Muslim Youth and the Mufti:
Youth discourses on identity and religious leadership under media scrutiny

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IN THANKS:

To Allah the All Compassionate for allowing me to attempt this work...

To my husband and children for supporting me throughout this work...

To Haneefa and Adam – you made life easier

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To the tranquil cafes of Brisbane for providing inspiration..

To my Muslim community – that we may be reminded,

and there may be some be some benefit in the reminder.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION:

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.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influences and discourses that young people from an Arabic speaking and Muslim background experience and respond to in developing their understanding of community political events and community identity. The research has focussed on the evolution of diverse leadership of their community, and debates on leadership particularly in terms of key events involving media and the community in relation to Sheikh Taj el Din Al Hilaly as the Mufti of Muslims in Australia. It has also explored the various influences on young people from family, religious and peer mentors in shaping the discourses in which they engage. This study has focussed on young men of Muslim background because these men are often seen as the most vulnerable to influence from radical leaders.

Based on interviews with young Arabic background Muslim males in South Western Sydney and an analysis of media representations of Islamic leadership focussing on a case study of events involving Sheikh al Hilaly in late 2006 and 2007, this research explores young Muslim men's perceptions of the role of the religious leader and what requirements they consider are necessary for religious leadership in the Australian Muslim community.

The thesis argues that these young men, in a climate of negative portrayal of their religion, their leaders and their community, negotiate their needs for relevant religious leadership through internal criticism while maintaining public support for defiant Muslim leaders in order to restore personal dignity when enduring an Islamophobic climate. It also argues that these young men recognise the inadequacy of their leaders in addressing such Islamophobia and draw on a diverse array of strategies to maintain ontological security - in particular a religious ‘framework of living’ and the development of an authentic Australian Islamic culture. Without a suitable ‘bridging dialogue’ between Oriental and Occidental perceptions of the Muslim community their sense of place and identity is significantly affected and they are vulnerable to brotherhoods offering membership in an ‘imagined community’ of a global Ummah with a more Islamist message.
Chapter 1: Background

The Muslim community in Australia and even the Muslim Lebanese community in Sydney is not a monolithic entity as it is often represented in political discourse, but comprises a wide diversity of ethnic groups, religious associations and religious adherence. In 1976 an attempt at unified representation and organization of the Muslim community was made with the establishment of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). It saw itself as the representative of the diverse Muslim community both nationally and internationally (El Erian 1990). In 1990, Sheikh Taj al Din Al Hilaly – then the controversial Egyptian Imam of the Lakemba mosque – was appointed to the position of Mufti by AFIC in a successful bid to forestall attempts to have him deported following anti-Jewish statements made during a talk at Sydney University in 1988 (Norington 2006). Although remaining as the leading Imam in the most populous mosque in Sydney – run by the Lebanese Muslim Association – Sheikh Taj Al Din Al Hilaly then assumed national importance as the appointed spiritual leader of the Australian and New Zealand Muslim community. He continued to be seen as a controversial figure whose statements were regularly interpreted as incompatible with the values of Australian society (Sheridan 2007) thereby reflecting negatively on the Islamic community he purported to represent. Despite calls for his resignation from government ministers and even members of his own community following each new controversy (Kerbaj 2006b), Sheikh Al Hilaly received vocal support from a substantial section of the Muslim community. Surprisingly, even though Sheikh Al Hilaly was not a youth leader and spoke little English, he appeared to have the support of Australian Muslim youth from his congregation. At the peak of his controversy in late 2006/2007 – the period analysed in this research – young supporters regarded him as being misunderstood and deliberately targeted. Popular online forums such as those carried by IslamicSydney.com carried comments such as ‘This sermon was not recent but they
made it popular now because of the famous DVD teenage rape case so they can blame muslims for everything’.¹

Much attention has been given to the defensive strategies utilized by marginalized young men from Arab background Muslim communities to perceived racism. This includes what Castells (as cited by Collins et al., 2000) calls ‘the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded’ whereby marginalised young men form their own exclusive groups as a resistance against perceived discrimination, and a type of ‘protest masculinity’ – an aggressive confrontational response which serves to restore male dignity in the face of humiliating racism. Both of these strategies were arguably demonstrated at that time by both Sheikh Al Hilaly and many of his supporters in response to what they alleged was wilful misrepresentation by the media and perceived Islamophobia². How then, did the youth of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s community interpret his comments, and the barrage of media criticism that he inspired? In particular, how and why did some Arab background young Muslim males identify with (or against) him and who assisted them in interpreting the moral panics and outrage that regularly surfaced in the mainstream media?

In May 2002, the Australian newspaper ran a daily series for 3 weeks titled “The Cultural Divide”. In this series it questioned the value of multiculturalism, the history and settlement practices of many Australian migrants and the ongoing debate about the nature of Australian identity. It tracked the settlement of many different ethnic and national groups since the removal of the White Australia Policy and demonstrated how the vast majority of migrants had managed to settle and integrate into Australian society in a productive and beneficial manner. The success of one group of migrants, however, was questioned in this series on almost a daily basis – the migrant Muslim community (Brearley 2002).

¹ Posted by BilalB, 26 October 2006, viewed online 16th June 2009, <http://muslimvillage.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=27550&hl=alhilaly&st=30> ² Waleed Aly was quoted on the popular online forum of Islamsydney.com as saying ‘They tend to view the controversy as a conspiracy of media and government - one more phase in the relentless campaign to attack and demonise Australian Muslims. Journalists are paid to defame the Muslim community, with the goal of keeping us divided and weak. This is a selectively hostile view of media, but there is, sadly, plenty of supporting evidence for those who wish to believe it’.
Amongst migrant Muslim nationalities the Lebanese Muslim community has arguably attracted most attention in media and political discourse and been at the forefront of experiences of racism and discrimination particularly in the years following the Gulf War of 1991 (Poynting and Noble 2004). Lebanese Muslim families have generally occupied the lower socio-economic category handicapped by poor English language skills, limited education, high unemployment levels and poor labour market opportunities for their mostly unskilled Arabic-speaking community (Batrouney 1995; Collins et al., 1995). Low income, unemployment and alienation are all part of social and economic stress, factors which directly impact upon unlawful and delinquent activity particularly amongst youth (Kennedy 2000). In addition, the discourse of anti-terrorism, domestic politics and international terrorism, and the increasing influence of Islamist thinking have had significant influences throughout their lives.

This thesis is an attempt to understand how the continual negative media coverage concerning Sheikh Al Hilaly was interpreted and accommodated by young male members of an already socially isolated community and whether cultural capital acquired from their Australian education altered their coping and interpretative abilities in assessing and re-interpreting their position and identity in society. It will also attempt to discover what support networks they turned to and whether there are any consequent implications for attraction to extremism.

According to Allison (1999), individuals derive concepts of their identity and validate perceptions of their community from what they learn about their own and other groups through media representations which include both respectful and derogatory appropriations. Media coverage of the Lebanese Muslim community in particular and Arab background Muslims in general, in conjunction with personal experiences of what Essed has referred to as ‘everyday racism’ (1991) has demonstrated a lack of respect for the Arabic Muslim community and consequent acceptance within the wider Australian society (Poynting & Mason 2007). In many

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3 The 2001 Census counted 281,578 Muslims. According to the 2004 HREOC Report Isma 102,566 were Australian born, of which a further 33% claimed Lebanese ancestry and 29,321 were Lebanese born. The Lebanese Muslim community would therefore comprise approximately 22.4% of the total Muslim community in Australia.
instances, the dominant attitude expressed by political and media commentary resulted in complex processes of ‘othering’ not only of race but also religion (Collins et al., 2000). Negative images of ‘Arab thugs’ are connected to the Muslim ‘other’ and further conflated to the image of a Muslim terrorist (Poynting 2007) compounding racial and religious discrimination and alienation.

Religion has a very strong influence on Muslim identity despite the considerable divergence between what are considered by some groups to be the moral universal values of Islam as opposed to ‘syncretic’ cultural practices (Eade and Garbin 2006). Tension between these is evident in the gap between first generation migrants attempting to legitimize and maintain their cultural religious practices and the attempt by their Australian born children to derive an ‘authentic’ Australian Islamic practice and culture that is less ethnic and more global. These two extremes of religious interpretation are represented in the polarity that exists between Imams of ‘ethnic’ mosques and younger leaders of a growing Muslim ‘brotherhood’ who represent Islamist teaching as opposed to those representing ethnically syncretist ideologies.

Family and cultural identity have also made a considerable contribution to the development of youth identity through strong familial networks characteristic of Lebanese Muslim immigrants (Bouma 1994; Mansouri and Trembath 2005). However, this ethnic identification is increasingly supplanted in Australia, as in Britain, by the concept of a ‘Muslim identity’ connected to a wider ‘Ummah’, which Modood (2005) sees as deriving not only from a romantic solidarity with defensive international wars, but also from a belief in the value of their culturally distinct beliefs, a religious cultural heritage which was threatened not only by racism but by an intolerance of cultural difference. Poynting (2004) has also described how coercive, developmental and commercial institutions, including for example schools, contribute to the emerging identity of Muslim Lebanese youth in positive and negative ways. Such institutional contribution to the development of identity in Lebanese boys was alluded to by Sheikh Al Hilaly when he claimed that such developmental institutions in Australian society were solely responsible for the reported behaviour of Lebanese gangs in 1988 (Stevenson 1998).
There are then multiple and often conflicting influences on the emerging identities of young Muslim males of an Arabic speaking background, although this does not occasion youth being ‘caught between two cultures’ as is sometimes portrayed. Engaging in the practices of accommodation, negotiation and resistance described by Stuart Hall (1996) and using their cultural resources against the rules and positions that society imposes on them, are some of the ways in which these young people deal with the additional economic and political processes which pressure them. According to Hall, identities are strategic and positional, and involve syncretism and hybridity of the cultural elements they inhabit. While these young men establish boundaries around their various communities there also exists certain fluidity in moving between them. Identities, then, are complex formations, influenced by many different sources and resulting in a plurality of identities responding to the relationship between ‘the self’ and the ideological discourses of the surrounding society (Hall 1996). It is those influences, the practices of negotiation, accommodation and resistance, and the discourses that young Arab background Muslim men are aware of and respond to in relation to their perception of their community and its leadership during a period of intense and negative media attention to the latter – arguably a moral panic – that are the subject of this research.

According to Gramsci (cited in Hall 1996), there is never one single, coherent ‘dominant ideology’ which exists throughout all of society. Similarly in the cultural environment of young people, there is also no single pervasive ideology. It is their discursive currents, the points at which young people accept, reject, modify or develop the ideologies to which they are exposed that are of interest. This thesis then examines the influences and discourses that young people of a Lebanese Muslim background have experienced and accepted, rejected or modified in developing an understanding of community political events, utilising as a case study the debates surrounding the leadership of their community in relation to key events involving the media and Sheikh Taj al Din Al Hilaly as the Mufti of Muslims in Australia and the Imam of the Lakemba mosque. The focus on young men of Muslim background was chosen as these are often seen as the most vulnerable to influence from radical leaders and most prone to act on those influences. Based on interviews with twelve young Arab background Muslim males in South Western Sydney, three of their
mentors as well as Sheik Taj al Din al Hilaly and his translator Keysar Trad, this study explores the leadership of the Muslim community with a particular focus on the Mufti, young Muslim men’s perceptions of his representation in the media and how these understand the role and requirements of the Imam or Mufti as well as leadership in general in the Muslim community.

This thesis argues that these young men, in a climate of negative portrayals of themselves, their religion and their leadership, negotiate competing desires to engage in critical discussion of religion and leadership without losing their sense of acceptance in either the Muslim or the Australian community. It also argues that these young men develop strategies in dealing with such community issues but have little trust in media representations of the same and are susceptible to those leaders who defiantly restore a sense of dignity to their community. Nevertheless, these incidents and debates significantly affect their sense of place and identity and their future as Australians, as Lebanese and as Muslims.

There has been little research to date on the influence of Muslim leaders, Imams or other mentoring influences on Arabic background Muslim males in their interpretations of the latter and their responses to key events, or their role in religious mentoring and consequent implications for extremist thinking. This research is an attempt to provide some insight into these influences and the development of an ‘authentic’ less ethnically syncretic, Australian Islamic discourse.

This study is particularly significant in terms of the ongoing and increasing agenda of political institutions that have identified the Muslim community and particularly the youth of the Muslim community as a potential risk to the safety and welfare of the wider Australian community. With the emphasis on anti-terrorism, the ongoing conflict in Iraq, increasing destabilization of Middle Eastern countries including nations such as Lebanon from which a substantial body of Muslims have migrated, it is imperative to gain a more in-depth understanding of the social structures affecting the younger Muslim community. While young Imams and other youthful leaders who have been outspoken in challenging not only the media and politicians, but also the established and conservative Muslim leadership of the community are frequently reported (Braithwaite 2006), other more subtle influences from family and social
institutions are unknown. Although the variety of community and religious leadership has been addressed by Saeed (2003), their involvement during community controversies by Collins et al. (2000) and Tabar et al. (2003) as well as early community politics by Humphrey (1987, 1990), there is relatively little research into more recent developments in Islamic bodies in Australia and their influence on youth or the influence of mosque Imams, youth leaders and workers, as well as religious/political organizations on community politics in Australia.

This study intends to contribute to an understanding of the influence of family and peers, religious and other institutions including religious mentors on the complex identity formation of Muslim Lebanese male youth. By investigating their discourses around the most senior religious position in their community, the ‘spiritual head’ of Australian Islam, an argument can also be made about the extent of marginalization and radicalization of young Arab background men. This information is beneficial for future programs aimed at strengthening their social capital and reducing the negative effects of marginalization. It also hopes to contribute to existing theories of cultural identity and specifically to religious influences on the latter.

Chapter 2 outlines the history of leadership in Muslim migrant organisations and in the development of its institutions in Australia. As the Muslim community progressed from a migrant to an Australian born and raised community, leadership has become a contested entity with early representative institutions seen as irrelevant and incapable of representing the plethora of entities speaking internally and externally to their communities. Leadership is also challenged through government political interference seeking to encourage an acceptable domestic Islam and discourage Islamist influences as part of the War on Terror and its accompanying security policies. Chapter 2 also provides an in-depth account of the Mufti’s talk which triggered media outrage and moral panic in late 2006 and the leadership strategies enacted by him in defying calls for his sanction and resignation.

In Chapter 3 a history of moral panics is presented and its application is argued in relation to the media outrage over Sheik Al Hilaly’s statements as continuing previous moral panics concerning Muslim attitudes to women. The perceptions and experiences of young Muslims during these media moral panics is discussed along
with the various self-preservation strategies utilised by them in maintaining acceptance within each of the communities they inhabit. In describing the conflicting demands made of them, the concept of ‘zones of acceptance’ - imagined social spaces where their cultural loyalties were accepted - is introduced as an aspect of the young men’s desire to maintain compatible multiple identities. Chapter 4 furthers these concepts in unpacking the young men’s personal reactions to marginalisation, their sense of individual responsibility and the ‘frameworks of living’ that assist in supplying their desired ontological security.

The role of the Imam as perceived by these young men is the subject of Chapter 5, including their overall dissatisfaction with aspects of religious leadership in the community, particularly the paucity of ability amongst Muslim leaders to competently engage with the media and effectively represent both the needs and the opinions of young people as well as their religion of Islam. The individualisation of Islam for these young men in their choice of mosque, Imam and sources of knowledge is presented, as well as the emotive attraction of ‘brotherhoods’ calling to an ‘imagined universal community’ – a global Ummah.

Development and Methodology of the Study

The interviewees were discovered through personal contacts of the researcher, and included former students, friends and relatives of the researcher’s existing contacts. Twelve young men of an Arabic-speaking background were interviewed, all of whom were practicing Sunni Muslims— in that they attended Friday prayers and identified themselves as Muslims following Sunni theology (full details in Attachment A). Three of the mentors that were mentioned most frequently were also interviewed, along with Sheikh Al Hilaly, and his translator Keysar Trad, the latter also on a separate occasion. The interviews were lengthy, often lasting between one and two hours, and were conducted in the researcher’s home, the interviewees’ homes, at a youth centre, in local libraries, at the University and in cafes. They were generally one-to-one, in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured. Each of the interviewees was informed that the interviews were anonymous and confidential and that their name would not be used. Mentors who were interviewed were offered the use of a pseudonym also – only one mentor is mentioned by his name.
The interviewees, each of whom are referred to by their pseudonym, were aged between 18 to 25, and had varying backgrounds – with parents from Palestinian, Syrian and Egyptian backgrounds, although two interviewees had a parent from a non-Arab background who had converted to Islam (one Australian Anglo-Saxon and one American Anglo-Saxon), although most identified with Lebanese ancestry and the Lebanese community. The majority of interviewees were studying full-time, the remainder working or both working and studying. None of these young men were unemployed and all had career options they were pursuing. Only four indicated that their mother had completed high school and only four indicated that their father had achieved tertiary qualifications. Of these only one interviewee had both parents completing tertiary studies. Compared to these young men, their parents had significantly less education and socio-economic opportunity. Only one interviewee claimed a confident literacy in Arabic although most had an ability to converse in the Lebanese dialect. Most of the interviewees were born in Australia, and all had been in Australia since they were in primary school, attending both public and private Islamic schools.

The interviewees were asked questions (full details in Attachment B) in approximately three sections. Initial questions concerned their response to the media and political criticism of Sheikh Al Hilaly, including the response of family and friends, those who had perhaps influenced their interpretation and from what sources they had initially heard about the controversy. As part of this process they were shown articles from the media at the time including the article titled ‘Mutual Respect near impossible if Sheik remains’(McLean 2006). The second section of questions concerned the immediate effect of these discussions on themselves in terms of their interpretation of their place in society, their Australian identity and included their experiences of marginalization, fear, discrimination and their resultant coping strategies. Finally they were asked about leadership and community representation in general, including details of choice of mosque and relevance of the khutbah to their daily lives. Although questions had been included on media attention given to Sheik Al Hilaly over two subsequent controversies (his interview on Egyptian television and links to terrorism through charities) these responses were not included as the
interviewee’s answers were similar and did not add further information to the data already collected.

Each of the interviews was taped and transcribed in full, and then coded and sorted according to the relevant question areas through the qualitative software Nvivo. This information was then analysed for trends, incorporating references to previous and current research material. Trends in the data were then developed into concepts, relationships and ultimately theory utilizing aspects of Grounded Theory in order to ‘build dense, well-developed, integrated and comprehensive theory’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Prior to the interviews newspaper articles, blogs, online forums and videos were collected for analysis. However, the extent of coverage of Sheik Al Hilaly over the first seven months following the publication of his controversial talk was so extensive that any in-depth analysis of newspaper articles was limited to the first ten days following the beginning of the controversy. In that short period, 241 news articles, opinion pieces and editorials, along with cartoons and letters to the Editor were collected and reviewed for this study. The extent of media coverage of Sheik Al Hilaly in the succeeding months and a further in depth media analysis is certainly worthy of further attention.

**Literature Review**

**Arabic Background Muslim Community in Australia**

According to Kennedy (2000) a significant proportion of the existing Lebanese Muslim community migrated in the 1970’s. Most of the subjects of this research are second or third generation Muslims who have spent most of their school life in Australia. Although the majority of Lebanese youth attend public schools there has been a rapid growth in Islamic schools over the past 23 years, with high rates of enrolment from the Lebanese community. Most speak English as a first language and are not fluent in the literary side of their native language of Arabic.

Most migrants from Lebanon, and in particular, Muslim migrants to Australia, came from a low socio-economic background with limited education and a reliance on
kinship groups for social advancement and security. A significant proportion of Muslim Lebanese therefore occupy the very bottom of the Australian social structure (Monsour and Convy 2008).

According to data collated by the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW from the 2001 census (currently the Community Relations Commission and available online), there were over 50,000 first generation and 66,000 second generation Lebanese living in New South Wales. 4 By the 2006 census the number of second generation Lebanese had risen to more than 75,000 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008). Those Lebanese migrants who arrived after the 1970's suffered much higher levels of unemployment and welfare dependence than those Lebanese who had migrated earlier and found greater difficulty in coping with their new country (Kennedy 2000; Collins 2005). The 1995 State of the Nation Report described Lebanese unemployment rates as being three to five times the national average, impeding their ability to obtain upwards social mobility (Collins, Morrissey et al. 1995).

Wafa Chafic (1994) found that a significant proportion of the Muslim Lebanese youth in her study came from families that were ‘relatively cohesive and stable’. Most of the families spoke English and had been resident since the 1970’s. Despite their long term residence and stability, 74% of families were unemployed or in receipt of a pension. They also exhibited a high degree of religious identification and practice. The young people in these families were seen as ‘cultural mediators’ and ‘spoke positively’ about their bicultural status. Generally they considered that their educational, vocational and marital aspirations were supported by their families. Chafic found that their outlook on the future was ‘very much linked’ to overseas events including their confidence in achieving personal aspirations while reconciling their bicultural individuality.

Questions must then be asked about the situation of more educated young people – those who are not socio-economically marginalised, and who have achieved success in education and employment with its accompanying social and cultural capital. Do

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the continuing ethnic connections of their first generation families influence their thinking and if so, does it affect their ability to critically reflect on the religious leadership of their community and hold accountable controversial leaders and their statements? In what way also do the international events in countries of origin that continue to actively engage their parents influence young people’s understanding of their place in Australian society?

