity hence transforms the practice of personal activities of consumption into a collective response of a social group. As I will further demonstrate, these economic activities are thus deployed by young Muslims as a means of demonstrating social and cultural solidarities both in the local and global arenas.

The notion of a Muslim consumer ethic needs to be given more attention at this juncture. Contrary to Cesari’s (2004) concept of an ethical Islam as a combination between maximising “individual autonomy with belief in a higher power” and “an adherence to the moral and humanistic values that underlie religious practice – without, however, adhering to the practice itself”, this chapter shows an intimate relationship between values and practices itself. In conceptualising a

\textsuperscript{16} such as http://www.inminds.com/boycott-israel.html
Muslim consumer ethic young Muslim respondents view the moral and humanistic dimension of living in a globalised world as an extension of their religious practice. Following the centrality of the youthful body as both a site of contestation and reconciliation in both the chapters on hip-hop and tattooing, the idea of a Muslim consumer ethics also advances a novel concept of the body.

Although Muslim youth engage in various forms of resistance as a result of their critical disposition, this topic of consumer boycott is apt for this study for various reasons. Firstly, it illuminates the tensions young Muslims go through in reconciling their piety with mainstream youth culture. Secondly, it teases out the various responses and discourses that underpin the youth’s concerns surrounding the negative light being cast on Muslims in the post September 11 era. Thirdly, it highlights the interweaving of the local and the global both at the level of state sanctions and the attempts of young Muslims to reconcile their loyalty to the global ummah and their nationalistic identity.

“Consumption” and Islam

The basis of what is considered as halal (permissible) is revealed in the Qur’an (the divine book) from God (the Creator) to Muhammad (the Prophet) for all people. The laws are explained and put into practice through the Sunnah (the life, actions, and teachings of Muhammad) as recorded in the Hadith (the compilation of the traditions of Muhammad). In general, everything is permitted for human use and benefit and nothing is forbidden except what is prohibited either by a verse of the Qur’an or an authentic and explicit Sunnah of Muhammad. Sociologically, Islamic law therefore delineates social action for the practising Muslim. As Turner (2008) has pointed out, religiosity comes from the word religare, which refers to the “daily disciplines.” Thus, to be a Muslim is to necessarily live one’s life in a generally halal manner; it therefore follows that when it comes to consumption, it is expected that the Muslim must also only engage with halal items. Food is only one of the primary objects of consumption. It is interesting, however, to trace how the traditional notions of halal consumption with respect to food have changed over time.
In principle, food and drinks that are halal must not only be permissible, but must also be ‘pure,’ which means it cannot be contaminated by any haram (prohibited) elements. For Muslims in non-Muslim majority communities, ensuring the supply of halal food sources has to be a priority. In most cases, systems of halal certification are implemented to facilitate Muslim consumption. Whilst the major preoccupation has been on food, contemporary Muslim consumer market and “halal product” businesses mushroomed, particularly with the extension of the halal requirement to items such as non-alcoholic toiletries, for example. Even so, what started with the more conventional notions of purity centred on ingredients and manufacturing processes have moved towards a more complex and sophisticated conception of halal-ness in recent times, which I argue is intricately linked to the forging of a unique Muslim identity.

This Muslim identity market is a lucrative one. The global halal market is worth at a staggering USD2.1 trillion (as at year 2008). The “halal industry” now includes Islamic finance which is estimated at between USD200 billion to USD500 billion annually, with an annual growth rate forecast of 12% to 15% for the next 10 years. This has resulted in more vibrant discussions on what constitute halal-ness; which include discussions on where profits are directed to. Part of these debates has spawned a series of “Islamic” products targeted at influencing the consumerist culture of young Muslims. The Internet hence becomes the new medium in which the Muslim identity market aimed at the youth is oft flouted.

The emergence of this Muslim consumer ethics brings about changing notions of purity and contamination to the body. The act of boycott therefore ritualises and makes sacred the body, physically removing the individual from donning and ingesting from an “impure” source. This is interesting because the categories of purity and contamination go beyond the standard general guideline of what is halal as delineated in the syariah. It transcends the religious categories of what comprises a Muslim diet or a Muslim fashion. Rather, the idea of contamination here is tied to the idea of resistance to economic and cultural hegemony. It is a call
for a collective action and social solidarity against those who are deemed to be oppressing Muslims.

These trends are compounded by the number of heavyweight transnational figures of Islamic authority having issued *fatwa* throwing their support behind boycott campaigns on consumer products that are deemed to contribute to the state of Israel. They include the recently deceased Dr Muhammad Sayyid Tantawy who was the Grand Sheikh of *al-Azhar University*, the symbolic center of Islamic study, and Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi who heads the *European Council for Fatwa and Research* whilst serving as Chairman of the *International Union for Muslim Scholars*. A 2008 *Foreign Policy* poll places Dr Qaradawi at number three in the list of the *Top 20 Public Intellectuals* worldwide. A new book called *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwi* (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009) was put together to mark his traversing influences. In calling for a blacklist of products to be mapped out, Tantawy considers it a religious duty of Muslims to “boycott Israel and all who support it in aggression and injustice” whilst Qaradawi states that “every dollar paid for these products is translated into a bullet fired at the heads and hearts of Palestinian children” (see Webman, 2002).

Hence, it is a logical transition for young Muslims participating in the popular culture of global social networking websites such as *Facebook*, *Friendster*, *YouTube* and *MySpace* to be exposed to how the media machinery works overseas. Their engagement with young people in foreign lands leads to a more critical consumption of the media which when coupled with a sense of religiosity, drives them to seek alternative sources of information and even engage in disseminating the “real” accounts of events from the perspective of Muslims.

**Getting Connected in Singapore and Sydney**

Being two of the most globalised cities; it is not surprising to see high Internet penetration levels in both Singapore and Sydney. The 2007 statistics released by the *Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA)* cited that 74% of Singaporean households have access to the Internet (June 2008). Compared to the
population as a whole, the numbers registered by youth who have access to the web is most significant. User penetration is highest all round at 98% for those aged 15 to 24 with 95% of them proclaiming that they access the Internet from home and a further 78% stating that they use the Internet at home at least once a day. A *Straits Times* survey involving 100 teens discovered that a staggering 94% maintain a profile at the very least on one social networking website such as *Facebook* and *Friendster* (AsiaOne, Nov 19 2008). Blogging as a social activity involving youth has also been documented. Youth make up the largest group of bloggers (16%) followed by the 25 to 34 age group (4%).

I’m always Facebooking. I can keep in touch with my friends. Singapore has technologically advanced significantly. Last time people didn’t have Internet, hand phones or ez-link cards. Now almost every 12yr old has all of these three things.

Nadia, Female, Singapore

A 2004 survey involving about 218 participants aged 18 to 24 reveals that the Singaporean Muslims were the most likely group to utilise the Internet for religious activities. They were the most likely group to surf for information and activities on their own religion and “searching for information on another religion, communicating with someone of another faith, and purchasing goods and services related to another faith online”. The survey also shows that the more pious and educated one is, the more one will employ the Internet for religious purposes (Kluver *et al.*, 2008). This is to be expected as it is consistent with other studies done on the correlation between education and the Internet (Gardner and Oswald, 2001). However, this takes a greater significance when it comes to taking Muslims as a unit of social analysis. Despite lagging behind the other communities in terms of education and other social indicators such as household income, Muslims in Singapore are the most active group when it comes to utilising the Internet for the purpose of religious activities.

In terms of positive perceptions towards the Internet’s religious impact, no noteworthy difference between the religious communities was seen. However, the Muslims were most sensitive to the negative impact the Internet can have on religion. 29.7% of Singaporeans visit foreign sites more frequently than local sites for religious activities and again there is negligible difference in this aspect between the four main religious groups analysed in the report which are Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Freethinkers. Taking the perspective of religious leaders in Singapore, a study by Kluver and Cheong (2007) showed that they have a positive view of the cyberspace and even employ it as a tool for either congregational or individual use. All those who were interviewed see the Internet as invaluable in disseminating information to the religious community.

Ho, Lee and Shahiraa (2008) found that Muslim surfers in Singapore tend to engage in online activities that were more related to personal religious concerns than those activities that were related to traditional institutional religion. Although Muslims are a minority religious group in Singapore, as a tightly knit community, they do possess the potential to emit influence and originate their own norms. Conformity to the larger Muslim community is congruent with our hypothesis, where it is positively related to the use of the Internet for religious purposes. Conformity to family members, on the other hand, does not have any significant association with online religious use. This suggests that the larger Muslim community may be a more important referent group, exerting more influence on the average Muslim individual than the family does.