Citizenship and Inclusion
Muslims in Australia and in particular young men from a Lebanese background have keenly felt a sense of public alienation arguably beginning with the ‘gang rapes’ of 2000 which followed the Edward Lee murder of 1998 and subsequent allegations of criminal gangs and violent crime existing in South West Sydney. Five researchers in particular have investigated the subjects of these allegations – young men, mostly marginalized and Lebanese– in regard to their attitudes and allegiances (Poynting et al., 1997, Poynting et al., 1998, Poynting et al., 2001), their strategies of resistance to marginalization and discrimination (Poynting et al., 1997; 1999; Noble et al., 1999a, 1999b; Poynting, 2004) and the gradual ‘othering’ of the Lebanese community portrayed simplistically as the cause for a series of moral panics – as contemporary Australian ‘folk devils’ (Poynting 1999, 2007). The same authors explained how the criminal actions of a few were conflated to the whole Arabic background community resulting in the essentialisation of the Arab and Muslim community (Poynting, 1999; Poynting et al., 2001) and then its criminalization (Collins et al., 2000; Poynting et al., 2004), inspiring moral panics that regularly flared in the tabloid media (Poynting, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2007). More recently the Arab community’s experiences of social incivility and everyday racism including the resulting affective process involved in denying national space and national identity have been explored (Poynting & Noble, 2004; Noble 2005; Noble & Poynting, 2008). Ongoing local events – the gang rapes, inflammatory comments by Islamist Imams, ‘jihadist hymns’ accompanying a soccer video (Kerbaj, 2007b), terrorism related arrests and the Cronulla riots, amongst other incidents, have intensified earlier fears and been conflated with the threats of international war and terrorism.
The domestic situation of Islam in Australia must also be considered as part of an international concern with the increasing Islamisation and politicisation of Muslim minority groups throughout Western countries. As noted by Olivier Roy (2004) the majority of conflicts affecting Western interests have involved Muslim countries. He argues that despite the Westernisation (globalisation or modernisation) of these countries, there is an increasing Islamisation of the same communities. He also argues that immigrant Muslims in Western countries experience a deterritorialisation of Islam, as their cultural interpretation of Islam becomes less relevant, and the internationalisation of conflicts involving Muslims becomes more relevant. Kabir et al (2008) found that Australian youth are ‘not immune to globalised Islam’, particularly those who have been frustrated in achieving social status and consider the media to be negative about their Muslim identity.

Such alienation has been acknowledged by young Muslim leaders, as Waleed Aly stated: ‘Muslims in Sydney feel they are under constant attack and it doesn’t matter what they say or do, there’s no point in engaging with the rest of the community. You are hearing this from people who are otherwise doing well, have long family histories in Australia, people who are educated and intelligent. It’s really quite shocking’ (quoted in Allard, 2007). This siege mentality has made it extremely difficult for Muslims within the community to engage in critical reflection as Eman Dandan explained ‘You enter a mode of defensiveness and when you enter that mode, it becomes incredibly difficult to question the internal….you can't go out in public and question a Muslim or Islam, because if you're seen to do that, you're seen as somebody who has left the community’ (Morton 2006).

In calling on a more socially constructive media presentation of the Islamic community the Chairperson of the Community Relations Commission asked: ‘How do we move from a situation where Islam is seen as exotic, threatening, disruptive, exclusive even un-Australian? (And) how does Islam move to acceptance as one of the religions of Australians?’ (Kerkyasharian 2006). This pervasive and negative media representation has then contributed to the Muslim community stereotyping their own identity and citizenship as explained by Humphrey (2001, p.48) who further argued that the ‘abject’ status of Islam criminalized its culture thereby
resulting in necessary legal intervention (Humphrey 2007a). The effect of such media pressure however on internal community politics and internal youth discourses particularly in relation to feelings of citizenship and identity as Muslim, Lebanese and Australian will be explored. This study will also seek to discover what strategies educated and religious young Muslim men might be utilizing in order to gain or retain inclusion and acceptance as Australians.

Protest Masculinity

Resisting pressure from politicians and the media, young men in particular have enacted a range of defensive strategies including what Castells (quoted in Collins et al. 2000) calls ‘the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded’ through the creation of an excluded resistant community, thereby reinforcing the boundaries between the discriminating and the discriminated identities. Another strategy utilized by marginalized Arabic speaking youth included a type of ‘protest masculinity’ in being tough, loyal to the group and affirming an aggressive masculine identity. Violence and confrontation can also be utilised in an attempt to restore their dignity and ease the ‘hidden injury’ of racism and lack of respect for their culture and religion (Poynting et al., 1997; Collins et al., 2000). Often unable to find legitimate employment and feeling powerless in relation to mainstream society this 'protest masculinity' is constructed as a response to the social control of ethnocentric discrimination which these masculinities constantly contested, negotiated and transformed through their social cultural organisation (Poynting et al. 1999).

Respect and honour are very important concepts within the Arabic speaking community and are related to patriarchy and kinship. The need to defend the honour of kinship structure was exemplified by the comments of one alleged gang leader ‘If you insult one of us, then you insult our brother, and if you insult our brother, you insult our father, our mother, and put shame on our whole family. Respect us, and we’ll respect you’ (Casey and Ogg 1998, p.1.4). However, if this is to be considered a learned behaviour, this study will consider whether it is also a strategy enacted by leaders of the communities whose credibility is threatened, and feel similar forms of alienation, discrimination and marginalization. Leaders who exemplify victims in shared ‘hidden injuries of racism’ are possibly more able to unite a ‘community of
suffering’. Such a situation was portrayed by the president of the Lebanese Muslim Association - Tom Zreika - in explaining his community’s defence of Sheikh Al Hilaly: ‘It’s a question of whether it is an attack on the mufti or an attack on Islam, and people are taking it as an attack on Islam’ (Coorey 2006), a perception only strengthened by the media frenzy which had turned him into a ‘martyr of sorts’ according to political commentator Irfan Yusuf commenting in the same article. The elements of leadership that were demonstrated by Sheik Al Hilaly at this time will also be explored.

**Cultural Identity**

The concept of identity is in many ways critical to the interpretation of this research. Stuart Hall sees identities as ‘about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves’ (Hall 1996). If culture and identity are, as he argues, a formative aspect of social and political life then the representation and interpretation of Sheikh Al Hilaly must be seen as a critical aspect of Lebanese Muslim identity at the time of this research.

While Hall sees identity formation as the product of difference and exclusion, this research will investigate identity as the result of a desire for and a realization of inclusion and acceptance. Again, issues of identity have been researched extensively amongst the socio-economically marginalized Arabic background community by Poynting and his associates (Poynting et al., 1998; Noble et al., 1999) but with little research amongst their educated and more socially aspiring, less socio-economically disadvantaged peers. Rather than identification occurring through positioning against others, it is my contention that mentors and peers provide a simplification of complex political issues into world views that can accommodate the data overwhelming youth. By offering acceptance to Muslim youth who adopt certain attitudes or behaviour, do more radical Imams, youth group leaders and mentors provide youth with a sense of agency through cultivating a feeling of acceptance and security? What is the implication then of a lack of more conservative mentoring sources on the development of an authentic Australian Islamic discourse? There is
little research to date on the affective responses in religious constructions of identity discourse and its potential for attraction to extremist ideologies. How effective is the Australian Islamic discourse in bridging the divide between what appears to be morally acceptable to one and morally reprehensible to the other in talking on the same topic – such as modesty – but from different culturally situated contexts?

Sheikh Taj al Din al Hilaly
Sheikh al Hilaly has been a controversial member of the Muslim community virtually since his arrival. Although seen as simultaneously radical and conservative, his comments and activities resulted in representatives from a variety of embassies to seek a rejection of any extension of his early visas in the late 1980’s (Humphrey 2005). Despite considerable pressure to reject his ongoing presence, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils appointed him as Mufti in 1989, and he was granted permanent residency in 1990 by the Hawke government. His controversial leadership in the position of ‘spiritual head’ of the national community of Muslims and the effect of other equally controversial Imams has had little research to date. Poynting and his co-authors argue that the leadership - particularly of the Lebanese Muslim community - participated in the processes of racialisation and criminalization through their interpellations of events, by echoing the media’s paradigm of a ‘cultural’ explanation to criminal events and therefore the community’s culpability.

What has not been addressed is an analysis of Muslim youth towards this ‘self-criminalisation’, and their attitude towards a leadership which arguably is incapable of representing or engaging with a plural and less ethnically engaged world, particularly when it threatens the social capital and community recognition that they may have gained. How accountable are such leaders and what developments in representational leadership have occurred as the Muslim community develops from migrant ethnic society into one that is national and Australian born?

The behaviour of the appointed spiritual leader was acutely embarrassing and divisive to members of the Muslim community (Kerbaj 2006b), beginning with the inappropriate comments in his talk referring to women as meat and men as cats, and which many felt duty bound to defend, refusing to resign until ‘they clean the White House’ (Skelton 2006c) to his offer to tape his mouth if ‘judged’ to be wrong (ibid.
2006; ‘It’s no gag, sheik vows to shut up’, Herald Sun, 4 November 2006, p.2) - followed by a much publicized stunt on ‘The Chaser’ in which they tried to offer him the said tape (Powell 2007). After leaving Australia he continued to embarrass his constituents with his comments on Egyptian television concerning the type of migrants Australia had attracted, specifically comparing those that chose to migrate and those that arrived ‘in chains’, and encouraging Australian Muslims to ‘stand in the trenches with Iran’ (Kruger 2007 p.1). His detractors from the Muslim community have called him the ‘uber villain’ and John Howard’s ‘magic pudding’ (Aly 2007, p.11), in that the Mufti predictably demonstrated negative characteristics which would ensure that the Prime Minister John Howard could win political support simply by positioning himself against an ‘easily maligned target’. Research to date has not addressed what these young people consider necessary for more appropriate leadership to occur and whether alternative voices and constructions of leadership are emerging in order to fill this void in culturally acceptable community representation.
Chapter 2: The Contested Nature of Muslim Leadership

It is not possible to fully comprehend the discourse both within and outside of the Muslim community in Australia relating to its leadership or the role of its nominated ‘spiritual leader’ the Mufti, without an understanding of the structure of its leadership and community representation. Previously centralised, but currently unregulated, the Muslim community is represented by a proliferation of organisations frequently dominated by ethnic diversity and tension. This chapter will investigate the complexity of Muslim leadership in Australia, particularly in NSW and trace the history of Sheikh Taj al Din al Hilaly in this context. An analysis of the theological background to his controversial talk in 2006 is required as well as the charismatic presentations Sheikh Al Hilaly used to strengthen his position in the face of extensive criticism by media, politicians and members of his own community and through which he was able to retain his position.

Unlike Christianity where priests are ordained and variously responsible to a church hierarchy, there is no single institution or parallel theological entity to control theological discourse or leadership aspirations within the Muslim community. Instead the Muslim community in Australia has evolved a number of different and parallel organisational structures which hold varying degrees of responsibility for the leadership of its diverse entities. The creation of a single authoritative position by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils in 1989 – an Australian Mufti – as the head of the Australian Muslim community was therefore an anomaly from its inception and fraught with potential controversy. Historically the Muslim community was too diverse in its ethnicity, settlement patterns and sects to effectively recognise a single leader.

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5 This was highlighted in the first grass roots consultation process undertaken by the IDA in March 2007. “Australia Deliberates – Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia” Issues Deliberation Australia/America 2007
Changes in Organisation and Representation

Although Muslim immigrants have played a significant part in Australian history even before British colonisation, the majority of contemporary Muslim organisations in Australia were not established until after the 1960’s (Humphrey 1998). Prior to the discovery of Australia by European explorers, Macassan Muslims and Aborigines traded and married in Northern Australia (Ganter 2006). In the 19th century Afghan cameleers contributed to opening up the outback, while Malayan Muslims worked in the pearling industry in Western Australia and in the 1920s Albanian settlers assisted in developing Queensland. However none of these communities have maintained a significant community or political presence amongst the contemporary Muslim population in Australia. This situation changed following the 1960’s when there was an influx of European Muslim migrants initially from Turkey, following the signing of an immigration agreement with the Turkish government. Later immigrants arrived from most parts of the Muslim world as the White Australia policy was gradually relaxed and replaced with a policy of multiculturalism.

By the 2006 census, the Muslim community represented the Indian subcontinent, South East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the African continent – over more than 70 different countries (Saeed 2003). In the 1960’s an attempt had been made to co-ordinate and unify this developing patchwork of different Muslim ethnic associations through the founding of the Australian Federation of Islamic Societies in 1964. A decade later it evolved into the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils established in 1976. Under this organisational structure a three-tiered approach to representation of the Muslim community would follow, with AFIC members being selected by Islamic State Councils, and local organisations making up the representative membership of each State Islamic Council (Saeed 2003). In this manner, AFIC empowered itself with international and national representation of the Muslim community and with authority over the establishment of mosques, schools, and centres along with the appointment of Imams – such activities largely being funded by the certification of halal meat (Cleland 2002). However this body was essentially a secular entity and had no jurisdiction over religious or theological matters – other than in assisting with the appointment of Imams to mosque associations and various
supportive functions for religious events including the Hajj. Muslim organisations by and large were established by ethnic associations who employed Imams speaking the language of the organisation’s culture and established facilities independent of the AFIC to meet their community’s needs.

The appointment of a Mufti by AFIC in many ways represented a desire to politically consolidate its authority not only in the secular sphere – as the national representative of these diverse and independent associations – but also the religious sphere. On significant occasions when the heads of various faiths were invited to represent their respective communities, the Mufti could stand as the representative of Muslims alongside Christian Bishops and Jewish Rabbis, adding to the authority and political power of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, despite the fact that his appointment was from a political rather than a theological entity – albeit he was the Imam of one of the largest and most influential mosques in Australia.

At the same time leadership in local Muslim communities has undergone some profound changes over the past two decades and includes a significant diversification of both representation and accountability structures operating independently to AFIC. With the financial benefits of multicultural funding since the 1980’s from various government departments there has been a proliferation of Muslim organisations other than those ethnic associations comprising the majority membership of AFIC - including educational entities, cultural groups and interfaith organisations. Most of these organisations operate outside of the influence of the AFIC and by their number and range have begun to weaken its authority and the representative leadership of its Mufti.

Since 1983 Muslim schools – including schools owned by AFIC – have grown to represent the most asset rich of Muslim organisations and currently number more than 20 in NSW alone. Various adult educational organisations of both a profit and non-profit nature have also proliferated. While each of these reserves the right to speak on behalf of their specific entity, at times they are also called upon to speak about Muslims in relation to wider issues in society. Political entities such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, AMCRAN (the Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network established in 2004), and Muslims are Peace (begun in 2003) have been able to join
the more representative political networks of State Councils but consistently speak both outside of AFIC and in conflict with it. This is further complicated as in NSW there are three competing State Councils – the Muslim Council of NSW, the Supreme Islamic Council, and the original Islamic Council of NSW – each of whom claim State leadership authority, the right to speak on behalf of the Muslim community on political and religious issues, and membership of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, which recognises only one State body. Women’s related issues in NSW have generally been represented by only two organisations – the Muslim Women’s Association, primarily an Arabic speaking entity located close to Lakemba mosque, and the Muslim Women’s National Network which represents a loose affiliation of women’s groups around Australia. Neither of these women’s organisations is represented on AFIC and therefore speak independently of it.

There has also been a proliferation of media active interfaith entities and public speaking entities including the Turkish Affinity sponsored ‘Intercultural Foundation’ (established 2001), the ‘Australian Intercultural Society’ (established 2005), Darulfatwa – run by the Islamic Charity Projects Association (established 2004), the Australian Islamic Mission (established 1994 out of the former Jamaat Daawah Islamiah of 1973), Diversity Connect International (2008), Al Ghazzali Centre (established 2004) and the Islamic Friendship Association of Keysar Trad. Unlike the earlier ethnic associations which raised funds based on ethnic relationships whether local or international, according to Ho (2006) the activities of many of the later groups have been supported through government interfaith funding such as that available under the Living in Harmony grants and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (formerly the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs).

Emergent leaders from the youth in NSW are represented by the various Muslim Student Associations which exist on every University campus in Sydney and Newcastle, the Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth (FAMSY), Islamic Da’wah Centre of Australia, United Muslims of Australia (UMA) which also operates Sydney Muslim Youth and Australian New Muslim Association), the Global Islamic Youth Centre and ICRA Youth Centre. In competition with the role of the mosque and its Imam as the main source of religious education are a variety of
religious training centres including Al Kauthar Institute, the Islamic Da’wah Centre of Australia, Al Ghazzali Centre, Dawn Quranic Institute (established by the Australian Islamic Mission in 2008), Sydney Islamic Centre (established 2005 by UMA), Al Furqan and also the more informal association of Tablighi Jamaat. Added to this array of voices propagating their particular versions of Islam are the various media outlets servicing the Sydney Muslim community, from publications of the AFIC - Australian Muslim News, or FAMSY – Salam Magazine, or UMA – Reflections, and the Sydney Guardian, through to internet networks – Muslimvillage.net and aussiemuslims.com, radio – Muslim Community Radio, Quran Kareem, Voice of Islam Radio, and Video or television programs – One Islam Productions, Islamic Media and Salam Cafe.

Each of these media entities, representative organisations as well as educational, social or welfare institutions provide leadership which is frequently independent of the local mosques, ethnic associations and the AFIC, and operate without any apparent form of accountability other than the public accountability required as recipients of government grants. This proliferation of competitive representations both to and on behalf of the Muslim community has the potential to detract from the overall authority of the AFIC and particularly of any representative figurehead – such as the Mufti - nominated by the AFIC to speak on behalf of all Muslims. Such competitive representation effectively undermined the original charter of AFIC written in 1976 and rendered AFIC’s claim that its Mufti spoke as the spiritual leader of a single Muslim Australian community as both misleading and irrelevant, as argued by Esmaeli (2007).

The inability of the Muslim community in Australia to unite behind the AFIC, the Mufti or even a few individual leaders can be attributed to the settlement difficulties common to a community of recent migrants. However it can also be attributed to the important role culture has in interpreting and specifying the practices of Islam. Humphrey (1990) has explained that Australian Muslim religious institutions developed locally, articulating the social experience of the various immigrant groups in that area. Their continued resistance to moving away from specific ethnic and class bases he described as ‘a conflict over the autonomy of Muslim communities’.
Despite the desire of Muslims for a unified community, and the Australian community for representative leadership capable of explaining and responding to crises as they occur, such leadership is not possible when considering the vast differences within and between communities in their understanding and interpretation of Islam, based on cultural background, social advancement and generational interpretation.

Islam in reality is multidimensional, but its adherents continue to be presented – and to see themselves - as belonging to a common entity, a single ‘Muslim community’, with relatively little recognition of internal differences and divisions. The presenters of the SBS program ‘Salaam Cafe’ are a case in point, being comprised of Australian born or educated Muslims who held senior positions in local and State Muslim committees in Victoria, and regularly provided media commentary and analysis via radio, newspapers and current affairs programs. However, none of the interviewees recognised these young people as representative Muslim leaders, not only because they were seldom quoted in the tabloid media in NSW, but also because these young leaders did not identify with the Lebanese community – the dominant culture of the interviewees. Equally, the educated presenters of Salaam Cafe were not recognised by traditional Lebanese religious leaders. They therefore served to provide commentary reflecting their own educated opinions rather than any representative leadership of a wider community. While the Muslim community is fractured along such generational and cultural lines, there exists almost as much suspicion and ignorance of other groups within the Muslim community as there is of the wider Australian non-Muslim community.

This presents particular difficulties for the Muslim community in NSW as each time there has been a moral panic, or instances of concern voiced in the media about Muslim culture or thinking, a demand frequently follows for ‘Muslim community leaders’ to reassure the wider community and respond on behalf of ‘their community’. The community that is directly involved and therefore held accountable is not easily identified, and may be culturally very different from other Muslim communities, yet by inference all Muslim leaders are held equally accountable in providing a condemnation of the offence. For example, the instance of a South Asian
person alleged to have behaved in an inappropriate or illegal manner due to his Muslim culture may not be affiliated with a local South Asian community. Even if such an affiliation exists, there may not be a spokesperson within that community capable of responding to the issue or even English speaking.

Such representative leadership is a reluctantly contested space, ideally filled by the appointment of authoritative religious leaders capable of explaining the legitimate cultural and religious practices of the multi-dimensional Muslim community and reconciling any controversy or misunderstandings. It was just such a role that the position of Mufti was designed to fulfil.

*The Creation of the 'Mufti'*

Politically a single titular head of the Muslim community was desired in fact not only by AFIC but by the Muslim community as a whole. The creation of such a religious figurehead assisted the AFIC in its consultative role with the Liberal government of John Howard being called upon particularly in times of media crisis such as September 11, the Cronulla riots and ongoing international terrorism. However, as the media and the wider community frequently called for a more substantial response than that offered by AFIC, those Muslim groups not affiliated with AFIC regularly circumvented the State Councils and AFIC to make media pronouncements and establish activities and organisations that dealt locally with the fallout from such events. It is therefore arguable that the position of a Mufti as the religious head of all Muslims in Australia and New Zealand was already a contentious one with considerable inherent inconsistencies even before Sheikh Al Hilaly himself attracted negative media attention while holding the title of Mufti.

Sheikh Al Hilaly arrived in Australia in 1982 in order to take up the position of Imam at Lakemba mosque. His position ever since has been plagued with controversy. In 1986 the Labor immigration Minister Chris Hurford tried to deport him for inciting ‘hatred’ (Kerbaj 2006a) after an anti-Semitic lecture, and in 1988 his

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6Sheikh Al Hilaly was appointed to the Muslim Community reference Group due to his position as Mufti of Australia and New Zealand.
successor Robert Ray was convinced not to deport him despite his alleged statements concerning Jews being the ‘underlying cause of all wars’ (ibid; O’Brien 2006a). In 1999 he was charged in Egypt with allegedly exporting antiquities, charges that were later dropped. He is also alleged to have been a member of the Ikhwan or Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt (O’Brien 2006a). In 2004 he again attracted controversy while travelling in Lebanon where he was reported as saying that the September 11 bombings were God’s work against oppressors. Allegations were made that his appointment as Mufti by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils in 1989 was in reality the result of negotiations with the then Immigration Minister Chris Hurford in order to ensure his residency (Bolt 2006a) and its authenticity has at various times been disputed by sections of the Muslim community.