Aware of these developments among the youth, the state has also tried to manage these trends by leading the discourse on Muslims and Islam via youth-friendly and sometimes even youth-driven websites. For example, MUIS has launched a portal, I Am Seeking Knowledge (I ASK) inviting youth netizens to pose questions and discuss issues related to Islam. Particularly concerned with the issue of the self-radicalisation of youth, MUIS also launched a dedicated website\textsuperscript{18} directed

\textsuperscript{18} http://radical.mosque.sg/cms/Radical_Ideology/index.aspx
towards Muslims to counter radical ideologies they might be exposed to on the Internet. These efforts had shown some success as in attracting the youth and directing their consumption of religious instructions to local sources.

If I have any queries on religion, like what kind of body piercings can a girl have, I will go to MUIS website. Other than that I will read Qur’an transcriptions on the web but take it with a pinch of salt.

Deeyanah, Female, Singapore

Further, to balance the influence of the global e-muftis who may espouse views which are deemed “too radical” for the consumption of Singapore Muslim youth, MUIS has also been promoting local ustaz such as Ustaz Muhammad Haniff who is sanctioned as a figure of authority on global terrorism.

In Australia, the number of people connected to the Internet has increased significantly. By June 2010, there were 9.6 million active Internet subscribers in Australia. Mobile wireless (excluding mobile handset connections) was the fastest growing technology in Internet access, increasing to 3.5 million in June 2010. This represents a 21.7% increase from December 2009. In 2008-09, 72% of Australian households had home Internet access and 78% of households had access to a computer. Between 1998 to 2008-09, household access to the Internet at home has more than quadrupled from 16% to 72%, while access to computers has increased from 44% to 78%. In 2007-08, two-thirds of all households in NSW had an Internet connection, and over half 53% of households in NSW had a broadband Internet connection. The proportion of households with an Internet connection was significantly higher in metropolitan areas (72%) compared to non-metropolitan areas (59%).

Although there have been no studies done to date specifically on the impact of the Internet on Muslim youth in Sydney or Australia as a whole, judging by the statistics presented above and the testimonies given in interviews conducted, the

Internet can be said to play a major role in the everyday life of a young Muslim. Interviews confirm that the majority of Muslim youth appropriate the Internet to form a network society of young people of the same faith, keeping each other abreast of the latest occurrences in their provinces. The social function of the Internet as a tool for free communication is especially significant for a migrant society as relatives, both immediate and extended, update their loved ones on their everyday lives.

I will talk to Muslim youth from other countries to find out how they are and basically to share stories. Ask them what is going on in their country, their aspirations and so on... On the most part, I get my religious guidance from the Internet... I go to sites with fatwas online to find out what various sheikhs think about certain issues.

Taufeeq, Male, Sydney

I plan to go to Qatar at the end of next year and teach there. That’s one of the reasons why I am in a teaching course right now. It will allow me to be mobile as I can teach anywhere I want. I have friends from Qatar that I have made over the Internet and from mutual friends that I have met. I will like to live in a place whereby Islam is more permanent. I have always believed that you conform a lot to the area that you live in. Qatar is a place where I believe that I can benefit religiously as well as financially.

Chantelle, Female, Sydney

Two essential observations can be gleaned if we look at the consumption of the Internet by Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney. Firstly, given the statistics, to even speak of alienation among the youth will be somewhat ironic. Youth, on the outset seems to be the most engaged, connected and globalised group in the demography. Secondly, with the Internet creating a network community that transcends the boundaries of nation-states, the division between the management of Muslim youth in majority and minority communities is becoming increasingly blurred and complex. It is obvious that both the Singapore and Sydney Muslim youth, although numerically minority communities, are in constant engagement with Muslims who live as a majority in their own countries all over the world. As such, the issue of media representations of Muslims and Islam become crucial. A negative
portrayal of Muslims in the Middle East, for example, will often equate to Muslim minorities feeling under siege. In addition, these global conversations enable the youth to be less reliant on mainstream news networks as these interactions also allow them to gather first-hand information from “primary sources”.

Locating Muslim Youth Practices of Resistance

In order to understand the dispositions of Muslim youth resistance, we also need to understand the protest culture of the particular locality that we are examining. Firstly, in Singapore, the efforts to spread these boycott messages on Singapore websites can be impeded even in the realm of the Internet. Civil disobedience often comes at its peril. The Singapore Broadcasting Act, Clause 4 of the Class Licence Notification, requires the pre-registration of all websites dedicated or seeking to promote political or religious causes. It states:

An Internet Content Provider who is or is determined by the Authority to be a body of persons engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political or religious issues relating to Singapore on the World Wide Web through the Internet, shall register with the Authority within 14 days after the commencement of its service, or within such longer time as the Authority may permit.

Media Development Authority, 1996, Clause 4 (emphases added)

It is worth noting that this clause does not only refer to websites based in the geographical confines of Singapore, since the global nature of the World Wide Web (www) browser means that website “relating to Singapore” can be established and domiciled anywhere. By including such arbitrary statements within the Internet policy, all possible regulatory loopholes are either removed or effectively negated.

The economic benefits of the Internet had led the Singapore government to turn away from the censorship approach taken for traditional print and broadcast media; opting instead for a light-handed approach to managing the Internet (Rodan, 2000). However, it can be argued that the government’s official “light touch” regulation (MDA, 2004) when it come to the Internet has led to the prevalent practice of self-censorship amongst its citizens. The example below showed an attempt by a
Muslim youth to initiate a boycott of the popular English football Arsenal FC, on an online forum. The boycott was to protest the club’s decision to sign a sponsorship deal in 2006 to promote Israel as its “official and exclusive travel destination”. The debate was immediately clamped down by the moderators of the forum.

Recently, this thread was locked cos [sic] of the sensitive nature of its topic. Religion and politics are the topics marked as OB or out of bounds by our dear government but I believe we can still have a normal, discussion about this potentially emotional topic. I don't mean to stir things up here but I've got to say my piece. We're citizens of a country with too much censorship made worse by the concentration of media outlets in the hands of government owned corporations. If Singapore is to make its way in the world, it won't be because we hush things up. Clichéd but still true: open discussion is healthy, even necessary. Hush up information and end up like Enron or Satyam Computer Services? Moving a little further away from the topic of openness [sic], in any given society, there will be moderates and extremists- IMO, its a question of different human reactions based on the nature of people. Should we discount extremism because of its negative nature and consequences? What are the reasons a bunch of people become extremists anyway? I doubt a normal Palestinian person would want to go out and launch rockets at somebody else and a normal Isreali person would want to wage war.

Anonymous Online Discussant, Singapore

Everyone… Just to add another point here. We are a Singapore registered society as such we have rules lay out by the Authority to follow, kindly read up on the Club Constitution to get a clearer picture.

Anonymous, Executive Member of Forum, Singapore

Singapore's Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim had directly expressed his objection to such calls for boycotts. He is of the opinion that condemning Israel for its attacks in Gaza will not solve any problem and that a boycott of US goods was not “sensible”. Rather than be influenced by text messages calling for a boycott of United States-made products, he urged the community to register their concerns at the national level. Below is his response to a question, as to whether Singapore, in not condemning Israel as the aggressor, was being inconsistent
in its stand on condemning terror, the Minister replied that Singapore’s position was consistent.

'The most important thing is that we must not be affected by all the SMS flying around which may not be from Singapore. I don't think it is sensible for us to do some of the things mentioned, like boycotting products. It doesn't help.... 'Israel is a state. We have to recognise that it is a state. Hamas is ruling Gaza. They are rightfully elected, but they are in conflict.

Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Singapore

The government’s view of the economic boycott as not ‘sensible’ coincides with the fact that all the three main dial-up and broadband Internet Service Providers (ISP) are directly government-owned or government-linked. This gives the authorities the upper hand in enforcing electronic surveillance. Having said this, the state is powerless with regard to the youth finding out about the boycotts over the Internet, spreading it via new media such as email, the SMS, and through social networking, either through sites such as Facebook or through the conventional word of mouth. Hence, these structures that are in place, either in the form of legislation, political condemnation or panoptic self-surveillance discourages a mobilisation of Singaporean youth through the Internet. This then “individualises” the resistance at the communal level.