However, Sheikh Al Hilaly has continued to exercise considerable influence particularly in the Sydney Muslim community in part due to his extensive scholarship (O’Brien 2006a; Esmaeli 2007) as well as his charismatic leadership. Such support was demonstrated in the award of the “Muslim Man of the Year” in 2005 by the Mission of Hope – a community award based on a popularity vote. His influence was recognised by the Howard government which appointed him to the Muslim Community Reference Group, a committee that he mostly boycotted. Media commentators in contrast have argued that for many Australians both inside and outside of the Muslim community Sheikh Al Hilaly was ‘a thorn between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians’ due to his recurring history of ‘extremist comments, clashes with the law and other inflammatory rhetoric’ (Stewart 2006b). However, to his followers including the young men in this research, the treatment of Sheikh Al Hilaly following his talk in the Ramadan of 2006 was linked to the marginalisation and disrespect from the wider Australian community that they commonly encounter as members of the minority Muslim community.

*An Analysis of the Mufti’s Controversial ‘Sermon’*

In the Ramadan of 2006 Sheikh Al Hilaly al Din al Hilaly spoke to a small congregation of Muslims at Lakemba mosque. Each evening in Ramadan Muslims traditionally pray the Tarawih prayer at their local mosque after breaking fast in their
homes and completing their normal daily prayers. As part of their spiritual devotions a smaller number of usually more elderly and devout Muslims would stay on and listen to a short talk later in the evening, often delivered in the Sydney Lakemba mosque by Sheikh Al Hilaly. On this particular evening he expounded on the Quranic verses cited during the evening prayers, specifically related to the significance of the different order of the same words in two verses. Unknown to Sheikh Al Hilaly his talk was taped, translated, and supplied to journalists some months later, in a successful attempt to discredit him – allegedly by a rival Muslim group.

The ensuing controversy over what was caricaturized as ‘the cat and meat sermon’\(^7\) divided the Muslim community and brought further unwarranted notoriety to its religious leadership. The talk itself was embedded in traditionally conservative ideas about modesty but was interpreted by media and politicians as evidence that Muslim values and aspects of Islamic leadership were, as argued by Cameron Stewart in the Weekend Australian ‘intolerant of basic Australian values’ (Stewart 2006b). In response Sheikh Al Hilaly demonstrated aspects of charismatic leadership which encouraged his marginalised followers to avoid the debate on the role and responsibility of religious leadership in the Muslim community that was being waged by the media and prominent critics of the Mufti. These debates only entrenched young Muslims’ belief in a hostile media and did little to resolve the lack of accountability in leadership and religious authority that continues to plague the Muslim community.

A thorough analysis of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk is warranted as it was represented at the time as both an example of the misogyny inherent in not only Muslim culture but the Islamic texts themselves. The lampooning of Sheikh Al Hilaly and his subsequent defence of his talk also called into question respect for Islamic leadership in the modern world and in Australia in particular. The Ramadan talk was in fact not a sermon and lasted less than 20 minutes. It focussed on a passage of the Quran in

\(^7\) In the three major newspapers servicing the Sydney area (the Daily Telegraph, The Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald) there were 11 satirical cartoons printed from 27/10/2006 to 2/11/2006 relating to the Mufti, meat and cats.
Surah al Ma’idah, verse 41 comparing it with another verse 2 in Surat Nur. Sheikh Al Hilaly’s argument was essentially a grammatical and theological interpretation of the Quranic passages read during the evening prayers that night, utilising his knowledge of Hadith and Arabic scholarship to highlight the linguistic importance of certain words as well as their order in each of the passages. Specifically he was pointing out how the Quran has a deliberate order in the words that are used and an understanding of such order leads to a deeper interpretation, both rhetorical and legislative, of the Quran’s message: ‘all the verses of the wise Quran, at their beginnings and at their ends, there is a connection between the body and the end of the verses’ (as quoted in ‘Revealed: The Mufti Uncut’ The Australian, 28 October 2006, p. 29). Citing the importance of accurate memorisation in Arab society at the time of revelation, Sheikh Al Hilaly then related the story of a nomad, a non-Muslim who heard one of the Prophet’s followers reciting the verse relating to theft and corrected him. The correction was based on a linguistic understanding of the semantics of the verse, and the Muslim, offended that a non-Muslim had corrected him, brought the matter to the Prophet who concurred with the corrected version. The ayat in question - Surat al Ma’idah verse 41 is:

As to the thief, Male or Female, Cut off his or her hands: A punishment by way of example, from God, for their crime: and God is exalted in Power. (Yusuf Ali translation)

What was apparent to the nomad was that the reciter had included the frequent rejoinder ‘and Allah is Most Merciful’ instead of ‘And Allah is Exalted in Power’. Sheik Al Hilaly then went on to explain that the Prophet had agreed with the nomad that if God intended to be merciful in such a situation, then the verse would have stated that the thief be forgiven, rather than proscribing a severe judgement. Sheikh Al Hilaly further explained that the Prophet had praised the nomad for correcting the mistake with ‘the eloquence, good style and beauty of the Arabic language’. Here Sheik Al Hilaly was attempting to demonstrate that the Quran is consistent - predictable linguistically even to an Arabic speaking non-Muslim. This theological argument is an accepted part of Islamic theological discourse and in that aspect the
context of his talk was received favourably by the Mufti’s audience, confirming his advanced Arabic and textual scholarship.

Sheikh Al Hilaly then used a second example of the importance of order in interpretation of the Quran with Surat Nur verse 2 where the woman is mentioned before the man, that is, the reverse of the earlier ayat involving theft, this time in relation to the crime of adultery:

“The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes. Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by God, if ye believe in God and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment.”

In expanding his argument on the reversing of gender references Sheikh Al Hilaly was then reported as engaging in some light-hearted comments relating to greedy women whose husbands committed theft in order to keep up with the demands of their wives. His inference was that theft was predominantly the crime and the responsibility of men, thereby explaining the priority of the male gender ahead of the female in the verse on theft. He then quoted the opinion of Al Rafi, an Arabic writer, in support of his statement that adultery was ninety percent the responsibility of the woman, as she ‘possessed the weapon of seduction’ which could lead to ‘a meeting, then a crime, then Long Bay Jail, then comes a merciless judge’. This was clearly a reference to recent gang rape trials. Quoting Al Rafi, according to the translated transcripts of his talk, Sheik Al Hilaly then used his now infamous metaphor of uncovered meat which was not stored away ‘in the fridge, or in the pot, or in the kitchen’ and ultimately is eaten by the neighbour’s cat. His argument being that women who seduce men are responsible for the majority of crimes of adultery, as he elaborated further in an interview with this researcher ‘if you put fuel next to a fire, it will create combustion’ although ‘we can’t say that all women are responsible and all men are innocent’.

In summary, Sheikh Tal Hilaly’s impromptu talk focussed initially on expanding the audience’s understanding of Quranic interpretation by highlighting the significance of the order of gender in two different ayats dealing with crime and punishment. He
then expanded this argument to women’s inherent ability to initiate adultery with a metaphorical reference taken from a classical Arabic writer and inferentially applied to a recent controversial case of sexual assault. Where Sheikh Al Hilaly attracted the greatest controversy was with his reference to Al Rafi followed by explanations on the role of women in initiating ‘the whole disaster’, thereby inferring that the blame for rape lay at the feet of immodest women.

In understanding why his talk was initially unnoticed, it must be noted that the elderly and conservative nature of his audience would have precluded the necessity of having to explain his use of such hyperbole or remind the listeners that rape was a crime in Islam to be condemned in the harshest terms as these matters were well understood by his audience. They also would not have considered his statements to indicate a condemnation of women, as Sheikh Al Hilaly was known for instigating the Muslim Women’s Association in the early 1980’s and had a history of support for its relatively unconventional refuge and domestic violence programs. In reality, Sheikh Al Hilaly’s opinions on rape and sexual violence were well known and generally shared within the conservative Muslim community.

However, by referring indirectly to the Skaf gang rape, he had linked adultery with rape and a crime of violence. By continuing with Al Rafi’s references to women in the home, wearing hijab and being chaste, without any comparable reference to the role of men, Sheikh Al Hilaly left himself open to allegations of misogyny especially when his colourful statements were taken out of their religious and cultural contexts into the Australian contemporary situation of media outrage over the earlier gang rapes. While Al Rafi may have been cited as an example of the extremes of public opinion of women displaying their sexuality – as alleged by Keysar Trad, and was not actually Sheikh Al Hilaly’s own point of view, by not prefacing or following it with any kind of qualification, he had left himself open to being considered a supporter of the more extreme view.

The issue of sex and relationships is a complex one particularly when considering the concept of sin in sexual relations. It can be considered to be at the core of Orientalist and Occidental divergence – an argument outlined later in this thesis. However, preventing unwanted sexual advances - and here we are not talking about
crimes of violence in criminal situations – is an important element of Islamic theological rhetoric and underpins proscriptions of modesty in dress and behaviour. Modern critics of traditional Islamic theology, including Ahmed (1992), Roald (2001) and Abou El Fadl (2003) argue that this conservative view is not substantiated by either the religious texts or the practise of the Prophet himself. However such arguments are not part of the mainstream discourse of the community and are generally the preserve of highly educated Muslims, rather than those members of the Lebanese Muslim community who largely comprised the followers of Sheikh Al Hilaly at the time.

In a later media interview, Sheikh Al Hilaly extended the concept of women as objects of desire by describing them as ‘diamonds’ (O'Brien 2006b). In traditional Islamic discourse this is related to the concept of fitnah (disorder, turbulence, evil) caused by that which overcomes the sensibility of the believer and which is often at the core of juristic discourse on the hijab or veil. Such an argument however, is regarded by Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2003) a prominent Egyptian American scholar, as a one-sided misapplication of the concept of fitnah. Abou El-Fadl capably argues on a logical, historical and empirical basis that such attitudes are more of a cultural view not demonstrated in the Qur'an or the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., as he did not demonstrate any such attitudes of ownership or domination over his own wives. At no time is there an indication in the Hadith that he ordered them into any disadvantageous situation, rather he exemplified the rights of the female even against himself. Such a situation was recorded in one Hadith in which the Prophet s.a.w. prevented his youngest wife Aisha from being disciplined by her father after she was caught arguing with the Prophet, and again in the occasion of the near divorce of the Prophet’s wives which followed their request – delegated to the young wife Hafsa - to ask for more living allowance. Rather than castigating or rejecting his wives Muhammad s.a.w. completely withdrew for three weeks while he engaged in prayer in order to seek a resolution. The matter was resolved with a divine revelation which offered his wives a choice between divorce and relative freedom, or a life of seclusion and relative poverty with the Prophet.
There is in fact no Scriptural support in either the Quran or Hadith for the implication that sexual crime is more the responsibility of the woman than the male nor that women are inherently the cause of ‘fitnah’. Sheikh Al Hilaly compounded his inaccuracy with the further quote from al Rafi referring to the image of a passive female in the home – thereby implying that the only safe place for a woman is within her house. He included no condemnation or responsibility on the part of the male who was portrayed as a cat, a voracious and aggressive character, circling the meat, hungry for sexual satisfaction. For his critics this traditional view of males as being inherently sexually voracious has again no textual basis in either the Quran or in the Hadith. The image of a voracious cat which circles its prey is in reality more relevant to a violent perpetrator capable of committing a criminal act of violence irrespective of the place or position of the victim. In such situations there is no equality in the relationship and the cat represents a situation of power over a passive victim - the piece of meat. In such a situation, the woman could not be held liable for any resulting act against her.

Reaction to the Mufti’s ‘Sermon’

Once the transcripts of his talk were publicly aired, his comparison of women to meat and the seductive power of women elicited a torrent of condemnation from all sections of the media, members of the Muslim community and prominent Australians. Over the 10 days following the initial publication of his speech on 27th October, more than 250 news and opinion articles, editorials, cartoons and letters to the Editor were published in six newspapers alone, all available in Sydney and Melbourne, variously referring to Sheikh Al Hilaly as raving (Fife-Yeomans 2006) wily and cunning (Albrechtsen 2006) and his talk as appalling and offensive (Prime Minister John Howard and Opposition leader Kim Beazley respectively, as reported by Leys 2006), disgusting and repugnant by members of his own community (Waleed Aly quoted again by Leys 2006) and divisive (cleric Ibrahim el-Shafie as reported by Kerbaj 2006b). His comments were also labelled as explosive (Yamine 2006), hateful (Kerbaj 2006a), deranged and heartless (Fife-Yeomans and Yamine 2006), poisonous and reprehensible (Albrechtsen 2006; Atkins 2006), repugnant and outrageous (Editorial in The Australian, ‘Time to Muzzle the Outrageous Mufti’, 27
October, 2006, p.19), sickening (Editorial in Daily Telegraph, ‘The unvarnished truth is not bias’, 28 October 2006, p. 26) and vile (Devine 2006; Editorial in Daily Telegraph, ‘Vile rape remarks can’t be forgiven’, 27 October, 2006 p. 32 and in Herald Sun, ‘Silencing the Mufti’, 28 October 2006 p.82; Farr and Cummings 2006) amongst many other epithets. The outpouring of aggressive emotion is evident in two editions of the Daily Telegraph posted online in the same day – the first titled ‘Vile Rape remarks can’t be forgiven’, the second at 11.30 am modifying the title to ‘Sick Rape remarks can’t be forgiven’ but with the additional sentence in its abstract ‘Here's the truth about the Sheik. He's a buffoon and he's pig- ignorant. Get that translated, Sheik.’

Such an extreme reaction to Sheikh Al Hilaly occurred despite an apology – which was labelled as ‘half baked’ in the Daily Telegraph Editorial - his well known support for Muslim women’s rights, (Coomba 2006) and the support of the Muslim Women’s Association which he had helped to establish. Pru Goward claimed that his comments were a ‘head-on collision between two entrenched Australian values – the rights of women and the right to religious self-expression’ (Stewart 2006b). However, Ms Goward’s claim that Australian values supported the rights of women was at odds with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation report ‘Two Steps forward, one step back’ (Taylor N & O 2006) which exposed widespread community attitudes that excused violence against women. Similar attitudes to the Mufti’s of women’s inherent fault in unwanted sexual behaviour were also reported by Dr. Caroline Taylor (2004, 2006) as existing throughout the Australian legal system, particularly in dealing with the prosecution of rape and sexual assault cases.

According to Leys, Pru Goward then called for the expulsion of Sheikh Al Hilaly from the country on the basis that his statements were an incitement for young Muslim men to commit violent crime against women. His views were labelled as primitive and completely unacceptable in a modern society that is sexually liberated, and grants equal rights to men and women, and according to Deborah Hope bringing to a head “the titanic collision between conservative Islam and modernity” in Australia (Hope 2006). His world view was characterised by the Weekend Australian’s editor (28 October p.18) as one in which women were property and men
were sexually incontinent beasts liable to commit a capital crime at the slightest glimpse of flesh. His metaphor of the unprotected meat representing women who did not wear the hijab and therefore liable to be devoured by sex-crazed men was rejected by Abdullah Saeed, an Australian Muslim scholar, as having no legitimacy in Islamic texts (Saeed 2006). He was condemned by the Prime Minister John Howard, the Deputy Peter Costello, the Premier of NSW Morris Iemma and the leader of the Opposition Kim Beazley.

The internal affairs of a religious community - particularly one that comprises less than 3 percent of the population is not commonly a concern of secular political authorities. The Muslim community and political implications of its religious interpretation however, have had a dominant role in political discourse both nationally and internationally. The re-Islamisation of formerly colonised countries, proceeding simultaneously with Westernisation and its attributes of modernisation and globalisation, and the increasing Islamist content of political discourse in Muslim minority and majority communities, has ensured active political interest in the Australian Muslim community. In recent years, overseas conflicts have primarily involved Muslim countries and are reflected in internal concerns. In 1983, the author was involved in the establishment of the first Muslim school in Australia – Al Noori Muslim Primary, a school that had to defend itself against community concerns about the PLO – linking domestic politics with distant conflicts.

Such political concerns about national security and Islam – the securitisation of Islam – particularly following the events of September 11, 2001 and the London bombings of July 7, 2005 have ensured that government policy actively and vocally seeks to influence the direction of local Muslim politics. This has occurred through grants to and public recognition of those organisations presenting an acceptable domestic face of Islam, policies on immigration and detention of asylum seekers, the creation of the Muslim Reference Group in 2005, and active political demands made of Muslim educational authorities in terms of the values that they teach. It has resulted in the decline of multiculturalism as preferred policy and an increasing focus on citizenship and Australian values. It was in this environment of an active political involvement in what type of domestic Islam was acceptable, that the standing and
outspoken statements of the Mufti of Australia were challenged by political leaders from all persuasions.

Charismatic and Defiant Leadership

Sheikh Al Hilaly’s response to the outcry and his ability to withstand and benefit – at least in the short term - from such a damaging onslaught arguably utilised the type of charismatic leadership originally described by Weber (1947) in his early concept of charisma as relating to divine inspiration. In this instance it can be related to Sheikh Al Hilaly’s acknowledged religious scholarship in interpreting the divine message of the Quran, as well as his pre-eminent titular role as Mufti and ‘spiritual leader’. Although much of the more recent scholarship on charismatic leadership has been related to organisations, Weber’s concept of a charismatic leader (Weber et al., 1968) demanding “that others obey and follow him by virtue of his mission” which he further described as “a mission directed to a local, ethnic, social, political, vocational or some other group” can be recognised in Sheikh Al Hilaly’s call to his followers to stand by him and against those in the media, politicians and even within the Muslim community who sought to discredit his traditional Muslim concepts. As Amir Butler, co-convener of the Australian Muslim Civil Rights Advocacy Network explained, the issue was not just that Sheikh Al Hilaly had made statements that could be construed as offensive, ‘but that his views have been interpreted to represent the Islamic position in the same way as a comment from the Pope or the chief rabbi might be seen to represent the view of their respective communities’ (Stewart 2006b). Such a confusion between the pronouncements of a Muslim religious leader and theological as opposed to cultural understandings on the complex issue of sexual crime contributed to the impression that the religion of Islam itself was being threatened through attacks on its leader. Sheikh Al Hilaly artfully interpreted the outcry over his Ramadan talk to bolster a heroic image amongst his followers, utilising elements of charisma that Burns (1978) attributed to a belief in the leader’s extraordinary qualities. One of the first demonstrations of such ‘extraordinary qualities’ was in his determination despite illness, an illness which had extensive media coverage showing him bedridden and with an oxygen mask, to defiantly rally his followers in the mosque the following day.
Such charismatic leadership according to Bass (1988) is characterised by high levels of self-esteem, and is demonstrated by steadfastly portraying a confident public image even when experiencing negative situations. Despite being told by the Lebanese Muslim Association to keep a low profile, Sheikh Al Hilaly’s rousing sermon the following Friday reportedly invoked ‘images of conspiracy and martyrdom’ (Sheehan 2006) in which Taj portrayed himself as the self-sacrificing victim, another characteristic of heroic charisma. His Friday sermon and subsequent combative statements made to the press and to his followers in effect increased support for Sheikh Al Hilaly amongst large sections of his local Arabic community although it simultaneously divided the wider Australian Muslim community. In effect the young Muslims – many of whom did not speak Arabic and therefore had difficulty understanding the substance of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk – were faced with two radically different interpretations of the event, and forced to take sides. On the one hand, Sheikh Al Hilaly had made serious errors in his talk, contributing to the perception that Islam was incompatible with Australian values, and making ‘mutual respect near impossible’ (McLean 2006). His statements reflected the Mufti’s history of disastrous public relations and inability to comprehend mainstream Australian culture. On the other hand, he was a highly regarded Arabic scholar whose talk had been translated out of context, and an Islamophobic media along with his political enemies were engaging in an extreme attack and interfering in the religious affairs of the Muslim community. By demonising the Mufti, calling him a liar - which was accompanied in Sheehan’s article by an extremely provocative graphic of an Arab man unable to restrain his forked tongue (Leys 2006) - and demanding that he step down, thereby interfering in the community’s leadership, young Arabic background Muslims were encouraged to identify with Sheikh Al Hilaly as the leader of a marginalised and misunderstood Islam, who was instead providing heroic leadership for their religion.

In their article on self-concept based theory, Shamir and House et al. (1993) sought to explain the process by which charismatic and transformational leaders affect their followers. In part this process was explained as occurring through increasing the value of the follower’s efforts and enhancing their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Although much of their theory relates to organisational situations, it can
also be directly applied to the social and communal situation of Sheikh Al Hilaly and his followers in that the self-worth and self-esteem of that section of the Muslim community was inextricably linked to respect for Sheikh Al Hilaly’s position as Imam and moreover as Mufti. Consequently his followers’ self-esteem and self-worth was decreased by the media’s and politicians’ attacks on him. In an environment where the Muslim community and Islam had continually received negative social coverage in the media, with Hizb ut Tahrir pamphlets claiming that this was the latest chapter in the demonization of Islam and the Muslim community, Sheikh Al Hilaly offered his followers a reaffirmation of the correctness of their beliefs and shared traditional viewpoints. In demonstrating his own high self-esteem under such conditions, Sheikh Al Hilaly was able to elevate the position of the Mufti and thereby the self-esteem of his marginalised community. According to Stapleton reporting in the Weekend Australian (2006) Sheikh Al Hilaly was able to mobilise up to 5000 followers to shout their support during his rousing Friday sermon. Responding to calls from within and without of the Muslim community for his immediate resignation, Sheikh Al Hilaly dismissed the public outcry over his remarks as ‘a storm in a cup’ (Coomba 2006) rejected a demand that Imams speak English, challenged his detractors to prove that he had intended to degrade women, and then made his own call for Premier Iemma to step aside as a rejoinder to the same demand from Premier Iemma (Chandab 2006). Employing the kind of charismatic rhetoric described by Bass (1985; 1988) which persuades, influences and mobilizes others, Sheikh Al Hilaly presented himself as someone who was prepared to and encouraged his followers to ‘stand up and be counted’ against those who would prevent him doing his job or misinterpret his teaching.