For the case of Sydney, the boycotting and protest culture is not something that is uncommon in larger mainstream society. In fact, groups that support “Muslim causes” such as the Palestinian issue are also well represented by non-Muslim individuals. Many Palestine advocacy groups can be identified within each state, such as Women for Palestine, Australians for Palestine, Australian Friends of Palestine Association, Fair Go for Palestine, Australians for Justice and Peace in Palestine and the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine (Rane, 2009:78). Although “the only nations that consistently vote in support of Israel are the United States and Australia, along with a few small Pacific island nations” (Rane, 2009:90), spaces are also provided for within the realm of national public consumption to articulate dissent. The Politics in the Pub series, as a case in point, is shown over
Sydney television over the TVS channel with some speakers calling for a boycott of Israel. As one walks the streets of Sydney, posters of protests held at the Sydney Town Hall speaking out against occupation in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq are not only available in Muslim concentrated areas of Lakemba and Bankstown but are also spread out in universities.

Of late, there has also been a proliferation of independent films and documentaries made in Sydney that were screened on national television. Programmes such as *SBS’ Middle Eastern Youth in Sydney Australia, Billal, Of Middle Eastern Appearance* and *Jihad Sheilas* attempt to document the everyday struggles of the Muslim youth in Australia. *The Temple of Dreams*, premiered at the *Sydney Film Festival*, focused on the Lidcombe youth centre and gymnasium which was credited with changing the lives of troubled Muslim youth in the area. It showcased how Fadi Rahman, an Australian Lebanese Muslim youth who ran the centre together with a group of volunteers, struggled for goodwill between Muslims and the larger community. In contrast, owing to the state monopoly over all the eight free-to-air television and 13 radio stations in Singapore, and their delineation of region and political activity as “out-of-bound markers”, the national broadcast stations present a space that is not readily available to the youth. *Mediacorp*, which is the parent broadcasting body in Singapore, is 100% owned by *Temasek Holdings*, the government's wholly owned investment arm.

Another key difference is that with Australia being a country of diverse domestic produce; many respondents have even promoted buying Australian made products as a strategy to thwart profits from leaving the country. Boycotts therefore present a chance for these Sydney Muslim youth to exhibit their “Aussie pride” by buying local produce. A useful concept that can be utilised here is Back’s “neighbourhood nationalism”, which concurrently embodies both local and national discourses on race and nation. This concept of an ethnically inclusive localism or “neighbourhood nationalism” in the community highlights this discourse among Sydney Muslim youth who in their consumption of local products regard the Australian community as a harmoniously multi-ethnic space where one’s sense of
belonging is not merely limited to colour or race, but by commitment to a particular area (1996: 239). Moreover, a number of respondents discussed how buying local produce can in fact alleviate their moral dilemma in two ways. Firstly, they would have fulfilled their obligations to the global Muslim *ummah* by participating in these boycotts. Secondly, they would have enriched the local national economy by purchasing Australian products. For the latter, these can be seen as a practice of their cultural citizenship.

Anyway, Zul boarded the train for about 40 minutes and arrived at Bankstown Sports Hall. Apparently at the event, they were selling a new clothing brand: Ummah Gear! lol Australian-made. its funny because it’s like copying the Muslim Gear (Canadian brand) a little.

Malik, Male, Sydney

As an example, a number of Muslim youth have opened up an Australian clothing line in 2007 selling apparel for the Muslim youth called *Ummah Gear* selling clothes like *hoodies*, jumpers, snow caps and track pants. This endeavour simultaneously is an indicator of the youth’s Australian and global Muslim identity.

We saw a lot of the Muslim youth for example wearing Nike, Adidas, and other designer brand clothing. So what we decided to do was make our own brand of clothing which would give the Muslims an image and also spread a good message.

Zim Recaj, *Ummah Gear* Store Manager

Mashallah I have to tell you all I have seen a sneak preview of the new t shirt designs and they are absolutely amazing! I have to agree with fear_none_but I... this gear IS hot hot hot!!! Really great colours and the designs are so clever... it's Islamic casual fashion at its best for both kids and adults! Just wait until you see this new UMMAH GEAR stuff at the EID Festival this Sunday!!!!! I doubt you would have seen anything like it before! Inshallah you're going to love it!!!!!!

Anonymous Online Discussant, Sydney

“*Islamic*” street-wear, beverages like the *Mecca Cola* and other “accessories for the fans” allow the youth to look both Muslim and western at the same time. Urban Muslim minority youth who see themselves as part of this New Awakening
are proving to be “good for business”. The boycott movement has also entered into popular youth culture through video gaming. A British software company called *Innovative Minds* campaigns for the boycott of Israel through its webpage and has produced multimedia games for the young, advocating that their strategy is “the best way to attract the youth to Islam” and to promote “a better understanding of Islam in the West”. One of the games on its *Islamic Fun CD* is called “The Resistance”. It allows for the player to be a farmer in South Lebanon and “defend your land and family from the invading Zionists” (Campbell, 2010:65). Mushaben (2008) points to the development of *Pop-Islam* in Berlin which spawned from Arabia towards the turn of the new millennium, citing the increase in charismatic *imams* and the impact of Islamic satellite television in creating idols and entertainment celebrities. This has created a “young, chic and cool” Islam among marginalised Muslim youth, who are deprived of basic rights of citizenship and access to resources in their countries of birth. She noted that these trends exacerbated particularly with the events post-September 11 although tensions have already appeared pre-September 11 within the Muslim community, centering on generational gaps.

**Singapore and Sydney: Practices of Resistance through Consumption**

The following sections discuss three aspects of consumption practices among Singapore and Sydney youth – critical consumption of media, the rise of the cyber-*ummah* and *e-mufti*, as well as boycotts as moral protest. Unlike the previous chapters where manifestations of hip-hop and tattooing have generally taken on varying trajectories, practices of resistance through Muslim youth consumption differ not so much as a matter of form but one of degree.

**Critical Consumption of Media**

A lot has been said about the negative representations of young Muslims in mainstream media (Said, 1997; Poole and Richardson, 2006; Ramji, 2003; Gardner et al., 2008). In Australia, there have been many works post September 11 that have also focused on the subject (Kabir, 2006; Manning, 2004; Poynting and Perry, 2007; Poynting, Noble, Tabar, and Collins, 2004). These scholars have been critical of the
moral panic that is constructed by the mainstream media by way of demonising the young Muslim subject. Moreover, scholars have also documented the view of Muslims who feel that the mainstream media is curtailing their freedom of expression and silencing their voice. In Singapore, especially in the study of the Muslim minority, it is precarious for a researcher to cite the national newspapers as a main resource. The Singapore newspapers are a contentious platform whose state centric coverage of events has been widely debated (Ang, 2002; George, 2002; Kalathil and Boas, 2003; Tey, 2008; Lee and Willnat, 2009). According to Mauzy and Milne (2002:128), there are undeniable authoritarian aspects of the Singapore government which includes draconian laws, control on political participation, and measures limiting civil and political rights as well as freedom of the press.

The negative reporting of issues and events relating to Islam and the Muslims makes up one of the major grievances of youth respondents interviewed in the course of this research. In Sydney, many referred to the media’s biased reporting of events such as the “Sydney gang rape” case of 2000 and the Cronulla riots of 2005, as well as the media’s “complicity” in what the youth perceived as imbalanced punishment meted out to Muslims in Australia. The youth of both cities also explicated how the stereotypes that are pervasive in the media translate into the discrimination they faced in their everyday lives. A common grievance amongst them is that the media tend to play up the notion of a “Muslim crime”. In other words, the youth feel that they are being singled out as Muslims whereas other acts of criminality are rarely labelled as “Christian” or “Buddhist” for example.

The media has caused non-Muslims to have a different and negative perspective of Muslims. During one of the GP lectures, my friend and I were sitting at one of the corner of the LT. The lecturer was talking about a guy who wrote in his essay. ‘The terrorist said that...’ and the lecturer commented that the guy is writing as though he has contact with the terrorist. Then, she goes on asking “who's the guy who wrote this essay” and a group of cheeky students behind me yelled back names of their friends. Then, she said, “Teachers, take note, there are terrorists at 45 and 46 [my friend's (an Indian Christian) and my seat numbers].” The lecturer referred to us as the terrorists who the cheeky students are in contact with. My friend and I
felt humiliated as everybody began to laugh and started calling us terrorists. My friend almost pointed his middle finger at the lecturer. The people sitting around us were all Chinese while we were the only two non-Chinese there.

Ibrahim, Male, Singapore

To add, both the respondents in Singapore and Sydney gave evidences of how the phenotypical profiling of Muslims is at times problematic with Indian Hindus and Sikhs often being mistaken for being Muslims.

The media is always portraying us as stereotypes. They identify us by our appearance. Our colour, our beard… So when the target is actually Muslims, at times other South Asians will also get bashed.

Mizan, Male, Sydney

Muslim youth respondents also point to the adverse experiences in school, with pressures coming primarily from peers and figures of authority. They are unequivocal in their view that the media is the main source of discrimination against their respective Muslim communities. It is interesting to note that “colour” as alluded to by the respondent or more accurately, phenotypical features are a big part of media and public discourse on the presence of Muslim minorities. As a result of the problematic emphasis on biological traits when constructing the Muslim other, many non-Muslims who share the “Muslim look” in Singapore and Sydney such as South Asian Hindus and Lebanese Christians also “feel the heat” that is being applied to the Muslim community.

A number of Muslim youth also talked about the culture of fear that has spread as a result of the negative portrayals of Muslims in the media. In fact, these portrayals have affected the perceptions of non-Muslims and Muslims alike. A number of respondents displayed their empathy towards the non-Muslim consumers by expressing that, if they were to judge Muslims through what they see and read in the media, they would also end up fearing the Muslims. Hence, the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media has also coloured the judgment of Muslim youth, leading some of them to a “boycott” of their own youth.
People will always find someone to hate. It used to be the Jews, then the communists... now is the turn of the Muslims. Sometimes even I am scared by my own people. Like when I’m travelling in the train and these boys come up, I will move to the next carriage. I will be pissed off if I get killed when the two sides are fighting this war on terrorism.

Saleh, Male, Singapore

The negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in mainstream media serves as the primary motivation among Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney to “boycott” the mainstream media. In Singapore, this is best demonstrated in the youth’s shunning of the Malay daily, *Berita Harian*.

*Table 16: Percentage of Readers for Berita Harian*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
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<td>16%</td>
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<th>Age Group</th>
<th>15-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
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<tr>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
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Berita Harian is the only Malay national newspaper in Singapore. Traditionally, the newspaper also makes fertile ground for the incorporating of new blood into positions of state political elites (Kamaludeen and Aljunied, 2009:90-97). The close relationship between the state and the Malay/Muslim journalists can be traced back to the pioneer batch of the Political Action Party (PAP) Malay Members of Parliament (MP)s such as Othman Wok and even the first President of Singapore, Yusof Ishak. The study above, conducted in 2004, proved instructive to cement the point of a youth boycott. The study shows that the percentage of readers is especially low amongst the youth, the educated and the affluent, and between the years of 1996-2001, Berita Harian has lost almost half of its readers. This drastic drop (16% to 8.9%) is especially significant given that the consumption of the state owned English Straits Times (56% to 56%), Chinese Lianhe Zaobao, Lianhe Wanbao, Shin Min Daily (22% to 25%) and Tamil Murasu (2.8% to 4.5%) newspapers have remained the same or increased over the same period of time.

Rise of the Cyber-Ummah and E-Muftis

Having “boycotted” the mainstream media sources, the youth in the Digital Age are intuitively driven to the cyberspace in navigating the negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam in mainstream media. Youth utilise the Internet to seek alternative sources of information, build solidarity with other youth and even stamp their viewpoints through online forums and discussions. This platform becomes even more important for Muslim youth who feel misrepresented in the mainstream media.

The Singapore media mainly just report stories from the major networks in the West. From my research online, I came to know that the global war on terrorism is all filled with lies by the media. I form my opinions through studies like the one done by http://www.rense.com/general26/penta.htm. Anyway this has already been written in the Qur’an Chapter 2 Verse 29 and Chapter 26 on The Poets.

Zali, Male, Singapore

I boycott the media like Fox News and Sky News and Australian newspapers like The Daily Telegraph or as they call it, the “Daily
Tele-crap”. I’ll go to Al Jazeera or read journals for resources. It’s made people a lot more afraid and worried about my religion and my beliefs. It’s become a very impatient and intolerant city. A fearful city. Not too sure why, but probably because of recent world events and media portrayal.

Adi, Male, Sydney

With the central role of information technology and interfaces, we also increasingly see a shift to the cyber-ummah as the alternative source of religious knowledge. There are also many websites which offer access to e-muftis and provide online fatwas on issues which are close to the hearts of Muslim youth. Muslim youth are looking for guidance and stewardship from the Internet and are embracing Islamic websites such as Islamicity.com, Fatwa-Online.com and Islamonline.net as sources of information. This youthful assertion of their freedom from the traditional mosque community is as empowering as it is alienating. It ensures the paradox that the youth can be connected to a global Muslim community whilst being in the confines of his own room. This freedom, some will argue, sits well with the youth spirit, as it allows the youth to “shop around” for fatwas. The danger is that, this shopping around for ideas is utilised to appropriate rulings that reinforce the preconceived beliefs of the youth.

Both Australian and Singapore authorities are wary of voices on the Internet, which they perceive would threaten the stability of the modern, secular state, for example, the calls for an Islamic state by certain sections of the Muslim community. Conservative Sydney politician, Reverend Fred Nile, for example, has called for the “removal of Islamic murderous threat videos against Australians by Muslim youth gangs from YouTube”. Both governments have therefore initiated a campaign to manage the cyberspace to regulate the discursive space of religious discussion in the virtual world. For example, the Australian government has also taken issue with religious sermons by local clerics posted on YouTube where martyrdom was encouraged. In Singapore, two Internet bloggers were prosecuted under the Sedition Act in court in 2006 for making racist anti-Malay comments, as a pre-emptive move against retaliations by the Muslim community. Nonetheless, even with national
agencies clamping down on uncompromising hard-line clerics, one concern of the Singapore and Australian governments is that the increasingly Internet or media-savvy Muslim youth is relying on the cyberspace by accessing overseas-based websites that issue *fatwas* to obtain religious guidance on issues such as *jihad*.

The advent of the Internet revolution has helped give rise to what Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (2009) has described as the global *muftis* and the new media *sheikhs*. From internationally renowned Islamic scholars to little known individuals whose academic credentials cannot be easily verified these websites readily issue religious edicts, upon enquiry. This is a stark departure from the traditional ways of gaining knowledge. Hence, this poses a challenge to conventional institutions of religious authority, leading to the deconstruction of traditional notions of *halal* consumption, amongst other issues. At the heart of these debates would be institutions such as *MUIS* in Singapore which acts as the centralised accreditation institution of *halal* foods and products. Arguably, this has driven the mind-set of dependency amongst the major sections of the Muslim community. However, as this thesis will show, there exist pockets of individuals who resist the limiting nature of the *MUIS*’ notion of *halal*-ness. This is in stark contrast to Sydney where multiple sources of authority exist in a competitive environment. To date, the *Australia Federation of Islamic Councils*, *Halal Certification Authority Australia*, *Halal Australia*, *Australian Halal Food Services* and *Islamic Co-ordinating Council of Australia Inc.* make up some of the stakeholders in the *halal* market. Inadvertently, such a set up promotes a richer discourse of what constitute the *halal* and what do not. In any case, the Information Age of the 21st century and the democratisation and liberalisation of knowledge brought about by the Internet have brought about a crisis of religious authority (Turner, 2007). From the perspective of the sovereign state, these developments also pose challenges to any attempts at the national level to create unique Singaporean or Australian Muslim identities.
Boycotts as Moral Protest

From the interviews that were conducted, it can be surmised that a significant number of Muslim youth abstain from purchasing one product or another, due to reasons relating to their piety. One of the most popular forms of boycotts are those extended to local franchises of global corporations which are deemed to be contributing to the oppression of Muslims overseas.

Currently, I’m not buying any food that supports Israel… like McDonald’s and Starbucks. There’s these websites that tells those companies that support Israel. And I had received several messages on this as in SMS and email.

Lynn, Female, Singapore

Besides not buying non-halal stuff, I boycott all Danish products because of the cartoon issue. We got to give it to them.

Bob, Male, Sydney

A young restaurateur, Rizal, also elaborated that not only does he not consume the products, he also does not sell them. It is therefore common for one to get responses like, “No Coca-Cola, only Pepsi” when ordering a cola drink at these outlets. Hence, it has to be emphasised that whilst participating in these boycotts, these young businessman are not essentially anti-Western.

It’s about where the profit goes to. I don’t drink Coca-Cola because the company donates a percentage of their profits to Israel. In fact, my restaurant also does not sell the drink for this reason and my restaurant is not the only one to do this. I know a few Muslim restaurants in Singapore, for example the one in Sembawang and the one at Jalan kayu, that do not sell this particular drink for this particular reason too. And Baba’s Curry Powder as they too donate to Sai Baba. It is a business to support their religious movement. It’s about where the profit goes to.