Approaching the mosque that Friday his followers passed a media contingent that was protectively corralled behind police barriers - expecting a possibly violent confrontation, with a heavy police presence, dog squads and a helicopter circling overhead. All of this enhanced a heightened state of anxiety and the perception of a besieged community. Sheikh Al Hilaly’s rhetoric on that occasion capably extended Gardner and Avolio’s concept of dramaturgy to the completely dramatic. He stated that he would resign ‘when the White House was clean’ and offered to be judged by an ethical court (Quigley 2006). If found guilty of encouraging rape he stated that he
would put tape over his mouth and perform community service (‘It’s No Gag, Sheik Vows to Shut Up’, Herald Sun 4 November 2006 p.2). Despite the intimidating police and media presence his defiance was rewarded with loyalty, an exceptionally large attendance and “rock star treatment” according to a news report by Stapleton (2006).

Strongly influenced by a fellow Egyptian, the blind Sheik Kishek, whose sermons Sheikh Al Hilaly was known to attend, and whose oratory resulted in a huge following of Muslims throughout the Arabic Muslim world, Sheikh Al Hilaly employed the imagery of the Qur’an and an extensive Arabic vocabulary as part of his rhetorical and dramaturgical tools. He began by calling on three sources of justification for his statements – the Prophet, the Qur’an and democracy – indicating that there was no division between them and thereby rejecting allegations of a conflict between Australian values and Islam. He then stated ‘I can’t find more truthful words, and more eloquent of recounts, except in the words of the most truthful speakers and wisest of judges (the Quran)’. By referring in such a way to both the Prophet and the Quran he invoked the essential tenets of the Islamic religion, packaging the beliefs of his audience and socially constructing the reality of the situation so as to ‘lead audiences to desired conclusions’. This Impression Management process described by Gardner and Avolio (1998) was clearly utilised to identify his own position as aligning with Islam, while his detractors were subtly presented as the enemies of Islam. In doing this Sheikh Al Hilaly quoted from one of the strongest passages in the Quran as follows:

Vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths, and what their chests conceal is greater still....Lo, you are they who will love them while they do not love you...they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you. Say - Die in your rage (‘I was just protecting their honour’, The Weekend Australian, 28 Oct 2006, p.9).

The success of his charismatic rhetoric was evident when Sheikh Al Hilaly’s audience responded with shouts of ‘Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar’. Taj had now clearly established a conflict between ‘his enemies’ - now framed as ‘the enemies of Islam’, and the true believers of Islam. Utilising imagery associated with war and
conflict he continued ‘We will tell them, our banners will remain raised high, God willing, and our voices remain heard, and may the world vanish if it doesn’t listen to ‘there is no God but Allah’’ (Carswell and Yamine 2006). Such framing was defined by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) as ‘a quality of communication that causes others to accept one meaning over another’. In other words, that criticism of his talk constituted rejection of the message of Islam. These rhetorical skills and dramaturgical skills help to explain the willingness of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s community to resist calls for his resignation, deportation and condemnation and in fact galvanised support in the Muslim community, causing Wockner (2006) to publicly question Muslim women in writing ‘Why are you abrogating your responsibility to make a difference? What are you afraid of and why is it that you can offer this man such unconditional support?’

In addition, the Muslim community was told that it was disappointing that ‘Sheik Hilali has not yet been summarily booted out’ (‘Sheik’s Values out of step with modernity’, Weekend Australian, 28 October 2006, p.18) and that he had escaped ‘serious punishment’ (Stewart 2006b). His followers’ support was proof that ‘such extreme views are tolerated, if not tacitly accepted by Muslims’, (ibid.) who were accused of ‘abrogating their responsibility’ as community leaders (Wockner 2006) and ‘accept(ing) the unacceptable’ (‘The Sheik Must Go’, Sydney Morning Herald 28 Oct p 36). Not resolving the matter could ‘do lasting damage to the perceptions of that community’ according to Prime Minister John Howard (Fife-Yeomans & Yamine 2006).

Sheikh Al Hilaly’s authority was contested however not only by political entities but from within his own community of Muslims. Muslims in Melbourne largely rejected his position as Mufti of Australia, seeing him as having authority only in his mosque in Lakemba with one anonymous Turkish Imam stating to The Age that ‘we despise him’ (Zwarz 2006). Many of the prominent Muslims who condemned Taj were seen as aligning themselves for political reasons with his enemies. Jamal Rifi – with strong connections to the Labor Party and previously a friend of the Sheikh’s was reported as saying ‘You have described ..(the controversy) as ‘a storm in a cup’, while most of us see it as much more serious and continuing to worsen because of
your actions. Your response to the situation demonstrates that you lack the insight about the extent of damage you are causing to community cohesion’ (Skelton 2006c).

Tom Zreika – a prominent member of the Liberal Party and local councillor, Waleed Aly – an outspoken member of the Islamic Council of Victoria and academic Abdullah Saeed were accused by Hilali’s supporters of having aligned with Australian institutions rather than their cultural roots, while various prominent Muslim women critics who were effectively the subject of the controversy were portrayed as challenging the importance of female modesty. Sheikh Al Hilaly marked out the conflict between those who were loyal to the truth of the word of God and the Messenger of God on the one hand, and those opposing them as God’s ‘enemies’ on the other. All of his critics could then be allocated to the opposition, enhancing his leadership in a situation described by Yukl (1999) where followers are susceptible to charismatic leadership due to their insecurity, alienation, low self-esteem or fear for their welfare. Weber (1947) argued that such a situation of crisis was necessary to precipitate charismatic leadership, although later leadership theorists argued it as a facilitating condition but not a necessary antecedent condition (Shamir et al., 1993; Conger and Kanungo 1998).

Sheikh Al Hilaly’s leadership and the local acceptance of his statements regarding women were then taken by the media directly to the public in a series of street interviews with Muslims in Lakemba, Auburn, and Bondi. Passersby were asked to comment on whether they agreed with Sheikh Hilaly, the pictures and comments portraying Muslims as divided on the controversy and adding further pressure to calls for the community to forfeit his right to religious authority (Allard 2006; Chandab et al., 2006). Adding to the pressure of politicians, radio and television presenters and the individualised pressure of street interviews, the media engaged in an attempt to visually humiliate him. Over the following weeks and months each time Sheikh Al Hilaly became embroiled in a new controversy, cartoons abounded, variously depicting Sheikh Al Hilaly and his follower Muslims as a butcher, a cat, chasing a women in a Whiskas can, as a lamb chop and so on. The visual image of a repressive and misogynist community was profound and could be characterised by
two cartoons in particular. The first was presented as a comic series and involved the concept of woman as fitnah or inherently the bringer of evil. Its caption included ‘If women, wear the hijab, are stuffed in a box, dropped into the ocean, 900,000 fathoms deep, crushed under an ocean liner, and hit by a meteorite, then they won’t be asking for it’ (cartoon strip by Warren Brown published in the Daily Telegraph, 27 October 2006, p.35). The second image mentioned earlier, was more extreme and less humorous, depicting a large photo of an Arab man attempting to cover his mouth, but with a forked tongue still sticking out. The title of the adjoining article was ‘Sheik Tries to lie his way out of trouble’ (Mucci 2006). This depiction of evil along with allegations in the article that Sheikh Al Hilaly deliberately lied throughout his later television interview, were an extreme presentation of the ‘othering’ of the Muslim community and its leadership that occurred at that time.

For the Muslims of Sydney and particularly Arabic speaking Muslims in Lakemba, it was almost impossible to remain impartial. With headlines claiming ‘You Heartless Ignorant Man’ (Fife-Yeomans 2006) Sheikh Al Hilaly found support amongst his peers, with 50 clerics signing a statement asking the Prime Minister and Treasurer to stop targeting the Mufti and allow them to decide his future (Skelton 2006a). Other Muslims were reported as stating that the furore was ‘just an excuse to persecute Islam’ and as ‘definitely over-exaggerated’ (Stapleton 2006). The atmosphere was accurately described by Cameron Stewart who wrote that ‘many of those who turned out to support the mufti yesterday did not condone his comments about women and rape but felt they must fly the flag for Islam in the present climate’ (Stewart 2006a). Stewart further argued that this would only serve to increase the ‘us and them’ attitude and ‘sense of isolation among Muslims’. Such isolation was inevitable however with headlines such as the Sun Herald’s Editorial ‘Mutual respect near impossible if sheik remains’ (McLean 2006) until the departure of Sheikh Al Hilaly for the Hajj brought a welcome temporary relief from the pressure of his aggravated leadership to all parties.

Such relief was however, short lived. In January, fresh from his pilgrimage to Mecca, Sheikh Al Hilaly was recorded on Egyptian television humorously explaining his recent difficulties in Australia, by stating that ‘The Western people are
the biggest liars and oppressors, and especially the English race. The Anglo-Saxons who arrived in Australia arrived in shackles. We paid for passports from our own pockets. We have a right in Australia more than they have’ (Sheridan 2007). This was followed up by two other incidents in quick succession – an allegation that he had passed Australian raised charity funds to a political leader with links to the terrorist listed organisations of al-Qaida and Hezbollah, followed by a quote from the Iranian media calling on Muslims worldwide to serve in Iran’s trenches and not kneel to its enemies (Chulov 2007).

By April of the following year, barely 6 months following the outrage over his ‘cat and meat’ talk, the Muslim community was again targeted by politicians and media to demand Sheikh Al Hilaly’s resignation. Minister Andrews complained that ‘the Australian community has lost patience with the Sheik’ while Minister Downer opined that Sheikh Hilali had ‘become a completely discredited figure’ in Australia and was causing embarrassment to his country (Kerbaj 2007a). According to Waleed Aly, the Mufti had become the political equivalent of John Howard’s magic pudding. Writing in The Age Waleed (Aly 2007) stated ‘The constant controversy surrounding him provides dream opportunities for Howard to adopt his most successful culture warrior pose. To this end, Hilali is fantastically reliable. Howard can bank on one controversial remark assuredly following another’.

In summarising the situation in late 2006 early 2007, despite decades of Muslim migration resulting in a diversity of ethnicities of varying socio-economic status, the Muslim community had become identified with one unpredictable, non-English speaking, Sydney Imam by much of the Australian population. Prior to the controversial statements by Sheikh Al Hilaly Al Hilali which are at the heart of this research, the authority of a single ‘spiritual authority’ heading an ethnically and socially diverse Muslim community was already potentially contentious. The Federation of Islamic Councils’ appointment of Sheikh Al Hilaly to the position of Mufti without any form of accountability, clear responsibility or consultative process with its subsequent disastrous consequences was in fact indicative of the loss of authority experienced by the AFIC, the only national Muslim organisation recognised by the Federal government. The AFIC’s aim of strengthening its
dominance and control over the Muslim community with the support of its nominated Mufti as spiritual leader has since been heavily contested, and made almost irrelevant due to the proliferation of independent Muslim organisations in the areas of education, media, welfare and culture.

Not having to rely on either halal meat or AFIC’s centralised finances for survival, these organisations have taken the initiative to respond to local moral panics with their own activities and public statements. Widely repudiated by interstate and non-Arab ethnic Muslims as a result of the incidents detailed here, Sheikh Al Hilaly and his mentoring organisation lost credibility and position – Hilali losing the position of Mufti within months of renewed calls for his resignation following the Egyptian controversy and AFIC being placed under court appointed external administration.\(^8\)

As this research is completed in 2009 Sheikh Al Hilaly continues to preach in the Lakemba mosque and mentor the community that he has ministered to for almost 30 years. However the issues raised by this debacle, the theological debates and the necessity for appropriate and accountable leadership have not yet been resolved. For the most part, organisations have chosen to ignore the AFIC and its Mufti, resulting in an unregulated environment where every mosque, self-appointed leader or entrepreneur is entitled to speak both to and on behalf of his community, but not on behalf of the whole Muslim community and with no nationally recognised authorities able to speak on the Islamic religion. Such an open forum for representative status has already given rise to a plethora of ambitious young leaders, each building their personal and institutional support bases with the potential for much greater conflict than the former controversial Mufti of Australia.

In many ways the concept of Islamic leadership in Australia was morally tested with the controversial statements of Sheikh Al Hilaly during his evening talk in the Ramadan of 2006. To his followers – which included significant numbers of youth in the community - the Mufti presented a scholarly and traditionally acceptable argument relating to an in-depth understanding of two ayats of the Quran. He had simply embellished the scholarly presentation with cultural interpretations of the

\(^8\) As reported in the AFIC publication *Muslims Australia*, Issue 1, 2007 p.1
inherent role of women in causing ‘fitnah’ through their natural attraction to men, leading to an admonition to respect the institution of the hijab. To his non-Muslim detractors, the Mufti’s comments only cemented opinions that the traditional theology of Islam encouraged dangerous and misogynistic attitudes amongst the conservative Australian Muslim community - particularly its youth – and there needed to be a greater accountability and responsibility on behalf of the Muslim community for their leaders. To the critics within his community the position of Mufti was again questioned along with a rejection of his traditionally cultural teaching which was rejected by those generally English speaking and well educated Muslims. It could be argued that had the Imam responded in a less aggressive and more conciliatory manner, or the politicians and media with a more rational and restrained response, the situation would not have been as divisive. However by portraying the nominated ‘spiritual leader’ of the Muslims with virulently negative and emotional responses, the Mufti was able to present himself as a victim of Islamophobia, and the champion of traditional Islamic values, allowing him to charismatically encourage even Australian born youth to support him.
Chapter 3: Moral Panics and Responsive Strategies

In many ways the moral panic that occurred in late 2006 following the controversial sermon of Australia’s Mufti – Sheikh Taj al Din al Hilaly, represented a perfect storm, building on and extending previous moral panics involving the Muslim community. Combining pivotal and divisive discourses about Muslims in Australian society and their attitudes towards women, religiosity and cultural leadership Sheikh Al Hilaly’s pronouncements appeared to provide the proof to Huntington’s thesis of a ‘clash of civilisations’ (Huntington 1996). Writing in the Weekend Australian at the time, an editorial claimed that ‘the views of Sheik Hilali are primitive and completely unacceptable in a modern, tolerant society such as ours that is sexually liberated, grants equal rights to women and abhors the slaughter of innocents’ (‘Sheik’s Values Out of Step with Modernity, 28 October 2006, p.18). Due to his position as Mufti, the fear that such apparently misogynistic attitudes were equally held by his congregation, which nominally included the whole of the Muslim population in Australia and New Zealand, led to demands for the Muslim community to explicitly reject his statements and remove him as a religious leader. Any reluctance of the Muslim community to disempower their Mufti, or to criticise and reject the Mufti’s comments would only substantiate allegations of the incompatibility of Islam and Muslims as a whole with modern secular society (Wockner 2006; Bolt 2006b) and further inflame the existing moral panic following the gang rape trials of 2005. This chapter initially focuses on the sources of information for the interviewees, the context of the moral panic that ensued, and then understanding the response of young Arabic background men to the media demand - and echoed by politicians - for the Muslim community to depose its religious leadership, as against the answering and equally strong call by the Mufti for loyalty. Finally this chapter attempts to analyse their often defiant attitudes in support of the Mufti and what is needed to permit more informed discourse and the role of Islamic leadership within the interviewees’ community.
Sources of Information and Interpretation

Although many of the young men interviewed for this research were tertiary educated, their awareness of the media frenzy over Sheikh Al Hilaly came from family, friends and tabloid media, rather than the more indepth news and opinion analysis. Very few of them had been in the mosque at the time of the actual ‘sermon’. Most of the interviewees when asked stated that they had not read the Arabic transcript, and few of them had gone through in detail even the English translation. Five heard from family sources, three from news items on TV, two from reading the newspaper with only one present during the actual talk. One interviewee – Ziyad - claimed not to have talked about it with anyone or read or seen anything in relation to the controversy because:

I don’t want any trouble, I know like if any Muslim does a wrong it means it’s all of them, but they shouldn’t think of it like that.

His response indicates a concern that negative issues involving one Muslim tended to reflect badly on the whole community, something that he had no control over and would prefer simply to avoid. The most common form of information was via word of mouth. It seemed that the interviewees were informed quickly – through friends, meeting at the mosque, family discussion, telephones – the more informal friend and communication networks, along with the evening news. Parents also appeared to have an important role in passing on information relating to the community with Anas mentioning that his father read the paper and would pass on relevant information to the rest of his family. Apart from one interviewee, Hassan, none stated that they were informed or affected in their opinion by the internet, chat rooms, or other online media. Although Hassan read the Daily Telegraph articles he had also logged on to www.Islamicsydney.com to find alternative views. Apart from Ali who watched the Al Jazeera report on the matter some time later, the interviewees did not utilise any of the Arabic media to inform their opinion.

It would appear then that the news about Sheikh Al Hilaly travelled informally and very quickly. Without accessing directly the commentary and critical analysis in the media of Sheikh Al Hilaly, their responses could be categorised as emotional rather than informed and were affected by their existing knowledge of Sheikh Al Hilaly
personally along with a generally pessimistic attitude towards the media. Their response to the initial reports they received were also affected by the attitude of informers. Hassan described how he was confronted with the news by his workmates who challenged him with ‘Did ya hear what your milkshake said?’ Not responding to the insulting language although he knew what they were referring to he replied ‘What? What’re you talking about?’ and they’d go ‘He’s saying women are like pieces of meat, and the men are cats, and if the meat isn’t covered, the men are going to launch out and eat the meat.’ This was clearly confrontational and caused Hassan – who was a frequent critic of Sheikh Al Hilaly and prominent community member – considerable distress. He subsequently withdrew from all discussion on the matter with his colleagues and felt obliged to defensively support the Mufti – despite his own reservations – because of the disrespect shown to the Mufti by his workmates and by inference therefore to Islam.

Informal reports were less than accurate as inferred from Sulaiman who stated that he had heard a multitude of different stories from friends and colleagues, concluding immediately that ‘it was something small, they take it the wrong way and completely out of context’. He even doubted the correctness of the context considering that ‘It was probably about something else and the question popped up and he probably just said it’ giving ‘ASIO, media, whoever they were’ the opportunity to spread it ‘like Chinese whispers’. He was convinced that the talk was misrepresented to give the impression that ‘he (Sheikh Al Hilaly) was abusing the Australian woman – which he never said the Australian woman’. When asked by his friends about ‘what’s this guy saying’ his response was defensive and focussed on affirming the general concept of the hijab in that ‘I believe he was right, cause I believe they should cover up. And even themselves they know that’. As with other interviewees, the central tenet and principle of ‘hijab’ as the basis of the Imam’s talk was uniformly supported. The media outrage was seen by them less as criticism of the implications of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s speech and more as an opportunity to attack the hijab and Islam in general. The immediate distrust of the media was also evidenced by Ali whose immediate response was dismissive, stating: ‘we’ve been taught not to trust everything that is said in the media...we’re used to being blasted by the media and stuff’ so his response was to avoid the issue as much as possible saying: ‘I didn’t
really want to get to deep into it. I mean what’s the point in arguing about something like this? I have better things to do’.

It is apparent that these young men were not interested in making a thorough analysis of what Sheikh Al Hilaly had said, seeing the allegations as part of a continuing attack on the Muslim community of which they were a member. Taking it personally as an attack on the hijab by outside forces – Ziyad hinting at a government conspiracy by mentioning ASIO - they went instantly into denial with friends and family, before verifying or understanding the actual allegations. Although transcripts were widely published at the time, Mahmoud preferred to rely on his friends who claimed to have been at the mosque and denied hearing any such statements – ‘they go, he never said that. It was taken out of context’. Asaf agreed, saying that after reading some news reports he had thought ‘that’s taken out of context straight away’. Asaf’s father could not understand the criticism, discussing with Asaf that ‘it was just a metaphor basically’ a view mirrored by Mahdi who commented that it was not ‘as bad as they made it sound’.

Only two of the interviewees took time to try and access the translation or the original Arabic ‘sermon’ in full, one of them, Mahdi, due to the amount of questions that he was receiving while working at the Lebanese Muslim Association. After reading the text in full, he agreed with the critics that better wording could have been used, but still supported the general context of the talk, feeling that strong words needed to be spoken to the mosque community about modesty. He added that if he had been speaking ‘I probably would have hurt people’s feelings’. The community in his opinion, and particularly young people and the families that cared for them, needed ‘something that’s going to make them wake up’ to make them ‘know that what they’re doing is wrong’. Such inappropriate behaviour included pre-marriage relationships and women as well as men who dressed and behaved provocatively – issues that are continually discussed by mosque attendees and their religious leaders. He confirmed that he was referring to both guys and girls in saying ‘I mean guys need punches in the head these days man!’ The fact that the talk was given in Ramadan provided an entirely appropriate context to address such important and sensitive, moral community issues. ‘It’s that hype of Ramadan. Everyone’s getting
into religion, getting back into religion, getting stronger in religion’. In Mahdi’s view also the underlying message was entirely acceptable and was designed to encourage girls to ‘be decent, respect themselves’. Asaf also agreed, reflecting that degrees of nakedness were an acceptable part of the Western way of life and Muslim women needed to be reminded that not complying with the more rigid and modest Muslim manner could lead to unwanted sexual advances. He felt that Taj was not addressing Western culture per se, but addressing Muslim families on the risks of adopting aspects of Western culture. ‘So, what he’s trying to say, there’s people who are out there (who) might be drunk, and if they see a naked lady, they will go for it’. However, ‘if you were covered up, he’s not going to go up to you, you know what I mean?’

In understanding their immediate reaction to the media reports about the controversial Ramadan talk several themes emerge. The first theme is that the commentary appeared to be taken as directed at them personally, as there was an immediate identification between criticism of a prominent Muslim leader’s statements, with complaints about Islam and by inference, against them as individual members of the Muslim community. Media statements confirmed their individual accountability. This was clearly evident in a statement attributed to the Prime Minister in the Daily Telegraph on 28 October (Fife-Yeomans and Yamine 2006), warning Muslims to ‘take a stronger stand or suffer the consequences’:

What I am saying to the Islamic community is this. If they do not resolve this matter, it could do lasting damage to the perceptions of that community within the broader Australian community...If it is not resolved, then unfortunately people will run around saying, ‘Well the reason they didn’t get rid of him is because secretly some of them support his views’.

Most of the young men interviewed generally wanted to avoid trouble, did not want to enter into the debate, and as a result, relied more on informal networks to access their information than published material.