Rizal, Male, Singapore

The youth hope that their collective action would achieve two objectives. Firstly, they are optimistic that their boycotting of consumer goods will impact these corporations economically and force them to respond and address their concerns,
hence opening up the discourse. Even if this is not possible, the respondents will still refrain from purchasing these goods as they do not want to be partisan or complicit to efforts that will harm Muslim interest.

I boycott companies which contribute to Israel like Coca Cola, Sara Lee, McDonald’s and Crispy Kreme. Whenever, I feel like having them, my friends will stop me. They are better than me and will improve me. These boycotts do work because a few months ago McDonald’s had to respond in The Torch newspaper in Bankstown.

Syuhada, Female, Sydney

In Singapore, popular Western fast food outlets such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and McDonald’s cater to the Muslim market and are all certified halal. The global coffee chain, Starbucks, has more than 15,000 outlets around the world, 57 of which are in Singapore. McDonald’s has more than 100 outlets in Singapore. It is no wonder then that the recent upsurge in economic boycott of these global symbols of youth culture had the representatives of these corporations making public statements. Both McDonald's and Starbucks in Singapore have denied the content of the short-message-services (SMS) being circulated, alleging their affiliation to Israel.

This is not something we have done, or would do. Please be assured that in countries where McDonald's operates, McDonald's is locally-run, serves local customers, employs local people, supports local charities and pays local taxes.

Ms Linda Ming, Communications Director, McDonald's Restaurants

Definitely a rumour… Starbucks is a non-political organisation. The company, regardless of where it is operating, does not contribute to Jewish organisations

Ruth Yam, Marketing Manager, Starbucks Coffee Singapore

In the other form of boycott engaged by youth, the consumer boycotts described by respondents in both Singapore and Sydney also display a local element. Muslim youth from both cities are wary as to whether they are directly or indirectly contributing to other religious movements in their country. In Sydney, where the
author went into a *halal* food joint selling Indonesian food which benefits a church, a Muslim youth was overheard saying to her companion,

This is the first and only time I am going to eat here. The proceeds of the eatery goes towards befitting the church. Look at the adverts of the church on the walls… Even the packaging of the mineral water that is sold advertises the church.

Nur, Female, Sydney

In this aspect, it can be argued that the plurality of the “religious marketplace” in the two cities has led to competitiveness among the Muslim adherents. The raison d'être stems from their uneasiness that they are making financial contributions to the evangelical efforts of another religion. Hence, it can be argued that economic boycotts are also activated not just when the producers are perceived to be oppressing Muslims but also when they are seem to be advancing a religious cause. I argue here that to the discerning Muslim youth consumer, it then becomes important that the product that they are buying is either seen as Muslim or “secular”. It has to be pointed out, however, as minorities living in multicultural societies; both Muslim communities do not have any means to exact punitive measures to discipline those who do not conform. Rather, the “punishment” comes in the form of social stigma and social pressure from family and friendship groups as described by the above respondent.

Be that as it may, there are debates within the Muslim youth fraternity with respect to the viability and justification for using boycotting as a form of resistance.

I don’t believe in boycotting consumer goods like Coca Cola and something like that. Why punish small businesses?

Asfar, Female, Singapore

For example, if you boycott Westfield you may hurt some innocent Muslim retailers in Westfield who may be using their businesses as a major supporter of initiatives that may be of great assistance to the Islamic community.

Yasmin, Female, Sydney
I don’t involve myself in the boycotts. I feel that these boycotts are also promoted as a business strategy to bring a competitor down.

Rahman, Male, Sydney

A number of respondents in both Singapore and Sydney believe that the boycott of certain consumer goods will, in the final analysis, hurt the small businesses more than the actual target of huge multinational corporations. One respondent from Sydney even went as far as dismissing the role of piety in the Muslim boycotts. He alleged that these boycotts can actually be used as a strategy to undercut business competitors. However, what is crucial is that, even among those who choose not to be part of the boycotting movement, all the respondents interviewed have either entertained the idea or debated the concept of boycotting either with others or within themselves. In an effort not to affect “innocent bystanders”, a number of respondents have refrained from boycotting as a strategy of resistance.

Compounding these debates on whether one should participate in boycott activities, youth respondents also talked about the reactive nature of consumer boycotts and how sentiments wane with time as a particular event fades from social memory, leading to similar boycotts being short-lived in the past.

The efforts to boycott these products increase whenever a war is taking place and then it dies off together with the conflict. Sometimes I will try but it is inevitable that we purchase something that will contradict the spirit of the boycott. It is really hard. The best alternative to me is to buy something that is Australian made whose profits are not going to proceed somewhere else and benefit Israel for example.

Yusuf, Male, Sydney

Nonetheless, Muslim youth are aware of the past successes of such collective action as a peaceful way of resistance. Among the successful examples that they cited were the boycotting of British goods during the Indian struggle for independence from Britain and the South African fight against the apartheid. In 2002, millions of Arab consumers, enraged by the Israeli military offensive in the West Bank, turned away
from US-branded goods. As a result, some companies suffered 50 per cent losses in sales (*The Straits Times*, 11 January 2009).

As this chapter has shown, although the adoption of boycotting as a form of moral protest is far from unanimous, it persists in the consciousness of every Muslim as its cyber presence develops over time. A number of significant strands can be delineated from these observations. The first point of view reflects the entrenched nature of global popular youth culture. The second takes an economic perspective citing the minority status of Muslims in Singapore and Sydney. There are those who are sceptical, that given the small percentage of Muslims in both cities, their efforts would make any significant impact even if every single one of them subscribes to the movement. The third argument takes a more social perspective. It states that boycotting consumer products has the unintended impact on those who are not the subjected targets. The final argument takes a theological perspective questioning if boycotting is permitted in Islam. There are those who take the view that the Prophet had never used economic boycotting as a weapon.

**Making Sense of the Networked Society and Economic Jihad**

The Digital Revolution brings the global social movements to the attention of the Muslim youth. As seen in the above quotes, the youth also take cues from the actions of Muslim countries and their leaders. Some of these countries have imposed trade embargoes on Israel as an expression of their protest towards its activities. Recently, boycotts have also been used in response to other issues. For example, there was a boycott of Danish products in Muslim countries in protest against the unflattering cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in the Danish press (Binh, Ngo and Tawada, 2008:205).

Closer to home, amongst their Muslim majority Indonesian and Malaysian neighbours, calls for consumer boycotts are common amongst Muslim activists and even politicians. In Indonesia, Muslim youth rampaged against Kentucky Fried Chicken during the Israeli attack on Gaza, urging a boycott of US brands such as *Coca-Cola* as a sign of protest. In addition to *Coca-Cola*, a list of more than 100
other products has been circulated ranging from food to beauty and clothing such as Starbucks, Colgate, McDonald’s and Maybelline. Slogans announcing “Boycott Danish products” were rampant in the Indonesian blogosphere, calling for the rest of the Muslim world for collective action (Lim, 2008:187-188). In 2009, Islamic groups such as the Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia and the Indonesian religious council urged Muslims in the country to boycott US-made products to pressure Washington to halt the Israeli attacks on Gaza.

A boycott is the best way for us to protest Zionist cruelty against the Palestinian people as consumers can weaken the economy of countries like Israel and its ally, the US…We urge everybody who loves peace and is against war to support our campaign. We must send a clear signal to Israel to stop the assaults in Gaza.

Ma'mor Osman, Secretary-General, Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia

In a massive campaign, more than 2,000 Muslim restaurants in Malaysia pledged to remove Coca-Cola from their menus and many others, both as groups and individuals, have launched an “economic jihad” against Israel and the United States. Events such as these would inevitably prompt Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney to evaluate their stance towards taking similar actions.

Particularly for the Singapore Muslim youth, the already established cultural linkages between Singapore and Malaysia, through affinities in shared socio-historical backgrounds, kinship linkages, language, religion and popular culture, mean that the Singapore Muslim youth are very much attuned to events from across the Causeway. Therefore, the already established cultural flows would also lead to their awareness of the debates amongst key Malaysian politicians with respect to such issues. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad had been a fore figure in calling for a global boycott of the US dollar and US-made products.

If you stop accepting US currency, the US can't trade and can't make any money, it will become very poor and it will have to stop the production of more and more weapons in order to kill people,' he told a press conference. 'We should not be buying all these weapons from the US, we can buy from the Russians if we must have aeroplanes and
things like that,' he added. 'People must act... they won't die if they don't drink Coca-Cola.

Mahathir Mohamad, Former Malaysian Prime Minister

However, current Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak explicated the complexity of the campaign when he said that it is up to the individual to boycott American products to protest against the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

Their franchises here are Malaysian companies and some of them are Bumiputra companies like KFC, which is owned by JCorp, and JCorp belongs to the state government of Johor. So what do you do with Kentucky Fried Chicken, KFC? Do you tell people to stop eating chicken produced by KFC? What do you do? It's a very complex world.

Najib Tun Razak, Malaysian Prime Minister

The Malaysian example is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it illuminates the global discourse vis-à-vis boycotting among Muslim communities. It not only shows the collective action of Muslims on the ground and their representatives, but also the conversations among the political elite. Secondly, it is crucial for the Singapore case study. Owing to its unique position as a minority population in a Sinicised environment, located in between Malay Muslim dominated countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, Malay Muslims in Singapore are often juxtaposed against a barometer of the Malay Other. This has been reflected in how other expressions of popular culture in neighbouring countries are readily embraced by Malay Muslims in Singapore. For example, movies made in Malaysia as well as Malaysian nasheed groups like Raihan, are very popular among Muslims in Singapore, with the latter having held huge concerts in the city-state. Popular trends among youth and terminologies coined across the causeway such as lepak (loafing) and rempit (“ramp it” in “bikie” terminology) often find its way into the everyday lexicon of Muslim youth in Singapore. Whilst these popular cultural expressions have found their way into the Singapore scene, so have the cultural practices of resistance.
In similar vein, for many Muslim youth in Sydney, their connections with extended families in the countries of their parents’ birthplace provide a compelling backdrop for their attachment to global events. They have a strong sense of affiliation to the social movements taking place in their countries of origin as more often than not, one or more of their family members will be participating directly in them.

Half of my extended family is here in Australia and the other half is back in Lebanon. I keep in touch with them through websites like Facebook. Besides the Internet, my family and I also phone our relatives every now and then. In fact, I am going this December to visit them and to potentially find a bride there... The boycott movement is stronger in the Middle East as they are sanctioned by the state.

Alif, Male, Sydney

As seen in the comment above, the global cultural flow in migrant communities is not only maintained by means of telephone and the Internet. A number of young Muslims spoke about their desire to marry someone from their country of origin. Hence, the idea of a global ummah is not only one of an “imagined community” but also cemented by matrimonial links. These alliances are also functional in the sense that they provide a chance for future spouses and their families to immigrate. And, with immigration, young Muslims are not only exposed but also engaged in the culture and ideas from their country of origin. For some, this acts as a reaffirmation of their cultural identity and heritage.

Living in an increasingly globalised world, it is only logical that the cultural flows that affect diasporic communities are also true for the reverse. Global communications and transportation has ensured that the latest trends are captured at both ends. Furthermore, donations from diasporic Muslims such as those in Australia more specifically are also funding the education of youth back in the countries of origin (Leonard, 2007:280). Indeed, in her work on South Asian Muslim youth in America, Maira (2008) observed that the youth identification with their native homelands like Pakistan and India are based primarily on their consumption of
popular culture such as *Bollywood* films and South Asian music which they accessed amongst others, through the Internet and satellite television. In their efforts, they conversed with other diasporic migrant youth of their community and in the process found similarities in their tastes. The home is transformed into a fundamental vassal in the consumption of this popular culture where extended families access their imagined homeland. The author raises the question of the flexibility of citizenship and as for whom it is deemed flattering and for whom it is portrayed as a threat. In a time when the *War on Terror* leads to a rigidifying of immigration and citizenship laws, Muslim youth are turning to popular culture, their lived realities in the workforce and education opportunities to make sense of their sense of place in the United States.

The main difference in state management of the cyberspace between the two cities is the degree of control over the Internet, with the Singapore government being more active with its attempts. However, as this research has consistently shown over the last four chapters, as much as the state wants to assert itself in cyberspace, this is easier said than done. Young Muslims are consistently finding spaces and creating networks and building new solidarities over the Internet. As such, more often than not, the stumbling block for Muslim youth mobilisation over the Internet is the panoptic situation which realises itself in the form of self-censorship. This results in an *individualisation* of Muslim youth resistance in Singapore vis-à-vis the mobilisation and vibrant discussions in Sydney.

**Conclusion – The Alienation of the “Alienated”**

It is fundamental for us to look at youth resistance through consumption in order to appreciate the nuances of popular youth culture. The cases stated in this chapter and in the previous two chapters demonstrate that Muslim youth participate in the global youth culture even if they resist the latter’s homogenising tendencies. It also explores the possibility in the emergence of unique Muslim youth cultures that “speak back” to the powers that be. The above studies have discussed how the transnational reach of the media and the proliferation of youth-driven new media are
shaping the opinions of Muslim youth, leading to a renegotiation of values and a rebranding of Islam. What the thesis has shown is that the Muslim youth cannot be caricatured to fit into either a liberalisation or fundamentalisation model. A Muslim youth fits uneasily into both the moral compasses as delineated by each camp.

This chapter also illuminates the inherent tension between the ummah and the state. The tension exists between the particular and the universal. The state is a limiting concept which hinges upon the concept of sovereignty. It necessitates the notion of difference to distinguish and make distinct itself from the other. The ummah, on the other hand, is a transnational concept that binds the Muslims of the world together into an unbreakable chain. It is sui generis, an external that the Muslim is born into. It is a global fraternity of brotherhood that sparks off social action and from time to time social change. The ummah traverses borders and requires a transcendentelisation of the individual consciousness. Arguing for a boycott on the basis of a moral good for the ummah gives the campaign its ideological edge. As James Jasper has eloquently argued in his book, *The Art of Moral Protest*, “consumer boycotts attract more participants when they provide outlets for articulating moral visions than when they simply ask for changes in purchases” (1999:266). The three empirical chapters as a collective present the attempts by the Muslim youth to constantly negotiate their piety vis-à-vis a globalising ummah and a globalising youth culture. To categorise young Muslims as a social group that is alienated is not only reductive but also misleading. To be sure, Muslim youth are also active participants in the alienation of dominant youth cultures through their appropriating, subverting and creating of popular youth cultures.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the impact of globalisation on the lives of young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney through a study of popular youth culture in the two cities. I have compared two groups of minority youth, living in an urban, secular and multicultural setting, across three aspects of popular culture: hip-hop music, tattooing and cultural consumption. Through this, the research set out to glean how the strategies employed to reconcile popular culture with piety in the face of different styles of state management get played out in these youthful assertions. It is undeniable that for young Muslims in Singapore and Sydney, “popular culture provides important frameworks of meaning and social identity” (Mandaville, 2009: 149). Whilst the Islamic nature of modern popular culture as practised by young Muslims engaging in popular culture seems complex and at times contradictory, it is apparent that piety remains an important consideration.

Young Muslims of the September 11 generation are faced with tough questions over what it means to be “Muslim” due to the increasing securitization by nation-states and the focus of the general public on their Muslim minority populations. September 11, as a global event, has resulted in many young Muslims having to come to terms with their piety regardless of whether they claim to be “devout” adherants of the religion. For those who consider themselves “religious”, September 11 presents them with the ultimate challenge of defending their religion as well as religious practices such as fasting during the month of Ramadhan and performing daily prayers. Nonetheless, even among respondents who accede to not “practicing” their religion, many find themselves in positions of having to re-examine their identity amidst enhanced scrutiny. Popular youth culture, hence, often becomes the common arena whereby these acts of piety, in all its diversity, are performed.
The study had set out with two research questions in mind. The first being, *to what extent does globalisation result in a convergence of popular culture among young Muslims?* With Muslims in Singapore and Sydney facing similar challenges such as their minority status and low socio-economic position relative to the larger society, as elaborated in Chapter 3, the predicament these young urban Muslims face in their everyday lives further coincides with the broader processes of globalisation that bring together the September 11 generation living in the Information Age. Although this results in a convergence of youth culture to a certain extent, youth participation in popular culture is often mediated and limited by the state structures and other socio-cultural actors in place, resulting in the different manifestations of popular Muslim youth culture.