The second theme which emerges is that the issue of modesty is an important and contentious one for Arabic background young men. As is argued elsewhere in this
thesis, the treatment and responsibility for women lies at the heart of much of the Occidental Oriental debate. They therefore intuitively understood and agreed with what lay at the heart of the Sheik’s message – that Muslim women would put themselves at risk by following aspects of Western culture and practice. This shared opinion and defensive response prevented a closer analysis of the implications of the Mufti’s talk or of ensuring that a Muslim in such a prominent position should be more accountable for his public statements – albeit they were made to his followers within his mosque.

The third theme involves the perception that Arabic background youth are familiar with being targeted and having their religion and culture misrepresented. They are more likely therefore to react defensively and to automatically withdraw from such a situation, inflaming rather than defusing the continuing moral panic through their inability to engage publicly in a productive critique or discourse.

**Media Moral Panic in Context**

Ali expressed the view of many of the interviewees that the controversy was deliberate and could have been cleared up quickly if the media had directly approached Taj and asked him for a clarification or an explanation in a less condemning and targeted manner. ‘This could have been something so small, this could have been something that was just cleared up with the Sheikh’ but instead it was ‘taken out of proportion’. They expressed an underlying fear that elements of the media and the Australian community were just waiting for any opportunity that would permit them to continue attacking and isolating Muslims. Anas expressed this concern when he stated ‘Every time that a sheik (speaks) I know the media loves to blow things out of proportion. They love to take it out of proportion’. Ashraf echoed this sentiment in stating that Muslim leaders ‘always talk positively...But, what the media makes out of it...it’s a lose/lose situation because the media’s gonna (sic) turn it into something bad anyway’. An understanding of why there was such a moral outrage against his talk requires a deeper understanding of similar recent moral panics prior to Sheikh Al Hilaly’s sermon and the construction of Islam in Australia as a foreign and culturally incompatible religion.
The term ‘moral panic’ was most famously used by Stan Cohen (1972) in analysing the media uproar over clashes in the sixties between rival youth subcultures in England, the Mods and Rockers. The term refers to a disproportionate - often media fuelled reaction - to an event or series of events which portrays the subject of the hysteria as deviant – as ‘folk devils’. Such deviancy is construed as being a threat to societal values and interests. In the Australian context the term ‘moral panic’ has been associated with the Muslim and Lebanese community in relation to the activities of ‘Lebanese gangs’ in South Western Sydney (Collins et al. 2000), gang rapes and apparent misogyny associated with Muslims (Poynting et al. 2004) and the Cronulla Riots of 2005 (Poynting 2007). Sheik al Hilaly’s pronouncements were seized by the media as a justification for previous moral panics, as evidence that Muslims in Australia were inherently morally deviant.

Historically, but more particularly since September 11, Islam has been considered as culturally incompatible with an Australian liberal democracy. In analysing the discourse of terror in the Australian media, Humphrey (2007a) explored the construction of Islam as ‘abject’ in the coverage of the gang rape trials between 2000 and 2003. He explained this as occurring in three ways – through situating new laws against gang rape in the context of Muslim culture, incorporating a ‘cultural defence’ in the legal process and linking cultural explanations in the media with individual criminal behaviour. In this way the Muslim community at large was criminally implicated and equally subject to the moral panic instigated by the behaviour of this small number of individuals. Such a view was earlier elaborated by Saniotis (2004) who described how the media portrayed Australian Muslims as a secular, resistant, ‘out of place’ other which was irreconcilable with the ideals and values of a Western democracy.

Humphrey also described how Australia’s ethnically diverse Muslim community has been dominated by images of Lebanese Muslims, a process of essentialising the Muslim community described in the HREOC report prepared by Poynting and Noble (2004) in which all Arabs were represented as Muslims and all Muslims as Arabs. From their arrival as civil war refugees (Humphrey 1998), to the discovery of criminal Lebanese gangs in South Western Sydney (Collins et al., 2000), to the gang
rapes of Sydney (Poynting et al., 2004) and finally the Cronulla Riots (Poynting 2007), the Lebanese community is perceived as synonymous with many of the problems afflicting the Muslim community. That the first Mufti appointed by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils was also the Imam of the Lebanese Muslim Association – even though by ethnicity he was Egyptian – only confirmed the Lebanese association with an essentialised Muslim community and served to increase the potential negative impact of his utterances, a situation exacerbated by his lack of English fluency.

In this way moral panics in recent years according to Poynting (2007) have ‘morphed’ from fear of ethnic and particularly Arab crime to fear of Muslims as the ‘other’. More recent moral panics relate to fear of Muslim misogyny. In Sydney this began with the trials in 2005 of the Skaf brothers and was reinforced by the speech of a prominent youth centre leader – Sheik Faiz - who alleged that women’s dress was an incitement to crime (Devine 2005). Grewal (2007) in analysing these media events interrogated the intersection of gender, ethnicity and culture in constructing Australian national identity. She argued that two major discourses could be identified in the media commentary – ‘race not racism’ in which the cultural legitimacy of a community could be called into question by the actions of a few of its members (echoing the argument of Humphrey of Islam as abject) and the appropriation of a ‘feminist’ discourse by conservative elements of the community against sections of the Islamic community.

It would seem then that there has been a continuing series of moral panics, each progressively supporting the next, beginning with violent Arab gangs, then linked to a general Muslim tendency to misogyny and finally to an encouragement for such misogyny and violence at the highest level of religious leadership. This could clearly be seen in the statements of politicians and media linking and then extending the earlier moral panics to the Mufti’s sermon and the whole of the Muslim community in late 2006. In other words, Sheikh Al Hilaly’s comments not only comprised inappropriate statements about Muslim women, but also comprised a threat to the welfare of Australian women and further a potential threat on behalf of the whole Muslim community towards Australian women. Such a conflation was evident on
October 31 2006, when Treasurer Peter Costello was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald as claiming that the Muslim community could have contributed to the gang rapes and to the riot at Cronulla by tolerating Sheik Hilaly’s sermons:

These kinds of attitudes have actually influenced people... So you wonder whether a kid like Bilal Skaf had grown up hearing these kinds of attitudes and you wonder whether kids rioting down at Cronulla have heard these sort of attitudes.

This type of discourse, argues Grewal, in seizing opportunities to maintain and demonstrate an ongoing moral panic in relation to the Muslim community and specifically towards young Muslim men, has become ‘common sense’ and is utilised by powerful entities in the public sphere. Such a discourse has an equally powerful effect on the perception of young Arab background Muslim men in relation to their ‘common sense’ understanding of their place in society – or lack of – a contested space which is continually subject to moral questioning.

Grewal also argues that in this moral panic conservatives have appropriated the ‘feminist’ discourse to criticise the Muslim community. Utilising the sea of media images depicting the ‘oppressed and veiled woman in Islam’ resulting from extensive media coverage of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the reported erosion of women’s rights in many other Muslim countries, Grewal refers to the Prime Minister John Howard who was quoted in The Australian in 2006 as stating that ‘people who come from societies where women are treated in an inferior fashion have got to learn very quickly that this is not the case in Australia’ (Kerbaj 2006c). Indeed the ‘veiled image’ of oppression itself is described by Ayotta and Husain (2005) as an added oppression – a form of epistemic violence that appropriates the voices of Muslim women. Muslim women are seldom permitted to argue their positive roles, where the position of the woman particularly as mother and wife is considered to hold a central and pivotal role in maintaining social order and fulfils an essential aspect of the Muslim community’s religio-cultural identity (Afary 1997) - a positive role which is equally present in many other non-Muslim cultures.
In assessing different cultures, Nader Laura (1989) argues that the treatment of women is ‘the grid from which we rank the humanity’ of a community. She describes two diametrically opposed hegemonic arguments – the Occidental and the Oriental, both operating on the issue of women and each claiming to represent a moral superiority. While the West condemns the treatment of women in Islam, conversely the more extreme Islamic gender paradigms are legitimated by their contrast with a barbaric and materialistic West, whose moral superiority is tenaciously resisted by the Muslim community in claiming its own moral superiority in a reverse hegemonic analysis of Western immorality (Ahmed 1992). The centrality of women in such cultural debates is presented by Grewal (2007) who cites a number of scholars (Yuval-Davis 1997, Eisenstein 2000, Racioppi & O’Sullivan 2000) in arguing that gender is a key dimension in many nationalist discourses. In such discourses women are seen as the embodiment of the Nation, representing the physical site onto which a national or communal identity is projected, a passive object that must be protected and around which national borders are marked and guarded. It is over the welfare of women that the borders of cultural civilisation are also drawn, in this context with Sheikh Al Hilaly marking out his territory on the protection of the Muslim woman from the depredations of the Western male, while simultaneously he and his community are castigated as presenting a moral and physical threat to the welfare of the Western female.

From this perspective - defining the cultural borders of civilisation through the protection of its women - it was inevitable that Muslim young men would firstly reject the media’s accusations against Sheikh Al Hilaly of misogyny or incitement to violence against women and instead affirm the critical concept of ‘modesty’ and the wearing of the hijab as a legitimate and fundamental aspect of his talk and of Islamic culture. Ali for example immediately assumed that his talk had been ‘to promote the hijab and stuff’ and Mahdi that girls should ‘be decent, respect themselves’ in that the Ramadan ‘sermon’ was intended to promote the civilised concept of the protection of women. The Mufti’s sense of humour and use of colourful metaphors were well known amongst the interviewees who immediately framed the talk within their own comfortable paradigms of modesty and Arab cultural behaviour. Ashraf affirmed his familiarity with this oft-repeated topic stating: ‘I believe in modesty for
both (men and women’), and that he understood ‘from where he (Sheikh Al Hilaly) was coming from’.

By maintaining and reinforcing such an ongoing moral panic against the Muslim community, its treatment of its own women and the potential threat towards women of the dominant culture, any public dialogue or willingness of the young men interviewed to engage in a deeper analysis of each of the opposing arguments about women, morality and responsibility which were alluded to by the Mufti is effectively silenced. Instead ideological divisions were entrenched – the Occidental, Oriental paradigms – thereby increasing the polarity in understanding of these very important and sensitive issues in both the Muslim community and the wider Australian community especially amongst the young Muslim men who are in fact cognizant of the arguments of both but unable to articulate their viewpoint in the wider public sphere.

This difficulty was expressed by lawyer and prominent young Muslim leader Waleed Aly (2007) when he stated that Australian Muslims have remained unable ‘to articulate their concerns, views or opinions in a language acceptable to the polity’ despite comprising a substantial immigrant and Australian born population since the 1970’s. As a result there is little effective and visible dialogue between Muslim community spokespersons and the media or associated political debate. While analyses of the effects of media marginalisation, socio-economic marginalisation and Islamophobia have been extensive (Halliday 1999; Noble et al., 1999a; Collins et al., 2000; Humphrey, 2005; Poynting, 2007) this discourse of belonging amongst Muslim youth in the face of anti-Muslim public opinion has received less attention, although discussed more recently by Aly (2007) and Grewal (2007). While Hussein (2007) has elaborated on the complicated discourses amongst Muslim women in regard to the hijab, there remains little study of youth religio-cultural discourse amongst mainstream Australian Muslims especially relating to their leadership.

Without an articulate public voice, the existence of an extensive moral discourse within the diverse Muslim community is consequently not reflected, and as a result a largely law abiding Muslim community is morally condemned due to the actions of a small criminal minority. Any such discourse within the Muslim community which
condemns acts of violence or encourages women’s rights receives little publicity and consequently is considered to be non-existent. It can also be silenced by the very complication and simplification of the debates about women’s sexuality itself – as Hussein has argued in relation to the hijab debate, there are risks for Muslim women in engaging in either of the ‘hijab-as-choice’ or ‘hijab-as-force’ arguments. Inevitably therefore, it is the visible actions of a minority that are instead perceived to represent the discourse of the essentialised Islamic identity.

Without a meaningful dialogue and with their absence from any ‘reasonable debate’ about Islam and its Australian Muslim identity, the polarity of perceptual misunderstandings between Muslim youth and the wider Australian community is increased. There exists no ‘bridging dialogue’ - a term I use to connote a common vocabulary that can align the commonality underlying each of the opposing Occidental and Oriental arguments, nor any discourse that encourages Muslim youth in the West to engage in a constructive critical analysis of cultural and political interpretations of Islam using a common framework of vocabulary derived from the dialect of Islam and the dialect of secular modernity. Modood (2005, p. 32) describes this as the racialisation of cultural difference, and an absence of language to ‘express loyalty to one’s own minority community within a public discourse of equality and civic integration’. Without this critical common vocabulary, the integration of second and third generation Muslims in Australia and their feelings of acceptance in Australian society must necessarily be inhibited.

The moral panic over Sheik Al Hilaly’s 2006 talk and the aggressive defensive response of Muslim youth is an example of such an automatic polarising of cultural perceptions about women and sexuality that occurs in the absence of such a ‘bridging dialogue’ when viewed from contextually prejudiced positions. In reality the moral context of the Mufti’s talk was based on the relatively common Judeo Christian concepts of modesty and personal integrity - albeit exacerbated by his inappropriate metaphor, and misguided sense of drama and humour. His supporters perceived it as a proactive and religiously valid viewpoint supporting the protection and respect of women’s rights, but it was perceived as the exact opposite by his detractors, who viewed his talk in essence as an approval for the violent
transgression of the same. In the emotional climate created by the media, there was no middle ground for a dispassionate analysis of the talk by either side, nor, as argued by Turner (2003) in the wake of a fading multiculturalism, no language left to debate the reasonableness of either argument.

Zones of Acceptance

Although all the youth strongly identified themselves as Australians, they felt misunderstood and marginalised, not finding any comfortable zone or place of acceptance in which to locate their Muslim Australianness and what they considered to be valid religious viewpoints. All of the interviewees expressed a desire to be recognised both as Muslims and Australian, to be accepted by the majority community and to find a comfortable zone where their Islamic identity did not contradict acceptance as an Australian. The vilification that they receive in the media was a constant reminder of ‘not belonging’ and of being made to feel ‘alien’ which Noble and Poynting (2008) attribute to the denial of ‘cultural citizenship’ and an internalisation of the ‘othering’ as a form of normality. It was in this context that in the face of a continuation of the existing moral panic relating to Islam and women that the initial response of the interviewees was defensive, leading them to allege deliberate misinterpretation or wilful interference in the affairs of the Muslim community.

Despite the implication that those not rejecting the contents of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk were complicit in a threat against women in society, the young men instead unified in their perception of an ‘imagined community’, an alienated ‘Other’ as capably described by Poynting et al. (2004). As Walid explained, ‘you should trust your Muslim brother or sister until they’re proven guilty’, and he was prepared to support Sheikh Al Hilaly until he had ‘evidence’ to the contrary. Recognising the Sheik’s Arabic scholarship, while privately disagreeing with his choice of words, Ashraf stated that he had known him ‘from before he made that comment. And I know him from after he made that comment. And I know that he’s not the type’ that the media was portraying ‘a radical, or this extremist...He’s so far from it’. For Mahmoud, to concede to the media’s demands would be an act of disloyalty to a
community where he did belong, and where he maintained ‘cultural citizenship’ in that the Mufti was ‘a person that’s respected in the community. And secondly, he’s your brother.’ As a result, to consider ‘bagging’ the Imam was inconceivable to Mahmoud: ‘I could never do it...not just for him but also for the community.’ They felt comfortable within their imagined communities understanding, a zone or imagined place where there was agreement and a common understanding of cultural priorities and loyalties. To step outside this comfortable zone, in publicly criticising the Mufti, could result in negating both the validity of their religious leadership as well as the crucial religious concept of modesty, while not providing any comfortable zone or place within an alternative ‘imagined community’ which accepted the validity of Islam or Islamic culture and precepts.

This situation where Australian born and educated Muslim young men are continually marginalised and effectively held responsible for the actions of a few individuals, as well as the statements of their migrant and non-Englishing speaking religious leaders, has unfortunately led to the entrenching of such leadership and the silencing of internal criticism. Although the educated Muslim young men interviewed are more familiar with Australian culture and more competent to engage in such cultural discourse, instead of feeling safe to counsel, advise and ultimately take over the leadership of their community, they are effectively disenfranchised and forced to support an out-of-date leadership as a response to mutual alienation. Mahmoud described the heated discussions that took place in his house and explained why he remained loyal to the Mufti. He felt that the media were attacking his religious leader ‘but me, verily, I love my mesheikh. I love the mesheikh of Ahlul Sunnah, and I could never look to slander them or anybody else’. Although wanting to repair the damage, he felt it was disloyal to openly criticise Sheikh Al Hilaly or to ‘come up to someone on local media, (saying) how dare the sheikh say this and that... (because he’s) respected in the community.’ Sulaiman explained further that it was unthinkable for them to publicly criticise him and ‘humiliate the guy’ in order to ‘save your own arse’.

Unable to engage in a meaningful dialogue as individuals with workmates, acquaintances or the media at large, and finding the only public discourse to be one
of allegation or resistance and denial, these Muslim young men were immediately marginalised. Although all had extensive Australian education, their own dialogical skills were insufficiently developed to locate the dilemma in concepts that were reasonable to both sides. As they were ‘Othered’ so they retreated to the comfortable zones of the ‘imagined community’ of the Muslim Ummah, where their cultural religious concepts of modesty and hijab were accepted. The defiant response of the Mufti contributed to drawing ‘a line in the sand’ between those who would stand with the Quranic message of Islam and the Mufti, and those against it. In effect the Mufti delineated further the ‘imagined Muslim community’ into the ‘imagined Mufti’s community’ effectively alienating and ‘othering’ in return those who did not support him. By this means any internal criticism and accountability of his religious leadership was also suspended through a call for unity against ‘the other’.

Response to opposing calls from the Media and the Mufti

The media had made the Mufti’s comments a public safety issue which required individual responses from his ‘imagined community’. As a result, friends, workmates and acquaintances of the interviewees demanded not only an explanation but an active response to demands for the Mufti to be removed, triggering a variety of strategies that the interviewees described in how they personally dealt with the situation. Only three responses appeared feasible to such ultimatums – an acquiescence and acceptance of the Orientalist interpretation, a defiant and masculine protest in terms of the ‘resistance identity’ described by Collins et al. (1999) of Lebanese youth in the face of racialised crime, or a silent withdrawal from the dialogue.

Hussein (2007) described how, with the first strategy, those who spoke out against the Sheikh found that their voices were appropriated ‘by those who wished to illustrate that Islam was by nature a violent and misogynist religion’ providing further proof that both Islam and its followers – were “out of touch with contemporary values” (Goward 2006). With the first strategy, there could be no comfortable zone of acceptance – considered as traitor by their religio-ethnic community, or adherent of a “vile” religion (Farr & Cummins, 2006) by the
Australian community. For the majority of the interviewees, there could therefore be no capitulation to the demands of media, irrespective of their own unease with the Mufti’s comments.

In order to understand why the first option was not feasible, that is in acquiescing to the Orientalist interpretation of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk and complying with the media’s request to take a public stand against him, it is necessary to analyse the Imam’s response over the days following. His first response consisted of a denial of media allegations and then an apology which was described by the Editor of the Daily Telegraph as half baked (‘Sick rape remarks can’t be forgiven’ 27 October 2006). He was then admitted to hospital with his supporters presenting him as an elderly, religious leader who had been deliberately targeted and publicly misrepresented. His supporters argued that the media attack on the Mufti - the nominal religious leader of Australia’s Muslims - violated the community’s sacred cultural values since the position of Mufti is traditionally held in high honour and esteem in Muslim majority countries (Morris, 2006).

Werbner (1991) describes how such a perceived violation of sacred values is one of the material targets of racism which can unify a fragmented community and in this situation it was one of the factors contributing to the unification of the fragmented Muslim community. As the ‘sacred values’ of Islam have become increasingly detached from cultural practice and linked instead to Islamist understandings of a Muslim identity and a global Ummah, such an attack targeting the pinnacle of religious authority assisted in creating a common identity of a targeted and maligned community which had the moral right to defend itself and its leader. As Ashraf explained, initially he did not support any non-English speaking religious leaders addressing the media: ‘To be honest, I don’t remember exactly what he was trying to say, but, no matter what, he shouldn’t be talking. Number one, if you don’t know how to speak English, don’t talk’. Later in the interview he expressed his frustration with the ongoing media circus and how he was personally affected saying ‘I was embarrassed, it was embarrassing’. Despite his personal opinions on the Mufti and on the appropriateness of what was said, the violation of sacred values, as described by Werbner, through insulting a Muslim religious leader and his teaching was
sufficient to cause Ashraf to put aside his differences and provide all the support necessary to the Sheikh:

But at the same time when I talk about it in front of non-Muslims I would actually defend him. I couldn’t stand against him in public, couldn’t stand against my own religion and my own community....As I said, I’m not a fan of him. But we all stuck next to him, you know, saying look, if someone attacks you or attacks the seat of the Muslims, the seat of the Mufti, we’ll never let that go.... I couldn’t stand against him in public. I couldn’t stand against my own religion and my own community.

Sheikh Al Hilaly encouraged this by deliberately portraying himself as a victim with Islam under attack. Despite being told by the Lebanese Muslim Association to keep a low profile, he defiantly gave the sermon the following Friday and invoked ‘images of conspiracy and martyrdom’ (Sheehan, Sheik Tries to lie his way out of Trouble SMH) encouraging feelings of victimisation in his audience and developing what Werbner described as a ‘community of suffering’ (1991 p.19) – individuals and communities whose humanity is violated and who are socially alienated through the shared experience of racism. By widening the media outrage from his own comments to indicate an attack on the sensibilities of modesty and the fundamentals of Islam, the Mufti effectively brought together his community in a common conception of marginalisation and misrepresentation, a victimised community that needed to unite with him. Capitalising on his knowledge of the Quran and historical instances of persecution he was quoted in the Weekend Australian on 28 October as saying:

I say: By God, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand ... the sun, the moon, Australia, America and the Western world, in order to give up the principle of the Islamic, moderate, Koranic calling, then I swear to God that I will remain all by myself until God makes me a martyr!