Globalisation therefore does not denote a free cultural flow. Chapter 4 captured the intricacies of global consumption and local production of youth culture through the case study of hip-hop music. In the liberal climate of Sydney, hip-hop culture amongst Muslim youth are manifested at various levels, from the basic appropriation of hip-hop as a mainstream, consumerist form of popular culture, to the unproblematic internalisation of a subgenre of *gangsta* hip-hop and to a more critical consumption of hip-hop music that gives voice to those who are at the margins of society. The production of critical hip-hop is, however, largely absent in highly-controlled Singapore. I argued that even where critical hip-hop exists, it is in the main, one produced by Singapore Malay Muslim youth for Singapore Malay Muslim youth. In other words, hip-hop culture amongst Muslim youth in Singapore reflects an internalisation of the state discourse on the “Malay Problem” as opposed to the engagement in the larger issues of citizenship, inter-ethnic dynamics and state-society relations as reflected in the Sydney example. The regimented management of the music scene, coupled with the “deviant” identity markers attached to certain music genres and certain modes of performativity, have motivated some young Muslims in Singapore to assert themselves through national talent shows. Hence, contrary to the *lyrical jihadis* amongst Sydney Muslim youth, the Singapore case
demonstrates an understanding of *jihad* as more of a personal struggle for excellence. With a focus on self-renewal, the *gaze of jihad* is thus directed at the individual.

In exploring the tattooing culture amongst Muslim youth in the two cities, Chapter 5 demonstrated the politics of space and the salience of cultural capital in shaping the direction of popular youth culture. Singapore’s *nationalisation* of Chinese gangs is contrasted against Sydney’s *perfect competition* among gangs. Since power is connected to prestige, and culture is the primary source of group solidarity (Bourdieu, 1984), the dominant Chinese members act as gatekeepers to the gang culture in Singapore. In order to negotiate social mobility or even to exercise solidarity with the rest of the group, the Singaporean Muslim youth gang members in Chinese gangs embrace this alternative cultural identity marker. However, a transformation of their identity does not automatically lead to an enhancement of their social status. Ironically, the bodily inscriptions can also be interpreted as signs of subservience and a pledge of allegiance to an alternative social order. On the other hand, state non-partisanship and non-patronage in Sydney allow for the mushrooming of self-styled gangs competing in a marketplace of signs and symbols. Hence, the forming of Islamic gangs and adoption of “Islamic tattoos” in an age of Islamophobia can be seen as a counterculture against the dominant strain. Islamic tattoos can then be understood to be a rejection of the dominant cultural values and an act of defiance against the stereotyping of Muslims in the larger society.

Chapter 6 explored critical consumption and consumer boycotts as direct attempts at understanding the strategies of Muslim youth resistance. In Singapore, structures in place in the form of legislation, political condemnation or panoptic self-surveillance discourage a mobilisation of Singaporean youth, even through the Internet. To a large degree, this then “individualises” any resistance at the communal level. In Sydney, the boycotting and protest culture is not something uncommon in larger mainstream society. In fact, groups that support “Muslim causes” such as the Palestinian issue are also well represented by non-Muslim individuals. Spaces are also provided for within the realm of national public consumption. Another key difference lies in Australia being a country of diverse domestic produce. Hence many
respondents have turned to promoting Australian-made products as a strategy to thwart profits from leaving the country. Therefore, boycotting also presents a space for the Sydney Muslim youth to reaffirm their national identity and flaunt their Aussie Pride through the act of buying local produce.

Whilst the relationship between religiosity and consumer ethics (Vitell and Paolillo, 2003; Vitell, Paolillo and Singh, 2005; Vitell, 2009) has gained prominence over the last few years, the idea of a “Muslim consumer ethics” has not been broached in an academic setting. There is probably a good reason for this given the plurality of views on the ground surrounding the issue leading to the untenable position of defending a monolithic “Muslim” approach to consumption. In this light, Chapter 6 provided us with an interesting perspective for one to see the discourse of a “Muslim consumer ethics” as exhibited in young Muslim men and women who, in their consumption choices, transcend a “halal consciousness” (Kamaludeen, Pereira and Turner, 2009) paradigm to include a global geo-political mapping of events affecting the Muslim ummah. Contrary to popular rhetoric that the consumption patterns of youth are largely determined by the mass media, the chapter demonstrated that the choice is often more complex than one might think. The decision to purchase a particular product is very much a rational choice and places the Muslim youth respondents in a position of attempting to reconcile their piety with popular consumption trends.

Instead of assuming an unproblematic and uninterrupted producer-consumer relationship, this thesis has argued for the pivotal function of the state and its apparatuses in directing and mediating global cultural flows. The study has thus shown that it is necessary for us to bring the state back into the study of the globalisation of culture. The four empirical chapters contrasted Singapore’s paternalistic style with Sydney’s liberal approach. The comparison demonstrates that although Singapore and Sydney are two highly globalised cities in the Asia-Pacific (according to international globalisation indexes), states can take on different paths in achieving this end.
As an extension, popular Muslim youth culture in the two cities is also a response to the different paths taken by the two states, as state policies and management of its youth and Muslim community shape the variations of Muslim youth culture that is possible. The micro-management of the Singaporean Muslim youth tends to result in its youth culture taking on more assimilative attributes, as opposed to the laissez-faire management of Sydney Muslim youth, which leads to a more competitive environment in Sydney. In the latter, more salient forms of “Islamic” expressions are being flouted in the identity market. This had been an important area of exploration in this thesis.

My second research question asked whether Muslim youth in Singapore and Sydney are experiencing forms of alienation which affect their capacity for social participation. To answer this question, I set out to study how hip-hop culture, tattooing practices and youth resistance through consumption capture the struggle of Muslim youth in reconciling competing ethnic and religious identities with secular, national identities and other sources of selfhood. This thesis argues that Muslim youth are not alienated as conventionally conceived. Rather, young Muslims succeed in gaining entry into popular youth culture to varying degrees, as global cultural flows and forms of piety interact with locally promulgated forms of popular culture. Overcoming restrictions imposed upon them arising out of their social class and status as well as other sources of moral guardianship within society, a plurality of religious rationalities thrives amidst an individualisation of views by young Muslims. Their active participation in popular youth culture thus creates dynamic fields where social alienation is challenged. However, as local and global gatekeepers seek to maintain a “puritan” view of youth culture, this result in some Muslim youth existing at the interstices of local and global youth culture.

Chapter 4 demonstrated how social alienation is contested through the use of hip-hop music that gives a voice to those at the margins of society. Youth in both cities infuse the notion of jihad in their hip-hop activism albeit in different ways. On one hand, the Sydney Muslim youth manages to resist the exaltation of misogynous themes in hip-hop and the conservativeness of Islamic music such as the nasheed by
making a distinction between the terms “Muslim hip-hop” and “Islamic hip-hop”. On the other hand, the Singapore Muslim youth appropriate hip-hop to advance the notion of a “progressive Malay” in order to thwart the embedded image of the uneducated, rebellious youth that was attached to the Malay Rockers of the 1970s.

The salience of a hip-hop culture among Muslim youth respondents reflects what Appadurai described as a “disjointed community of sentiment” across differing, even oppositional, social and political landscapes (Appadurai, 1996) that traverse national and ideological boundaries. Hip-hop culture offered symbols of defiance, a platform to speak the truth to power, and a sense of solidarity among those who feel a sense of exclusion from society. Hence, the appropriation of hip-hop culture by young Muslim groups represents a manifestation of broader shared sentiments. Hip-hop iconography and symbolic vocabularies have gained profound meaning beyond American soil. From its global popularity, we can extricate “comparable rationales for attraction, which point to a broad community of sentiment” (Prestholdt, 2009).

Chapter 5 examined the culture of tattooing among Muslim youth and demonstrated how the body is used as a site of contestation amidst a competitive environment in Sydney and a controlled environment in Singapore. Not unlike the hip-hop example, youth tattooing practices simultaneously present a response to moral guardians who proscribe tattooing such as religious authorities, potential employers, family members, and also pose as a challenge to the norms of what constitutes acceptable tattooing. Nonetheless, with many Muslim youth having discovered, or are discovering a youthful, popular and chic “Islam” that is a potent mix of Muslim themes and global consumer culture, it has become increasingly plausible to reconcile a formal rejection of tattooing as haram as well as an implicit acceptance of tattooing as another aspect of popular youth culture.

Chapter 6 demonstrated, firstly, how young Muslims in the Digital Age make informed and critical choices in their consumption of mainstream media that is often deemed to be perpetuating a jaundiced and unrepresentative view of Muslim youth. Secondly, whether these youth in both cities partake in consumer boycott, the very
notion persists in the consciousness of every Muslim youth respondent as they find themselves in a position where they need to reconcile their piety with their choice of consumer products. In this regard, the youth themselves can be seen as one of the gatekeepers who seek to maintain a puritan view of youth culture as these two dimensions have the effect of shaping and directing popular Muslim youth cultures in the two cities.