This was clearly aimed at presenting politicians and sections of the media as attacking the Muslim community as a whole and contextualising it in the history of the early Muslim community, in this instance referring specifically to a famous story
in the Sirah of the Prophet in which he was pressured by the authorities in Mecca to renounce his calling as a Prophet, but refused. In this way Sheikh Al Hilaly presented himself as the heroic leader who was withstanding the assault against his victimised community. In this context to join with those inflicting the suffering would be intolerable, but to join with the community following a defender of the faith was a comfortably righteous zone, a zone inclusive of community acceptance.

It is argued here that Sheikh Al Hilaly portrayed a type of ‘protest masculinity’ a term introduced initially by Bob Connell (1995) and utilised extensively by researchers of male Arabic background (mostly Lebanese) boys in South West Sydney (Poynting et al. 1999, 2003, 2004) to describe how marginalised young men consciously adopt a strategy of confrontation as a means of restoring their manly dignity in the face of Islamophobic humiliation. The term was used by Connell particularly to relate to an ‘intersection’ of ethnicity and masculinity, a gendered protest by the marginalised and usually ethnic working class against their dominating ‘white’ social structure. Although it could be argued that Sheikh Al Hilaly in his position as Mufti and leader of the Muslim community did not inhabit the type of marginalised social working-class represented in these accounts, it could be equally argued that he did. He arrived as a migrant to Australia, struggled to obtain residency and never mastered English. The income provided by the mosque community was minimal, and he interacted on a daily basis with the frustrations felt by all ages of his equally marginalised parishioners, statistically one of the lowest socio-economic communities in Australia. His history of challenging those that he considered to have authority in the Australian social environment has been at the core of numerous attempts to have him removed by the establishment. His defiant stance on numerous previous occasions and aggressive responses – epitomised by his comment that he would only resign ‘when the world was clean of the White House’ (Skelton, 2006c) a reference to the influence of the US and President Bush, had contributed to his popularity amongst the young men interviewed. When asked if he had received support in the community because of his aggressive defiance, Hassan responded:
Yeah, I think that’s very true. Like, a part of me, I was in. For me personally I can’t stand parts of the media, certain elements, certain journalists. But I like the fact that he stood up, you know, and gave it to them.

A more humble and apologetic approach in the face of the emotional and insulting language utilised by the media, as described earlier, would have been almost shameful in the Arabic community. Instead, his challenging ‘in your face’ response, based as it was initially on passages of the Quran, and thereby recalling glorious periods of celebrated Islamic history, restored pride amongst his community including the young people, even if at the same time they recognised that the controversy would thereby continue. In presenting the outcry over his talk as an attack on Islam and its chosen leader, Sheikh Al Hilaly constructed a very masculine and aggressive response which appealed to and resonated with many of his parishioners – both young and old and restored comfort and a sense of personal dignity. This personal sense of restored pride, of masculine defiance, provided another zone where the young men could feel comfortable, could find a zone of acceptance in their marginalised state. Farouk, a youth mentor reflected on this defiance and call to unity after Sheik Hilaly had, in his words, been ‘bombarded and attacked viciously’ when he stated:

Regardless of what he had said, even if he had said worse things than that, then they (the youth) would have come out and supported him. Because the simple fact is that they’re so sick and tired of the injustice that keeps taking place.

As a result an internal and an external dialogue occurred - internally the youth lamenting the Mufti’s lack of English, his inflammatory comments and inability to engage in an effective dialogue with his critics, while externally adopting and maintaining a defiant loyalty based on a restored pride in both religion and culture. The identification with Sheikh Al Hilaly in suffering from the ‘hidden injuries’ of racism were expressed by Hassan: ‘Your heart sort of leans towards him a bit, even though maybe he was wrong...he should be treated with more respect’.
The third strategy in evidence amongst the interviewees was a simple withdrawal from the event and associated discourse, in refusing to read the papers or to listen to the reports - an active disengagement as a reaction to the sense of being besieged described by Muslim leader Waleed Aly (Allard 2007), in a sense a refusal to submit to powerlessness. Hassan exemplified this determination to ignore the whole issue when he requested his workmates to change the radio station whenever the Mufti was discussed. He explained, ‘I think the fact (is) that it’s siege mentality’. In the face of a powerful media there was no avenue of easy resistance. ‘He’s a Muslim and (the media) are not just bagging him, they’re making fun of Muslims...the power that the media has, you feel like they’re the aggressor no matter what’. With this strategy the youth returned to their normal zones of acceptance as Australians without a religious identity or with a hidden religious identity, through avoiding the controversy altogether. This withdrawal in the face of a powerful media and its alienating discourse was expressed also by Mahmoud who, after hearing the reports on the news, explained that: ‘(I) just didn’t bother. I knew that for the whole week we would keep hearing about it’.

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the comments of the Mufti, Sheikh Taj al Din al Hilaly – who was also the Imam of the Lebanese Muslim Association – dramatically escalated the existing misogynistic view of an essentialised Islam already associated with perceived ‘problematic’ Lebanese Muslims. The young men interviewed for the most part did not access either the original transcript or the informed debate on Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk, relying on informal, subjective and emotional accounts from friends and family. Those who were confronted with hostile allegations against the Mufti – generally from non-Muslim workmates, reacted defensively. The media response itself was in fact a continuation and confirmation of earlier moral panics relating to gang rape trials and the Cronulla riots, with commentators and politicians elevating the moral panic from the behaviour of a few criminals, to the Muslim community at large and finally to the highest levels of its leadership. As a result, the interviewees felt personally affected by the media outrage. Not having a public space to engage in the discourse and lacking a common framework of vocabulary – what I have termed a bridging dialogue – which would allow them to link the valid underlying arguments of both Sheikh Al Hilaly’s critics
and his supporters in relation to the rights of women, modesty and sexuality, stifled the ability of these educated young men to contribute to the discourse that occurred. They were also unable to critically analyse the statements of religious leaders and particularly Sheikh Al Hilaly, or hold them to account about their controversial statements due to the pressure of remaining within a comfortable zone or place of acceptance within their cultural and religious community.

In my research on the responses of these young men to the moral panic over the Mufti, their adoption of two strategies was apparent. They refused to publicly acquiesce with the Mufti’s critics despite acknowledging privately that his comments were embarrassing, inappropriate and the product of his inability to understand English and therefore aspects of the Australian culture, and despite immense pressure throughout the media for a public rejection of the Mufti’s statements. Instead they uniformly supported the validity of his underlying religious argument, speaking defensively in public while privately critical. Many of these young men identified strongly with his defiant and masculine protest against perceived Islamophobia and hostile interference in the internal affairs of the Muslim community. The alternative response was a withdrawal from the discourse which demanded accountability of Muslims and their leaders, thereby attempting to avoid the controversy altogether and separating the religious aspect of their identity which precluded maintenance in a zone of acceptance as Australians, in order resume some normality to their lives.

Each of the alternatives outlined above effectively silenced their ability to encourage more appropriate and contemporary interpretations of Islam. Instead, by defiantly protesting in support of the Mufti, or avoiding the issue altogether, young Muslim men engaged in an internally critical and externally loyal discourse which ultimately reinforced what they acknowledged was an inappropriate form of leadership and denied them the opportunity to engage in a discourse of reform. Marginalising and essentialising the Muslim community is counter-productive in that it drives young men who are potentially the solution for a more harmonious and integrated version of Muslim culture, to stand with and behind inappropriate leaders who will entrench potentially hostile communities inside Australia. Such a situation where aggressive
and masculine leadership can capitalise on the lack of critical discourse and the ‘hidden injuries’ of marginalised young men – albeit educated and relatively successful, could potentially increase the radicalisation of a ‘community of suffering’. It is essential therefore, that a bridging dialogue is developed which begins to reflect the common framework existing within Judeo Christian and Muslim concepts of modesty, family security and sexuality, locating them in the secular modern debate on individual rights and community responsibility. A public space away from any pre-existing moral panic, which includes a comfortable zone of acceptance for these young men, where their identity as both moral Muslim and Australian is accepted and where the type of bridging dialogue described above is available, is a necessary condition for the critical appraisal of current Muslim religious leadership.
Chapter 4: Identity

In previous chapters the contextual background relating to leadership of the Muslim community, the emergence of disparate and competing voices for its multiethnic and varied constituency and in particular the history and significant although controversial role of the Mufti were analysed. Details of his most controversial statements relating to women and the moral panic that ensued - building on and authenticating previous moral panics - were then discussed, followed by an investigation of the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees relating to media demands of them, in particular for them to be personally accountable as members of the Muslim community for allowing the Mufti to stay. Although the remnants of multiculturalism continued to underpin Australian policy and discourse at the time of these incidents, comments by the Prime Minister amongst other prominent Australians concerning who was an acceptable member of the Australian community – previously alleging that Muslim asylum seekers had thrown their children overboard (Editorial in The Age, ‘Demonising the Boat People’, 12 October 2001, p.14), and in this instance that the Mufti’s talk was ‘out of touch with contemporary values in Australia’ (Farr and Cummings 2006) – impacted strongly on young Arabic background Muslim men. The affective process on their sense of identity and belonging to the ‘Australian community’ is the subject of this chapter.

Citizenship and Ontological Security

In beginning each of the interviews in this research, the opening interview questions were directly related to the young men’s perceptions of identity in relation to their citizenship. The answers were enlightening, with a relatively high rate of self-identification with an ‘Australian’ identity although in some cases considerably qualified. All of the interviewees had lived in Australia for most of their lives and appeared strongly to desire acceptance and normality by the wider Australian community. Their desire to be accepted without ethnic qualification as an Australian was expressed often and appeared to be critical for them in acquiring a sense of
belonging, the capacity to feel comfortable referred to by Noble (2002, 2005) in furthering what Giddens (1991) called a state of ontological security, a sense of security which is fundamental to the capacity for social agency. According to Giddens this state is often achieved with the assistance of traditions in articulating ontological frameworks that provide the meanings inherent in all social life and activity, meanings which reduce anxiety, provide a feeling of biographical continuity and develop a sense of self-identity. Although tradition or culture for these young men provided an awareness of where they had come from, it no longer supplied answers for the future, on what they would become, nor did it reduce their anxieties and sense of self-worth and identity in the face of ongoing negative portrayals of the same traditions.

Many of the interviewees were educated and had made a series of pragmatic socio-economic choices to progress successfully along a path of acquisition of cultural and social capital. As this was acquired so also a degree of ontological security was acquired. Having achieved a relative state of comfort the necessity of arguing for inclusion into what they see as the ‘imagined Australian community’ and self-identification with the dominant Australian culture was less necessary, providing a greater choice of global, transnational and multiple identities. However, as the chapter progresses it is apparent that such ontological security is a relative state with these individuals losing some of their progress in acquiring social capital due to challenging media events and hostile political statements in response to local or international events. The interviewees then experienced social marginalisation, discrimination and felt the ‘hidden injuries of racism’. Analysing the discourses surrounding their identity formation there is a specific focus on the affect of the ‘moral panic’ (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1996) due to Sheikh Al Hilaly’s comments and their subsequent experiences of racial discrimination or marginalisation. In discussing similar experiences of vilification experienced by Arab and Muslim Australians, Noble and Poynting (2002) have reflected on affective processes which inhibited them from full participation in local and national spaces and national belonging. The experiences of young Arab and Muslim men in this research reflected similar affective processes and feelings of exclusion. How this impacted on their identity as Australians is the subject of this chapter and in particular how each
of the interviewees developed strategies in order to regain or reaffirm their sense of ontological security in an Australian identity. Throughout all of this discourse on identity, the religious aspect of their Muslim identity was an ever present and essential aspect to all of their pragmatic choices.


The young men involved in this research had not been marginalised to the extent of forming their own subculture through gangs or criminal activity as a means of valorising their exclusion from mainstream society, although they had equally experienced the social incivility of more recent research, and it is their understanding of how this affected their hopes and prospects in identifying as Australian that this chapter attempts to uncover. As outlined in chapter 1, many were students or were in the early stages of developing professional or business careers. They therefore could not be considered to be from a low socio-economic situation although invariably their parents continued to occupy such a space. Instead they were in the process of developing and negotiating considerable social capital in the hope of avoiding marginalisation and finding acceptance as ‘normal’ Australians. The outcomes of my research then will be reflecting on the situation of a more ‘mainstream’ community of Arabic background young men, who, unlike some of their previously researched peers, hold out hope that they will achieve ‘normality’ through educational and other strategies that they pursue. However, like their more marginalised peers and the subjects of later research in the area, the interviewees in this research equally experienced the ‘hidden injuries of racism’, the exclusion and the ‘othering’ common
to Arabic background Muslim young people, the only difference being that for many their strategies of negotiation and resistance were more advanced.

Multiple and Global Identities

There is a considerable body of writing surrounding the processes and contingencies of identity formation which largely focuses on the construction and application of 'difference' and 'otherness' as a determining factor in identity formation (Brah, 1996; Hall, 1996; Noble et al., 1999b). A contrasting rationale which could more effectively match the statements of my interviewees would consider 'attraction towards' as well as 'exclusion from' as equally important influences on the complex construction of youth identity. Individuals exist in polarities - seldom fully accepted into a community, seldom completely rejected, mostly moving fluidly between zones of acceptance – a concept enunciated in Chapter 3 - and zones of rejection, involving various sites of integration as mentioned by Noble (2008), according to the climate and context of their interaction whether social, professional, or student based.

In addressing stories of injury and suffering, Humphrey (2002) referred to the Arab diasporic community arriving as immigrants with little social capital relevant to their new Australian community. Since the majority of their social capital related to an Arabic, Muslim and ethnic background, initially they retreated into their own communities – outside of mainstream Australia, and ‘othered’ by it (Said 1979; Goldberg 1993). As they and their children gradually developed communication and social skills - thereby acquiring a greater range of social capital - they adopted more of what Noble et al. described as a ‘strategic hybrid’ identity (Noble et al., 1999b), or a more competent ‘bicultural’ concept as utilised by Kabir (2007). This hybrid identity was neither a complete fit within their original ethnic background – often denying them the opportunity to return to their homeland, nor was it sufficient to permit a complete social acceptance into Australian mainstream society. This was a common experience of earlier generations of Lebanese and Muslim migrants who maintained strong links with their country of origin and maintained an intention to return – as this researcher heard often from the parents of Lebanese students in her schools. Their children – the subjects of this research – have less connection with or
motive for return to their parents homeland, are educated and socialised in Australia and have moved beyond the necessity for a ‘strategic hybridity’ into a multiple identity, even transnational identity through identification with the Global Ummah.

The concept of a ‘Global Ummah’ relates to the emergence of a ‘globalised Islam’ described by Olivier Roy (2004) particularly in reference to second and third generation Muslim migrants living in the West. These Muslims he argued, did not identify with the homeland of their parents - a ‘diaspora Islam’ (Humphrey 2007b), or even of the Middle East, but were more concerned with resisting the corruption of Westernisation – seen as a global, not local influence - through the imposition of Islamic norms in Muslim society – whether minority or majority Muslim societies – and the construction of a universal Muslim community represented by the traditional Arabic concept of ‘Ummah’. This universal community would not simply recreate the past glories of Muslim civilisation but would transcend the failings of earlier Muslim societies. Closely affiliated with the growth of neo-fundamentalism, this Global Ummah is not related to a specific culture or nation-state and has no apparent political centre, its emphasis being on the individual realisation of the universal concepts of Islam.

The interviewees recognised that their ultimate benefit – the ‘cognitive and emotive anchor of the feelings’ as proposed by Giddens (1991, p.36) - their ‘ontological security’ lay in an Australian identity, albeit negotiated and resistant to ‘unIslamic’ practices, and often including participation in the global Ummah. Mahdi, for example, clearly understood the benefits of an Australian identity: ‘Like, I’ve got the two best things in the world, being Muslim and being Australian. To me they’re the best.’ Each of these spheres of his life had the potential to provide him with the emotional and cognitive support that allowed him to be comfortable and to discover that state of belonging described by Giddens. ‘I’m happy to be a Muslim because it’s the best religion and it’s the right religion. And I’m happy to be in Australia, an Australian, because Australia is the best country in the world!’ These two spheres or social spaces for Mahdi held the potential for reconciliation, the opportunity to negotiate occupation of both at the same time: ‘It’s got the fairest, you know, fairest laws, it’s very similar to Islam even, the way this country goes, and I’m very proud
of both of those’. However, as the research of Vahed (2008) revealed, the consequent feeling of being ‘part’ of the Australian community is not always attained by Muslim youth.

Noble et al. (1999a; 1999b) described a complex process of ‘othering’ in the ethnic identity formation of Arabic-speaking marginalised youth that occurs through the mapping of oppositions between and within cultures according to notions of self and other, using both strategic essentialism – a simplified and essentialised view of cultures - and a relative fluidity of perceived ethnic boundaries. These youth simplified the modern world through the lens of crude stereotypes of themselves positioned against ‘others’, often heavily influenced by popular media stereotyping, and thereby provided themselves with a sense of agency. Modern society for them could be evaluated through a cultural framework grounded in their sense of being Lebanese. This essentialism was supplemented with a strategic hybridity which maintained a strategic combination of distinct elements – although sometimes conflicting elements - drawn from both cultures.

In resisting notions of hybridity, however, I will be referring to multiple identities as a more practical description of the strategic register adopted by youth in different contexts and different spaces. The young men of this study are not ‘caught between two cultures’ as described by Amin (2003), being more educated and confident and less prone to seeing cultures as ‘essentialised’. Having learnt to move fluidly and unconsciously between languages and cultural appearance including body language or bodily expression and identifiable fashions, these young men based their frustration at marginalisation on a clear understanding of their joint Australian and Islamic identity. Hybridity carries a connotation of a certain reduction of the characteristics of the parent identities, which is in contradiction to the experience of young people who can potentially accommodate the complete expectation of each of their multiple identities according to the given situation. Just as a politician who is also a sportsman is not seen as a hybrid - with his political profession impinging on his sports appearance or vice versa, but has multiple identities according to his different professional and recreational roles, in each of which he can fulfil a complete fit as required of that role - so also a young Lebanese lawyer can,
according to context, present the behavioural characteristics necessary for social acceptance within the Lebanese family and social environment, while also behave professionally in order to meet the required role of a lawyer or engineer. I would contend that individuals - as demonstrated by the young men in this research - are able to master the required cultural capital for more than one identity - that is, in these cases, they are equally able to inter-relate successfully with the lower socio-economic situation of their families and sections of their community as with their professional, student or semi-professional working life. As explained by Noble and Poynting (2008) social inclusion is not a singular process, because ‘migrants inhabit various sites of integration’. As a result, they develop multiple sources of cultural capital according to their gendered, classed and ethnic situation as proposed by Collier (1998). Sheikh Al Hilaly himself (as cited in Poynting & Mason 2007 p.76) is reported to have acknowledged the extent of the cultural integration of Muslim youth by controversially saying ‘They are born in Australia; they have Australian hearts, Australian brains and Australian culture; what they watch on television is Australian; their education is Australian; the only thing Lebanese about them is their name’ as a defence against the media criminalisation of the Lebanese community following a shooting at a Sydney police station.

However, this cultural capital - albeit of the required professional or educational variety - may not translate into the necessary social capital in instances where they are marginalised or excluded due to statements of the media or politicians resulting from international events, or the behaviour of their leaders as in the instance of Sheikh Al Hilaly. Unlike the 'gang' subcultures that were researched by Collins et al. (2000), in most cases, these young men did not develop their own alternative subcultures with an associated and valorised cultural capital in order to provide an ontological security in the face of such marginalisation. This may indeed become necessary in the event that they continue to experience social marginalisation and the 'hidden injuries of racism'. However, in most cases, these young men were sufficiently educated to demand their social inclusion due to their experience of existing systems and institutions, or to be confident enough that such exclusion was temporary, and simply required time before they could recover their social capital and therefore social inclusion. Without recognition and in a state of marginalisation
they were aware that their cultural capital was not sufficient to be effective. This was particularly evident in a story told by Asaf when he related difficulties that he had during his first years at University. As his fellow students headed off to the bar for their social activities, he initially made excuses as to why he could not join them. Eventually he plucked up the courage to ‘explain to them slowly’ that he didn’t drink alcohol. They started ‘making that distant look’ and questioned him ‘Come on, how come you don’t drink? I can’t believe you’re for real. Are you serious?’ Now he is far more comfortable and able to drink non-alcoholic drinks with them in mutually agreeable premises as over time he developed the skills necessary to have his religious needs recognised as well as maintain social inclusion by acquiring the social capital necessary to balance the two.

Racial vilification does not necessarily occur through overtly racist action – it can appear in subtle forms of incivility, as Noble (2005) discovered, a negative form of acknowledgement from strangers which negates the feeling of belonging. This ‘social incivility’ can be imparted in the interaction of body language, mannerisms, facial and linguistic cues and is manifest in feelings of discomfort or comfort, in being recognised not as an Australian but as a foreigner. A look or a glance can frequently carry a host of meanings from acceptability, to questioning, to rejection – all of which were frequently cited by the young men in this research. Such subtle rejections deny social capital, and put the individual on the ‘outer’ in that instance of social interaction. The required social capital can alternatively be acquired by having a critical mass of individuals with sufficient knowledge of the ‘Australian way of life’ to secure their own niche in Australian society, and thereby become socially acceptable by their size and internal confidence – as for example, the community of Italians, Greeks or Koreans who have acquired enough of the subtleties of language, behaviour and cultural norms for them to move from the ‘foreigner’ status to an accepted Australian migrant entity.

There is thus a progression of identity – firstly in being the outsider on arrival, then the ethnic migrant who is marginally accepted and still trying to claim identity as an Australian. This second stage is marked by the hyphenated, or hybrid type of identity which is continually challenged and strategically positioned to further the interests of
the individual, but often under pressure from rejection or exclusion. Over time this progresses to the ontologically comfortable 'ethnic' Australian who can choose to refer to his or her ethnic background, but can also choose strategically a national Australian identity, a transnational or global entity because a comfortable state has been obtained – an ontologically secure position where there is no longer the necessity to struggle for social acceptance and a recognised identity status. It is such a process which will be investigated in this chapter, utilising the discussions on identity following experiences of social incivility that these young Arabic background Muslim men experienced as a result of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s talk.

Achieving Ontological Security

The state of comfortable identity as an Australian is in constant flux for the Muslim community. Those who have achieved the ontological security of being comfortably identified as Australians, albeit qualified as to values and practice – e.g. non-drinking, incorporating ethical economics, halal food and so on – can find such comfort quickly threatened by international events and by the media when they are accused of being ‘un-Australian’. This has occurred in the wake of media allegations of inappropriate comments from Imams, attachment to a ‘terrorist’ religion, and actions of outspoken or ‘extremist’ members of their community. On the occasion of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s Ramadan talk, and his subsequent controversial statements, demands were made by both politicians and media (Fife-Yeomans & Yamine 2006) for Muslim Australians to choose between the identities that they had successfully negotiated, by publicly disavowing his statements and removing him as religious leader or suffering ‘lasting damage to the perception(s) of that community’. As explained in chapter 3, one successful strategy employed by these young men was to withdraw altogether from the discourse and the community until the matter had resolved itself. While this strategy might be appropriate in the short term, an ongoing demand of this nature would ultimately require one of the other two strategies – acquiescence to the media’s demands for self-exclusion from the Mufti’s followers, or a defensive support for him at the risk of sacrificing the ontological security of their Australian association. Ultimately such a decision would be affected by the
amount of social capital gained or lost – family loyalty, employment and social acceptance in the various sites of integration inhabited.

In responding to the question of their ethnicity and citizenship each of the young men demonstrated very different backgrounds and experiences, and different stages in the process of acquiring a comfortable identity from the complex environments they inhabited. Among the more privileged young men with the social, cultural and socio-economic capital to have acquired arguably the greatest extent of what Ghassan Hage (1998) termed ‘whiteness’ was Abdullah, who initially described himself as Australian but multiracial. Abdullah's acquisition of social capital came from a variety of sources - his parents, his public schooling and his private Islamic schooling. Both of his parents were professional and had acquired social capital that allowed them as Muslims to live comfortably amongst the wealthier sections of society. His father travelled internationally for a multinational company, while his mother - although of Lebanese descent - had lived in Australia for most of her life. Abdullah's early public schooling developed his Australian social capital, while his education at an Islamic private school provided him with a familiarity to and ontological security in his ethnic and religious background as he recalled 'the students were always fun to get along with, we all had the same sort of issues, we all grew up in the same community, with similar families and things like that'.

Abdullah found that at his senior school (which was on Sydney's North Shore) there was a mix of wealthy and lower socio-economic families, as well as a multiracial environment: 'they were all mixed, like some were filthy rich, but they didn't show it, and then others were, you know, poorer, and they came from small economic background, or low economic backgrounds, and you know there was just no real divide’. These socio-economic and racial differences were not reflected in the way students grouped themselves - it was irrelevant to their social patterns at school. I would argue that Abdullah had amassed sufficient social capital to provide him with a comfortable Australian identity, allowing a further pragmatic choice of religious and ethnic identities if necessary or advantageous socially. In this regard in stages of identification, he had arrived at that secure state of Australian ‘normality’.
Able to inhabit the varied sites of integration mentioned by Noble and Poynting (2008) Abdullah was equally comfortable in the Australian as well as the Muslim ‘imagined communities’: ‘Whenever I go into the masjid, for some reason straight away I can just feel comfortable with whoever I meet, while if its outside the masjid, you know, any random person, I won't feel comfortable with until after a while. But when (I) meet a brother at the masjid, it's straight away’. He discovered a similar feeling of belonging with the community of believers while performing the Hajj: ‘you're with millions of people from all over the world, like from countries that I've never even heard of before, you'd meet them, and they'd all have the same idea in mind’.

Religious ‘Framework of Living’

Abdullah’s familiarity allowed him to move beyond the experience of multiple identities to a transnational identity. Like others in this research he was not seeking to recreate an ethnic identity based on a foreign land, but was generally comfortable with speaking sufficient of his ethnic language and practising relevant cultural routines at home, while equally comfortable in tackling much of the marginalisation and discrimination that he experienced in the wider community and at work, with the same tools of accommodation, wit and humour, or critical discourse that was used against him.

This success is partially founded on a more overt and confident ‘framework of living’ that is religiously, not culturally based. It appeared that while many elements of the young men’s culture were expendable, aspects of their religion including ethics of justice, individual rights and social behaviour, were not. Unlike their parents, this was one area where most of the young men interviewed were not prepared to compromise aspects of their identity, and in fact reclaimed their religious understanding ‘often becoming more orthodox than their parents’ (Poynting and Mason 2007). Unlike their peers in Britain where ‘they found white friends. And danced with them. And drank with them. And slept with them. And took drugs with them. But at the end of the day someone would call them a Paki’ (Wazir, 2002: 32 as cited by Poynting and Mason 2007) the young men in this study were generally not
prepared to risk their religious identity for a temporary and ultimately futile attempt to assimilate.

Sulaiman described what could be called a ‘boomerang effect’ where the initiatives and negotiation of some of the interviewees assisted in the gradual social inclusion of other Muslims through, for example, demanding changes in the workplace which would accommodate their needs. When he first started work at his company none of the administration had dealt with Muslims or their particular needs before. Previous Muslim employees had not attempted to ask for consideration of their religious needs - a place to pray and time off for Friday prayers. Sulaiman was confident that he was the first to ask for such rights and also to receive them. This set a positive precedent breaking down some of the fear, anxiety and misunderstanding between the Muslim employees and their supervisors. At the same time Sulaiman had little patience for those who were not prepared to accommodate his needs. ‘If you don't want to accept this, too bad, we've got our passport. And if they have a problem with us, their mistake was a few hundred years ago, bringing us here. Or let us come in. But now that we're here, they've got laws - we're abiding by their laws...then there shouldn't be a problem’. He equated the experience of Muslims as similar to many other marginal but not necessarily marginalised groups - homosexuals, Emos and Goths. The only way to achieve social inclusion was ‘just like the Unions push...and the same way, we should push’ until acceptance was achieved. Referring to the Goths he stated ‘I used to think - what are these guys man? But now you see it all the time, you accept it. The first time you bump into it, it'll be a shock, the next time you bump into it it'll be half a shock, the next time it'll be normal’. Ashraf similarly described his successful campaign in providing prayer facilities at TAFE. Although after he left the facility fell into disuse, it set a precedent that he believed would ensure easier provision in the future.

Zreika and Asaf, in contrast, were still at the stage of negotiating and reconciling their multiple identities and negotiating a religious ‘framework of living’. Zreika related arguments with his father over his intention to call one of his children by the name of a Prophet - a Prophet not usually cited in Muslim scriptures and representing a name more commonly used amongst Christians and Jews. Although
naming a child with an Arabic name is not culturally required, using a name more commonly applied in Christian and Jewish communities was regarded by the first generation of Muslims as compromising their Arab identity, in contrast to Zreika who felt it would assist him in social integration. Asaf cited family disputes concerning cultural expectations in marriage – that his parents would expect to hold a Lailiyya - or dance celebration, which is more related to Syrian culture than to Islam. His choice would be to follow more closely what he sees as specified in the Quran in favour of cultural practice, resulting in a different but Australian and more authentic – from their point of view – Islamic culture. Both Zreika and Asaf recognised that distinguishing between religion and culture was much easier for themselves than for their sisters, who found their parents’ culture automatically restricted access to many commonly available Australian activities – especially in the area of sport or fashion. They felt that this desire to negotiate a compromise, a position that was neither completely Arab nor commonly Australian, but within the boundaries of acceptability for both, was the area most commonly in dispute: ‘there is (a) clash and I think that we have to fit in as Muslims - that's where all the clashes come, you know what I mean?’ Ziyad expressed similar difficulties observing ‘it's different being down here of course, and the way they're brought up is their grannies, from their parents, different to down here. Down here we grow up, we learn from the teachers, high schools and Sheikh..and everywhere’. Resolving the clash between migrant culture – ostensibly religiously based – and appropriate elements of Australian culture which were seemingly more in tune with ‘Islamic’ precepts, represents the emergence of a new ‘Australian’ Islamic culture and identity.

Two other interviewees also seemed to be still in the process of negotiating their identities. When asked about his citizenship Hassan identified strongly as an Australian, but not in the way defined by his friends – an identity which ‘I disagree (with) strongly’. Like Zreika and Asaf he had decided that he could define his own interpretation of ‘Australianness’ although his multiple identities had not yet reconciled. ‘A part of me feels Lebanese but I will never live there so sometimes you feel a little bit torn – sometimes’. However he felt ‘definitely Australian... with a Lebanese background, but I don’t feel a hundred percent Lebanese and I definitely don’t feel 100% Australian’. Attracted to both communities he also felt partially
excluded – not fully comfortable in either. Mahdi, born and raised in Australia appeared confident in his Australian identity, and objected to being questioned about his background. ‘Where am I from? I don’t like anyone asking that question! I mean, yeah, all right, I got a Lebanese background, but I’m Australian. Yeah, I see myself as Australian. (But) If someone asks me about my background – I’m Lebanese’ again demonstrating that he maintained multiple identities, not a hybrid identity, and was able occupy what Dunn (2001) described as varying spaces of belonging.

Ashraf was born in Lebanon and came to Australia when young, went back and then returned when about 13 to start high school. Both of his parents were Lebanese and he frequently visited Lebanon, thereby maintaining very strong cultural links. Ashraf was the only participant who appeared to have maintained strong cultural links with the homeland of his parents. Yet he was very insistent, even enthusiastic about being an Australian stating: ‘Of course I am Australian, I mean, I’m in Australia, beautiful country with the opportunities that I have been given here. So I’ve got to respect it more. I’ve got to grab it with two hands and I’ve got to respect it as well. And respect you know, if I come, I give you something. Look, yeah, I think we’ve been given a great opportunity and we should keep working hard towards keeping this opportunity’. This clearly demonstrates the importance of attraction towards a social entity which could provide ontological security as much as exclusion from social entities in the complex construction of the identity of these young men. This was further demonstrated when he was questioned again about whether he was ethnically Lebanese and he responded very forcefully that he was ‘Australian!’, clearly indicating that although he was comfortable with returning to the land of his parents and his ancestry, he did not need to occupy some of these multiple identities.

In contrast to Willis (1990) I find in the statements of these young men no evidence that their cultural background provided a ‘framework for living’, nor did it symbolically assist them to make sense of their lives. If anything ‘culture’ was a source of conflict and contesting values between the generations. Rather their religious background and the interpretations presented of Muslim and non-Muslim, justice, equity and the rights of the individual, gave them the resources with which to
interpret their frequently marginalised experience as well as a 'framework for living’ linguistically and traditionally referred to as the ‘Deen’ or way of life in Islam.

An ‘Australian’ Islamic Identity

Gole (2003) has described how for some Muslim youth, Islam is no longer acquired through social, family or local settings. Instead the young Muslims reappropriate, revisit and collectively reimagine a new religious self in a more modern and Islamist context. While Gole sees that the collective reimagination of this new religious self in a modern context is an appropriation of Islamism amongst Muslims who are socially disembedded, I have found conversely that Australian Muslim young people are not necessarily adopting a political Islam but forming a new identity that is related more to their social capital as Australians, rather than their parents ethnic social capital. There is therefore a reforming of Islam and a reimagining of practical, ethical and non-political Islam, an ongoing process occurring simultaneously with their gradual acquisition of the necessary social capital that prevents their exclusion from ‘normality’ as Australians.

The concept behind this Australian Islamic identity – which is not related to an ‘Islamist’ identity – is an attempt to become an acknowledged facet of mainstream Australian identity in the same manner as Italian, Greek or Catholic Australians have been acknowledged. Tariq Ramadan (1999 p.190-1) argues that Muslim identity consists of four elements: faith, intelligence (in terms of contextual reading of Islamic sources), education and transmission followed by participatory action. However, most Australian Muslim youth have had very little in the way of Islamic education and their faith is often limited to a rudimentary understanding of the concept of submission to God and His Prophet, social responsibility including culinary and relationship restrictions and the essential practices of a spiritual life. All four elements elucidated by Ramadan then are almost non-existent in the social context of Australian Muslim youth. Instead, Ramadan’s statement that ‘the environment, no matter what it is, is a space within which the Muslim should find the required milestones permitting him to act in accordance with his belief: as such, the environment is a means through which his identity can exist and flourish’ (ibid.
p.131) is far more relevant to the Australian experience. From this perspective, Muslim youth see themselves as active participants in the Australian social environment and bring their ethical and religious practices to bear within this space. The reality amongst Australian Muslims is that they are adapting and implementing Islamic concepts within an authentic Australian discourse of identity.

The process of developing an authentic Australian Islamic identity could be seen in Zreika who referred to himself as ‘Australianised’. His parents migrating from Syria, he described himself first as a Muslim, secondly as a Syrian Arab, but mostly importantly as an Australian. He explained his reference to Australianised as meaning ‘brought up with the values and the culture of Australian society, but also the Muslim way’. Although he referred to himself as a Syrian Arab, it was the religious rather than cultural framework that he had incorporated into his identity.

Anas also referred continuously to a religious framework of living in working through and discovering a comfortable identity which appeared to be still unresolved. Although stating reluctantly that he was Australian, because of the time he had lived here, he prefaced his response to the question as to whether or not he was an Australian, by referring continually to his attachment to Islam as a framework for his identity. Although the question did not refer to his religious status, he felt that it was imperative to stress that before any nationality, and in any situation, he saw his identity as Muslim first. Despite this he seemed reluctant to let go of his Lebanese culture – ‘cause I’ve only been (in Lebanon) for 5-6 years’. He seemed to indicate that he was required to adopt Australian values from the age of 6, values which he now seems to be reassessing. When asked whether he would consider going back to Lebanon, he reluctantly stated that it was not possible at the time, due to limited income and medical drawbacks, considering only visits for family visiting reasons and not for a permanent relocation. It seemed that he was unhappy about this and would have liked to consider Lebanon as a realistic alternative to living in Australia. However, he was pragmatic enough to see that Australia had what he needed to survive comfortably, despite instances of exclusion, while Lebanon did not provide the same options or even what was barely sufficient to survive.
Like Anas, Walid who was the child of an American mother and an Egyptian father gave pragmatic reasons for his citizenship, although once again he emphasised the religious framework in describing his identity. Describing himself as one third Aussie, one third American, and one third Egyptian, he indicated a multiple and fractured identity that was one of the closest to strategic hybridity of those interviewed. When asked about where he would like to live, he gave pragmatic responses about medical as well as lifestyle opportunities being much better in Australia than in America or in Egypt.

It appeared that those who presented with a more religious 'Islamist' outlook – including Anas, Walid and Mahmoud, all of whom referred continually in their interviews to the Quran, Hadith and Islamic terminology - were reluctant to identify strongly with Australia or aspects of its culture, re-iterating their religious framework as the basis of their identification. Mahmoud for example, described himself as Muslim first, and referred to 'the land of Australia', that he came from the 'land of Lebanon', thereby identifying more with a Global Ummah present in both. He appeared to be avoiding the topic of racial identity or national belonging – in Islamist ideology the importance of nationhood is frequently rejected - and attempted to refute its importance or even its relevance in Islamic terminology.

At the same time however, these young men recognised that no country could offer them the same opportunities and support as was offered in Australia. The more widely educated interviewees in contrast seemed to be comfortable with an Australian identity that included a framework of Muslim religiosity, feeling no necessity to preserve an identification with the land of their parents. Their identities were less hybrid, more multiple, and strategically positioned to benefit from each of the social communities in which they were involved and to which they were attracted. In these early questions relating to identification of identity, all of the subjects recognised the opportunities for services, socio-economic advancement and general principles of justice and equity available to those who were accepted in the Australian ‘imagined community’ – a concept proposed by Benedict Anderson (1983) to explain identification with or membership of a ‘nation’, an image of a community whose members cannot interact face-to-face or know each other directly.
At the same time, these benefits and principles were frequently challenged, and occasionally denied as a result of various negative media and social occurrences.

**Acquiring Social Capital**

Farouk, now in the position of actively mentoring other youth only a few years younger than himself, described in great detail his own journey through each of these stages of identification, although still anticipating his final arrival at the ontologically secure state of Australian ‘normality’. The necessity of familiarity with the majority Australian community, thereby acquiring important social capital, was realised early on by Farouk who described how he was forced at a young age to stay within the comfortable confines of his ethnic community, speaking the language and continuing the subtle social norms that were part of his predominant ethnic culture, and thereby denied the opportunity to learn the language and social norms of the ‘Australian culture’. Farouk was sent to an English literacy centre on arrival in Australia. He was scathing in his assessment of the practicality of the English lessons, which did little to equip him with practical and normative English. Naturally gravitating towards other Arabic speaking kids, he had little immersion in English and spent many years unsuccessfully waiting to qualify for entry to a mainstream school. Once again he was there confronted with the security of youth from his own background, who would retreat with him to the comfort of a familiar language and customs, again reducing their English literacy levels and general social capacity. ‘You tend to find safety with a group that you know, and then you don’t move out of it until you really have to.... Because all human being(s) need that safety, that assurance that I’m safe’. Finding himself along with his family at a severe disadvantage due to the isolation of his ethnic identity, Farouk assumed responsibility for improving his family’s socio-economic situation. Observing that the Australian families of his peers had already achieved economic gains ahead of his struggling family, he justified this as sufficient reason to “play catch up and sort of accelerate yourself in the shortest period of time” and entered the criminal scene in order to improve his family’s socio-economic status, until his life was threatened at the peak of his activities.
Farouk represented the least ‘comfortable’ of all the young men interviewed, continuing to suffer from ‘the hidden injuries of racism’ and still working through the negotiation and resistance required to accommodate these experiences. He spoke at length about his disenchantment with what he perceived to be the hypocrisy of Australian values. Educated to believe that Australia practised principles of justice and equity, Farouk felt isolated and marginalised, and at times victimised by his adopted society. ‘Where’s the justice that you guys are talking about? And as long as we see this double standard exists in our society, then you’re always going to find young people who are going to feel isolated and marginalised and say “I don’t belong to this place.” You need to look into our justice system. Go look in the local courts! I’ve attended so many times with young people as a support person - it’s disgusting what goes on there. Absolutely disgusting! Why? Because you happen to have a crude haircut?’ As a result he adopted a more destructive strategy of resistance, involving what Castells calls the ‘exclusion of the excluder by the excluded’ (1997) Farouk had felt justified in his anger ‘being young and dumb, and not highly educated or not educated at all, you accept it’, an anger that was encouraged by an anti-Western Islamist discourse which gave legitimacy to his feelings. ‘It sat with you very well. It was easy for me to hate the West. Hate the West! What?! Does Islam say that, ooh you’re my best friend’. Again this was a religious rather than a cultural framework providing a method of accommodation and resistance against perceived injustice and the hidden injury of racism, although capable of significant social damage in rejecting and ‘othering’ the West and its local or national spaces when utilised through an Islamist agency.

Social Marginalisation

Most of the young men interviewed had avoided a negative Islamist interpretation of events, and had successfully negotiated varying degrees of acceptance into local and national social spaces. They identified as Australian generally by choice, and had acquired sufficient skills to negotiate their needs within an authentic Australian Islamic identity. However, following the moral panic over Sheikh Al Hilaly, many of them expressed a renewed fear of loss, and the return of Essed’s ‘everyday racism’
as elucidated by Noble (2008), requiring a renegotiation of their acquired social skills.

This sense of marginalisation - the ‘affective process’ negatively shaping their ability to remain comfortable and feel ‘at home’ - had been experienced by most of the interviewees in different ways and to different degrees as a result of the moral panic surrounding Sheikh Al Hilaly and his statements. Anas felt that ‘non-Muslims are going to look as (if I was) a predator coming after women or something, and they’re gonna look at me as...They’re gonna have a lot of, lot of misconception of me’. He felt that he would be targeted specifically as he was ‘a person who gives the sermons’. Ashraf, who had a high profile through sporting activities, internalised the affective response of the moral panic – living in fear of being marginalised rather than actually experiencing it - through the feeling of embarrassment. As he explained, ‘I was embarrassed, it was embarrassing.’

Again the affective aspect and its exclusionary process was indicated by Abdullah when he was asked if he felt uncomfortable after the issue with Sheikh Al Hilaly. He replied that he ‘was annoyed. Because there was a lot of frustration in the community ......since September 11, I mean that's just increased it, that's all.’ Ali’s parents became concerned about his overall welfare, checking on where he was going and which mosque he might visit supporting Noble’s assertion that a landscape of fear alters the social opportunities for Australian Arabs and Muslims to realise full participation in spaces of local or national belonging (Noble and Poynting 2008). Citing the Dr. Haneef case, Ali expressed a fear that no matter how much social capital Muslims had, they still were at risk of being accused of terrorism. ‘Before, you could say you know, this guy’s a doctor, he’s more educated, he’d have nothing to do with terrorism. But now we’re finding that even the doctors are being accused of terrorism.’ He related how other parents he knew were becoming afraid for their children, feeling that the accusations of terrorism were completely unwarranted. He recalled the medical student Izhar ul Haque who ‘was a University student, (who) managed to get high grades, so what’s this guy got to do with terrorism? So they (the parents) have a bit of fear that, regardless of what you’re doing in society or where you are going, this could result in your being caught for
doing nothing and being accused. Like that’s the kind of fear that’s being
developed’.

The fragile state of a negotiated comfortable identity in the face of such moral panics
became evident to Mahdi as he felt forced to choose between two identities formerly
seen as comfortable and compatible. ‘When that stuff happened (Sheikh Al Hilaly),
it was kind of like you had to choose, your religion or your country. There was
division, it’s like, I’m this now and then I’m that. I remember I went on a tour up to
Castle Hill for a holiday, just for a weekend holiday. And, literally I’m like a
different person. And when people found out that I was a Muslim, it was like “no
way you’re a Muslim, you can’t be a Muslim” they’d never seen a Muslim in their
life. And it was weird, you know, it’s like you have to be two different people
sometimes’. Holding sufficient cultural and social capital to move easily in both
worlds, he suddenly felt that they were not as compatible as he had previously
believed.