The four empirical chapters collectively present attempts by the Muslim youth to constantly negotiate their piety vis-à-vis a globalising ummah and a globalising youth culture. The concepts that I have advanced in the chapters such as homological imagination and competitive/assimilative tattooing are tools that explain how young Muslims straddle the ambiguities of a global religion, an ethnic identity which is communal and a secular national environment which is inherently limiting. However, to generalise Muslim youth as an alienated social group is not only reductive but also misleading. As this study has reflected, Muslim youth are also active participants in the alienation of dominant youth cultures through their appropriating, subverting and creating of popular youth cultures.

**Muslim Youth Culture and Globalisation**

Globalisation, as a political, economic, and cultural force, operates as much through the production of similarities as well as differences. As a result, the “local” might either work together with or resist structures of globalisation by partaking in various forms of global religious patriotism, national ideology and ethnic pride that both dominate and marginalise - as shown in the case of Muslim youth in Sydney and Singapore. Going further, the thesis also moves away from a homogenised understanding of globalisation to a more nuanced notion of the “local”, demonstrating both the local and global dialectics that contribute to the functional and substantive rationalities of Muslim youth culture.

There are a number of observations that can be gleaned from comparing the two case studies. Firstly, following Bourdieu, the structural conditions of the local field influence the dispositions of its members. In particular, the degree of the state’s
management of Muslim youth influences the manifestation of Muslim youth culture. Although the digital revolution has allowed for increased homological imagination among Muslim youth transnationally, the practice of youth culture may still, in the main, be shaped by state policies. This can be understood at two levels; policies targeting the Muslim community specifically and the governance of the population at large. The presence, degree and the strategies of resistance are determined by the level of tolerance towards civil disobedience as delineated by the state. To add, there are also other centre-periphery relationships within local society that the youth has to negotiate. The Muslim youth’s relationship with the other dominant ethnic groups, documents the tensions in the appropriation of culture to secure and inculcate within each member, the “conversion rate” for the type of capital with which each group is best provided. It is important for us to be aware of the multiple centre-periphery relationships that exist in order to understand the context in which Muslim youth culture develops.

The second observation is that there are multiple and disparate centres of youth cultural influence. This inevitably challenges the discourse that promotes a homogenised notion of globalisation; particularly, that it is either about the Americanisation of the young or the Arabisation of Muslims. The divergence and departure from a homogenised view of globalisation hence need to be understood against a framework of the dialectic relationship between the resistant “local”, in confronting the “global”, so as to avoid the production of dichotomous and over-simplified categories of what globalisation entails and to accentuate the complexity of the social constructions of “the local” (Lukose, 2005). As this thesis has shown, an integral aspect of understanding the complexity of popular Muslim youth culture is to consider the style of state governance of its young Muslim populace in Sydney and Singapore. Its significant bearings are evident in the differential responses of the youth, which have allowed the young to map their unique religious, political, social and cultural development. To this end, it will not be farfetched to surmise that new ummahs are formed all the time. Whether the youth identify with the sense of community depends on happenings and incidences that they feel significant to them.
A particular event can change one’s idea of a community as youth culture evolve in response to national and local aspirations, and not merely the ummah’s aspirations. The sociological implication of this will be the development of multiple ummahs that will embody the distinctive characters that have been shaped by the socio-cultural dynamics of its people (Hassan, 2006).

Thirdly, whilst the study did not set out to examine the body as a focus of analysis, it is observed that the subject is central to the performativity of popular youth culture. The forms of popular culture analysed in the thesis follow how a youth body regimen is produced as a strategic tool in multicultural, secular environments such as Singapore and Sydney. Disciplined bodies are shaped through a systematic consumption of special foods, clothes and controlled participation in the spheres of social interaction. These levels of control need to be considered in relation to forms of production and consumption as well as in the context of various relationships of domination. This analysis builds upon modern notions of religious commodification in which it is often difficult to distinguish between traditional forms of piety and modern expressions of the consumer self (Kitiarsa, 2008). Body discipline is, in many respects, a prime example of modern rationalising tendencies. In the disenchanted world, all aspects of life become subordinated to bureaucratically organised patterns of behaviour. Muslim youth rationalisations and performance of Islamic/Muslim hip-hop culture, competitive or assimilative tattooing patterns and the development of a Muslim consumer ethics all focuses on the body as an exertion of religious “sensibilities”.

Finally, it is perhaps pertinent to contextualise this study of young Muslims amidst the debate currently raging on globally about the place of minority Muslims living in secular multicultural societies. In Australia, the government’s continued decision to back multiculturalism as official state policy has been much criticised. Recently, Julia Gillard’s government was charged with “rowing against the tide” and being “out of step” with other developed countries. Many national leaders such as British Prime Minister David Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Dutch deputy Prime Minister Maxime Verhagen have
over the past year declared the failure of multiculturalism, with many pointing to their Muslim minorities as a prime example to argue their position. Verhagen, for example, declared that “(t)he Dutch no longer feel at home in their own country and immigrants are not entirely happy here either” and Cameron demanded a “more active, muscular liberalism”, one that goes beyond a tolerant society, which is neutral to differing cultural norms, and “says to its citizens: as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone”, to “a genuinely liberal country does much more. It believes in certain values and actively promotes them”. Sarkozy sums it up by proclaiming that “(i)f you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community, and if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome” (Akerman, 2011; Neighbour, 2011). Singapore’s Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, in his recent book aimed at the younger Singaporean audiences, echoed his European counterparts in decrying the place of its minority Muslims in his book, Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going (2011). He claimed that Singapore was progressing well “until the surge of Islam”. In calling for Muslims to be less strict in their Islamic practices, he added that “today, we can integrate all religions and races, except Islam”.

This thesis have shown, through the lens of popular youth culture, that looking at multicultural societies through the prism of two unchanging, monolithic and immoveable cultures is highly problematic. In their attempts to craft an identity for themselves, young Muslims, do not hark back to and imitate the cultural norms of the previous generations. As I have consistently demonstrated, Muslim youth living in highly globalised settings are engaged in a perpetual dialogue to reconcile their piety with shifting global trends, state demands and their peculiar socio-cultural contexts. In the process, the relationship of Muslim youth with their religion is one of constant re-reading and re-interpretation. Hence, seen through the eyes of these youth, multiculturalism can never mean, as the various national leaders have advocated, the formation of “certain values” or the development of a “single community”. On the contrary, multiculturalism has led to the formation and amalgamation of new norms and values that do not necessarily fit comfortably into a
neat “liberal” or “Islamic” category. The expression of popular Muslim youth culture is an unending project that draws its inspiration from multiple and disparate sources.

The empirical studies highlight that in order to overcome, if not, to negotiate their minority status, Muslim youth at times seek to embrace or integrate another dominant culture may it be in the form of another local culture or a foreign one. Placed within the pecking order of other competing cultural forms, Muslim youth respondents in Singapore and Sydney demonstrate that they understand the cultural norms of the majority and that they are flexible enough to redefine themselves in the image of these cultural norms, and even use these images to further their social status. It is worthy to note that even in an authoritarian country like Singapore where paths to becoming modern entails that each and every citizen subscribe to the ideals set by the ruling regime, the manipulation of self-identities become a means by which the Muslim youth ensure their survival.

The thesis has demonstrated that rather than the strict adherence to religious precepts, Muslim youth culture is crucially the result of social, political and economic factors. Whilst religion itself is not changing, the relationship of the globalised Muslim youth to their religion is. This can be seen in the increasing competition played out in the arena of youth culture. As a guide to the new global order, clear-cut associations among youth, popular culture, and globalisation obscure more than they reveal. It is important to note that while the thesis offers a perspective of how young Muslims develop a collective identity as part of the September 11 generation, it also argues that the Muslim youth engage in self-criticisms and re-examinations of their collective identity. These constitute a critical aspect of the cultural change that these re-examinations can cause. Thus, the cultural dilemmas and contradictions that young Muslims experience throughout play an important role in their breaking with that collective identity that allows some of them to advance a new discourse based on reflexive subjectivity.

A more nuanced understanding of the “local” enriches the ways in which globalisation can be conceptualised. Factoring in both state-society and inter-ethnic
relations within the “local” as marked sites of activity, coupled with the agency of Muslim youth, paints a more intimate picture of globalisation. An analysis of how young people form new Muslim identities by negotiating new globally-inflected spaces reveal these spaces to be specifically structured resulting in differential consequences for the youth. This must be understood in the engagement of Muslim youth with both the “local” and “global.”
**Annex: Profile of Respondents for In-depth Interviews**

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