Interviewees who had not negotiated successfully their access to social space and
belonging, discovered the fragility of maintaining their success, commented
frequently on the hostile attitudes, ‘death stares’ and misrepresentation – the social
incivility – that they experienced from either a targeting media or an ignorant
populace. Farouk’s explanation about an incident when asked by the police ‘Why did
you go hit the guy?’ was ‘It was the way he was looking at me’, indicated that the
‘everyday racism’ and denial of belonging encountered through hostile body
language and visual expressions, can be powerful antisocial communicators. As
Farouk explained: ‘Can people look at you in a racial type of way? The way they
looked at me was in terms of - What the hell you doing here? You’re not supposed to
be here! Get the hell out of my area!’ However, his lack of cultural capital and social
ability was not confined to the school yard or the beach. Farouk complained that he
regularly experienced this social incivility ‘going somewhere, feeling people staring
at you cause you look a certain way. Or walking into a shop and the guy following
you right around thinking that you almost going to steal something. It offends, it
hurts so much!’ Lacking the necessary social skills and confidence that as argued by
Honneth (1995), needed to be acquired intersubjectively following recognition by
relevant social entities, Farouk initially turned to revenge, only realising that there were alternative routes to social acceptance after his life was threatened.

Sulaiman described angrily the exclusion he experienced, virtually relegated to an irrelevant and invisible status when ‘I’d be sitting there with aussie mates, and you know, you’re sitting around and they go “oh, look at that stupid Arab or stupid wog” and they’d say “wog” and you know, I’m sitting right there, you know? Obviously, they don’t care about you, they don’t care’. Although these were his mates, they seemed oblivious to the racist taunts that hurt him. Regardless of not being directly aimed at him, they targeted his negotiated identity as an Australian Muslim, effectively regulating his sense of belonging and social participation. Sulaiman described how despite living in the South Western suburbs, far from the beaches of Cronulla, he was still targeted during the Cronulla riots. ‘I myself have never been to Cronulla, never walked in there, all my friends at school are pretty much Aussies... I married an Aussie wife, and I still had my car smashed up in front of my house in Cronulla time. And I’ve never entered Cronulla. That’s just the way it is!’ Fortunately, good relations with his neighbours ensured that they assisted him in chasing the protagonists away. Hage (1998) refers to Sulaiman’s acquiescence to or resignation of the inevitability of racism as a ‘caging of ethnic wills’, and an incorporation of their subordination, an attitude also seen in the comments of other interviewees.

Asaf had also experienced this ‘everyday racism’ and loss of belonging from his contacts at Cronulla. ‘I've got a lot (of friends) from Cronulla area, and Engadine...they were all a bit in your face, you know but you could sense they’ve got this racist bit’. Even though he believed that those who had given the Muslim community a bad name - through the earlier rapes and the Bilal Skaf case, could not be considered to be Muslims, the image that they had created of Arabs was hard to remove: ‘It's very hard to change that image, you know? Trust me, it's very hard. Wherever you go they look at you - you're an Arab. You go to your family, you're walking around, you're not doing trouble or anything, you're just there for an ice cream or a swim, but they'll just look at you in a weird look’.
Attempting to utilise his social skills to resist the direct racism experienced by Mahmoud of “the death stare while you're driving, or you'll get the odd mockery - "terrorist this", "you look extreme", stuff like that’ he took such comments in his stride with as much of a sense of humour as he could muster because ‘you don't want to be ignorant like them’. His goal was to do as his father suggested, to ‘repel it with a better way’. When he was confronted with a situation that could not be handled with humour he went straight to the point with his protagonist: ‘I told him, that I wouldn't take it, and what type of person I am’. Mahmoud then continued: ‘Look, I'm here just to go to TAFE and get on with my life’ a tactic which seemed to have given him some respite.

As part of the management of national space incurred through such everyday racism, there also appears to be a management of physical space, with various areas delineated as ‘unsafe’ areas – a type of physical cordonning off or ‘ghettoisation’ of majority Arab Muslim areas. This was demonstrated when a Christian contact Ashraf had met through school activities in North Sydney offered to meet with Ashraf in Bankstown. The student was not serious however, and when Ashraf replied ‘No problem’ the student was horrified, hurriedly saying ‘I'm just kidding!’ Eventually Ashraf convinced him to take the risk and visit Bankstown, taking him to play indoor soccer at night with some 'religious people' from a Muslim organisation. Despite the religious talk that followed, the student appeared to enjoy himself, Ashraf even thought he was impressed: ‘He goes, I didn't know that Muslims like that could be good people’. Although initially afraid to enter this area of ‘Little Lebanon’, once introduced, he was sufficiently comfortable to come down regularly. The social exclusion and management of social spaces is therefore a dual process – with the dominant culture also excluding access for themselves from physical locations like Bankstown or Lakemba, while simultaneously attempting to regulate access and comfort to the excluded in their own places – such as Cronulla, or North Sydney. In my own experience during a discussion between Principals who were working on a values based interschool project involving the Shire and Punchbowl, each of the Principals articulated the comfort that their students felt within their own locality, and spoke about the fear expressed by their students of moving into other areas of Sydney that were outside of the students’ comfort zones.
Overcoming such perceived ‘hidden injuries of racism’, marginalisation and discrimination, each of the subjects of this research had developed different strategies of negotiation, resistance and accommodation. Ali engaged in reflection and self-absorption when disillusioned with the negative reaction given to Sheikh Taj – and then rationalised it saying: ‘Then I got over it I think, when I found that a lot of people were accepting, and it was a minority’ who had been actively involved in delivering the marginalisation.

Ziyad echoed the resigned and reflexive expectation that such marginalisation was inevitable ‘like, everyone all around Australia pops up in your face, and wants information, that's it’. When asked if this should stop, he responded ‘Oh well, of course they should stop it, but if they don’t stop it, you’ve got to accept it that’s how it is, that’s it.’ Sulaiman shared the inevitability of his attitude – ‘How did I feel? Other than me always putting in my head, all good media is good media, I felt that they did him over hard. It’s not right to be doing that, but that’s their job. You’re not really going to argue about their job because they’ve got to make money, they’ve got to make a living, but it’s not right to be picking on us. But that’s the thing, if they don’t pick on us, they’re picking on the Indian guy playing cricket, or the Africans, or some other – Aborigine, sniffing this and that. But everyone’s going to have their time, and I believe that the English people, the people that actually read, some of them can use their brain and actually work and realise that everybody’s going to get to put under. I mean, the Pope got put under, under the magnifying glass’. Again this appeared to be an internationalisation of the subordination of a global community of suffering and a feeling of inevitability. Sulaiman’s solution was not to give the media anything to respond to, shutting the doors of the Islamic Centre and refusing communication, neither acquiescing to their demands, nor actively resisting them, but withdrawing from the discourse and waiting for it to recede.

Feelings of Personal Responsibility

Utilising his religious ‘framework of living’ to develop an appropriate response Walid recognised a personal responsibility for ‘the image that we represent’. In some ways acquiescing to the media’s demand for personal accountability in the actions of
the larger group of Muslims, he explained: ‘It does come back down to our actions, to (the) way we talk, to the way we walk, we can encourage a non-Muslim to say ‘la ilaha illa llah, Muhammad rasulullah’ in the end. Or we can talk bad and all that, and actually push them so far away from Islam which can actually have an effect on us’. Again, in responding to the fear of marginalisation Walid referred to a religious argument, rather than a social argument demonstrating how the Islamic ‘framework of living’ is effectively utilised to make meaning out of complex social situations.

His rationalisation of personal responsibility was used to validate the necessity of maintaining a Muslim presence in Australia. While acknowledging that ‘There is abuse, there is all these laws and all these new legislations, but it hasn’t really got that severe to isolate the country, at the moment’ there were counter weighing benefits in ‘general help regarding the services available...musaallahs (small places to pray), and there’s dawah (teaching about Islam) going here’. Such opportunities to continue propagating Islam were sufficient to outweigh the disadvantages of a more personal, local, or national exclusion from belonging. He explained that despite ‘all the problems its (Islam is) just continuing to grow. And there’s a lot of Australians that are only missing one thing, to know about Islam ...I believe that once they know Islam they will know that it is a perfect way of living’. Such an identification with a global Islamist purpose, based on a strong religious ‘framework of living’ is resilient to and relatively unaffected by any ongoing marginalisation or exclusion from a sense of local and national belonging. By identifying with a Global Ummah and supranational Islamist purpose, such temporary setbacks could be resisted and withstood, and offer a potentially dangerous alternative for marginalised young men to the desire for social inclusion at a local or national level.

Similarly, personal responsibility for accommodating and negotiating the Muslim presence was expressed by Mahdi: ‘A lot would say you know what, it’s not fair, it’s hard, but you know what, in the end I would say, it’s my fault. And if I am targeted, then it’s no one but my fault. If anything’s going to happen, I’m going to change it, no one else’. His confidence in being able to tackle the problem of marginalisation clearly indicated that he believed he had enough social capital to ensure a positive outcome.
Just as Australians enact ‘othering’ against communities and individuals that are apparently incomprehensible in their ‘frameworks of living’ and incompatible with norms of Australian society, so Muslim young people also engage in ‘othering’ those of their own faith. When asked to explain whether it was conceivable that Muslims in London could have committed the London bombings, Ali responded with ‘Muslims in the sense of the ‘Muslim’ word – definitely not. No way. Someone who’s perhaps got the wrong idea of what Islam is... I don’t think Islam would be the reason for that. It would be more the person who’s using Islam as a weapon. Like the person who’s actually influencing these people, would obviously have not a proper understanding of Islam. Because Islam obviously doesn’t condone these kind of things. So I would never think that a Muslim in the true sense would ever do something like this. It just seems wrong.’ Here Ali is drawing boundaries around those who are suited to be included in the ‘imagined community’ of the Global Ummah, refusing admittance to those Muslims who are deemed to have performed atrocious acts, acts considered to be incompatible with an Australian identity by mainstream Muslim community Australians.

This exclusionary view was not shared by all interviewees. Hassan, for example, ‘would just never completely black list anything that goes on in the Middle East’. However, as a pragmatist, he recognised that the most pressing issues are those related to his own Muslim community. ‘Let’s turn the focus back to Australia. Facing the Muslim community we’ve got major issues, everything you name it, drugs, gangs, prostitution, everything. Let’s look at these things, and tackle these issues’. His solution to some of these pressing problems was to utilise the knowledge – the cultural capital - he had gained through his work in the police force, to assist the youth who had not yet developed such competency and negotiate a more inclusive environment.

This goal was not to be easily completed however, as Hassan continued to experience bullying from his peers in the police force. Relating the skills of accommodation and resistance he had developed he recognised that it was ‘a form of bullying, but I don’t find it harmful to me’. Accepting that it was a necessary part of his work he explained ‘I put up with it okay. I’ve never complained about it, ever!'
And I can give it back if I have to. There is a line, and they know the line, and all jokes, when it’s with a smile and that, I’ll let it go. One guy has only ever crossed it. And I let him know, you’ve crossed it, don’t do it again and he’s never done it again’. He went on to explain that he has learned how to accommodate their jibes and to return them, for example when they called him a ‘camel jockey’ he would reply ‘Well, you guys brought us out here to help you, to get your way around, and to ride a camel you were so dumb, you couldn’t ride it yourself!’

Like Hassan, Mahmoud was able to meet his protagonist on common ground. After initially holding back when someone complained about his beard he said ‘look, this is my way of life. I’m not discriminating against you and I ask you nicely not to discriminate against me’. Although the complaints continued, Mahmoud held his ground successfully by saying ‘look, it’s not up to you what you don’t like you know what I mean? If I’m following the laws in this country, Alhamdulillah and I’m not discriminating against anyone else, don’t discriminate against me’. This type of negotiated accommodation is a learned skill and requires familiarity with the dominant culture – in this case, laws on discrimination – as well as inclusion into the social space in order to begin such negotiations.

Engaging in a critical discourse Mahmoud rationalised that such discrimination was to be expected: ‘like Alhamdulillah in another way we got used to things like that. You know just always constant bagging from the media. I knew there would be another story ... another challenge to confront’, but utilising his religious framework to accommodate the inevitability that earlier had depressed him he explained ‘Inna lilahi maa sabireen (Truly, Allah is with the patient)’. Similarly Sulaiman stated that the Sheikh Al Hilaly moral panic ‘did make me feel unaccepted. But I did feel that already, so it's alright’.

The belief in potential justice encouraged the interviewees to persevere in their acquisition of social capital, believing that their marginalisation would be temporary. This was assisted by their relatively high socio-economic status and education. This was not the situation however of Mahmoud’s less religious peers who had become involved in criminality. He had ‘stayed away from them’ once again referring to the religious framework in saying ‘people that I know for example, like drug dealers or
people that are mujrimeen (criminals), I don’t like to associate myself with them. Cause verily people that don’t fear from Allah won’t have any fear of anyone, ya Latif (Oh My God)’.

An important aspect of the strategies employed by the interviewees in combating perceived marginalisation, discrimination and the ‘hidden injuries of racism’ relates to their use of a ‘religious framework of living’ rather than a ‘cultural framework of living’. This is in contrast to early Muslim migrants to Australia as described by Poynting and Mason (2007) who tried their best to integrate, through studying and graduating from University. Despite their education, they lived a hybrid identity, epitomised by their Muslim name at home and a Christianised version at work. They were neither fully comfortable at home, concerned about compromising their ethnic ideals and culture, neither were they comfortable and secure at work, in sacrificing their religious identity for a ‘normalised’ Australian one.

This strategic hybrid identity which did not permit full inclusion into either social sphere – whether the social religious community or the wider work-based Australian community, was described by Farouk in his own experience as ‘Ramadan Islam’: ‘So that when Ramadan comes around, all of a sudden you’re praying and fasting and doing your Islamic things. But once Ramadan is gone, you’re just a Muslim’. Farouk described his return to a more practical and relevant aspect of a practical Islam, an appropriate religious framework of living, as the solution to his ontological crisis after searching unsuccessfully to find his identity which, as he explained was: ‘almost a struggle and a fight on a daily basis in trying to find myself an identity. Who am I? Where do I fit in?’

In diverse ways many of the interviewees had come to accept as inevitable or to challenge in practical ways the marginalisation that they had all experienced. Only one of the interviewees was unsure about leaving Australia, the remainder recognising that they were amongst the most recent in a troubled history of migrants each of whom had endured a battle to obtain recognition and acceptance. Cultural issues in sifting their parent’s heritage were addressed through a religious rather than a cultural framework of living and were continually being negotiated. While the globalised Muslim community or Ummah was theoretically attractive to some of the
interviewees, and provided them with a sense of belonging in the face of continued marginalisation, the potential of realising the benefits of being a part of a prosperous Australia and the possibility of overcoming socio-economic and social disadvantage essentially drove their determination to withstand ‘everyday racism’ and its affective regulation which attempted to deny them cultural citizenship and access to local and national belonging in an unqualified manner as Australians.

While Hall's construction of uniqueness goes to explain the majority community's discourse of identity politics, it is ineffective in explaining the continual expression of 'Australian' identity by these occasionally marginalised and excluded Muslim young men. An alternative paradigm must be developed in order to recognise the basis of their ongoing insistence of inclusion in such an 'atavised' political and social discourse of identity. Instead these young men demonstrated a collective awareness of the future, and of participation in an 'imaginary community' related to the social ideational concepts they have learnt through school as well as political statements relating to justice and Australian values.

It is particularly in Hall's (1994 p.200) 'systems of cultural representations' that marginalised Muslim youth attempt to participate and are particularly enraged when they are excluded. Having developed the cultural capital to become active participants in educational, institutional and professional environments, their 'othering' from the symbolic 'Australian' community which is discursively constructed to include common ethical boundaries of equality under the law, equal opportunity and acceptance of cultural diversity in the social sphere is particularly galling.

While Bourdieu (1994 p.7) sees that the creation of 'national identity' or 'national character' is validated by the social institutions of the state, such as schools and bureaucratic procedures, the egalitarian concepts embedded in Islamic culture of the rights of the individual before God and the inalienable desire for justice, over-rides and resists the frequent experience of exclusion and marginalisation delivered by these same institutions. As a result, marginalised Muslim youth seeking the ontological security and comfort of a national identity, are sometimes more likely to prefer the 'imagined community' of the 'Global Ummah' and utilise strategies that are
justified and interpreted through their religious framework of living. Although many of the young men interviewed demonstrated that they are able to redevelop the social and cultural capital lost through events similar to the moral panic and outrage over Sheikh Al Hilaly utilising this religious framework of living, those with less education and suffering to a greater degree from the ‘hidden injuries of racism’ may choose to identify more closely with an Islamist Global Ummah – a situation that could lead to sympathy towards terrorist agendas and isolation from a desire for ontological comfort within the nation.
Chapter 5: Imams and Mentors

A fundamental principal in ensuring the secularity of the ‘State’ in the European context according to Silvio Ferrari is the availability of representative religious institutions operating at the national level which are capable of functioning as an interlocutor of the state (Ferrari 2005). An organisation representing the Muslim community could then ensure effective cooperation with the state in the areas of religious teaching in schools, financing of religious institutions, public representation on behalf of the religious community and so on. In previous chapters I have discussed the attempt to fill such a position by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) and its affiliate bodies at the State level, their initial ‘State’ political recognition and its subsequent loss, as well as the continuing struggle to realise any Muslim religious institution that could effectively and authoritatively liaise with the secular authorities on religious matters. In Australia the Jewish Board of Deputies fulfils a similar representative function to its British counterpart the British Board of Deputies, and in recent years an equivalent role is being filled by the Muslim Council of Britain, a role to which AFIC previously aspired but which has more recently been supplanted by the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) sponsored by the former Howard government. In Chapter 2 I looked at the proliferation of leadership voices speaking on behalf of the Muslim community in Australia, however the division between ‘lay’ Muslim community leaders – as represented in the AFIC and its State bodies – and the religious specialists as embodied in the mosque Imam is particularly pronounced and problematic in the area of accountability. While sectarian, ethnic and political differences were the critical factors in establishing a mosque congregation for Muslim migrants in the 1970s and 80s, (Humphrey 1987; Saeed 2003) the needs of contemporary Muslim young men are not related to maintenance of the culture of the ‘home country’, nor its language but a recognition of the social and religious issues facing English speaking Australian Muslims in interpreting their place in society and aspects of their identity. Although there has been some research on the role and history of Muslim leaders in Australia (Humphrey 1998) there is a considerable gap in research concerning the relationship between Muslim young men and their Imams in
respectively seeking and providing religious guidance to this marginalised community, and how effectively the latter fill the representative religious role.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in most mosques there continues to be an expectation by mosque boards that Imams in the local community meet the needs of the first generation community as they generally comprise most of a Board’s membership. Such needs may not be compatible with successive generations of Australian educated and English speaking young people. In outlining emerging social roles for British Ulama, Jonathon Birt (2008) has emphasised the size of Britain’s youth population which at 52 percent requires Imams who can teach and lecture in English, are capable of adopting wider roles outside the safe confines of the mosque, address pressing social issues and engage in pastoral youth work. This chapter is an exploration of the issues faced by Muslim Arab young men in finding appropriate religious leadership through analysing their responses to questions concerning expectation of leadership within the Muslim community, choice of mosque for worship and the relevance of the khutbah, engagement with religious authorities and sources of religious information and advice, in comparison to other mentoring they may have received, in order to discover how relevant the role of the local Imam is in interpreting Islam for them in contemporary Australia.

*Imam’s Qualifications*

The interviewees were encouraged to consider what qualifications they felt were necessary to fulfil the role of an Australian Imam. They were encouraged to consider existing Imams as well as an ideal construction of an Imam in the contemporary context. The leadership portrayed in Islamic sources is most commonly related to that modelled by the Prophet himself and the four Caliphs that immediately followed him. In a non-Muslim society where leadership in constructed on a diversity of ethnicities, over a range of sects and for differing generational needs, the traditional model of leadership is held as an ideal that is difficult to translate into a contemporary setting. The immediate requirements cited by respondents related to the purely functional role of an Imam in maintaining the required rituals and
essential knowledge of Islam in a non-Muslim setting. According to Anas an Islamic leader:

[He] should be a person who can lead the prayer, he should be a person who can pass the Islamic knowledge on. He should be a person who can help the community. He should be able to give lessons. So I believe the leaders should firstly have to have very, very good Arabic language. He should understand the Quran, he should understand the Sunnah. He should be learned.

Anas, along with most of the respondents mentioned the importance of qualifications and traditional knowledge including Arabic language ability, and at its most senior representation, for example, in the position of Mufti, where after questioning on the radio or other public forums, the Mufti would be capable of giving a Fatwa in response citing the relevant Hadith and scholarly opinions to justify his decision. However the role of the Imam in providing pastoral care was also considered to be important while simultaneously problematic. In dealing with different generations, who were often in conflict with each other, the Imam – particularly one employed by a more traditional ethnic mosque - was required to fill a conflicting role. On the one hand he had been employed with the intention of maintaining the community’s ethnic culture, often in resistance to the gradual adoption of a foreign ‘Western culture’. At the same time, he was required to minister to the legitimate needs of the younger members of the community who were more Australianised and had frequent conflict with the more ethnically based cultural expectations of their parents. Sheik Al Hilaly was particularly well known for his work in this area, as related by Rahman: ‘What he does for the community, behind closed doors is unbelievable. The number of problems that he has stopped... If somebody needs him at any time he will go out and visit them’ and it was his known mediating capacity between the generations that was recognised by most of the interviewees as being incompatible with the allegations levelled against him by the media.

In this regard the Imam is often seen as a mediator, assisting the older generation to discard the cultural elements of the religion that can be foregone in an Australian environment, while simultaneously encouraging the young people to adopt the more
moral practices of Islam in relation to the consumption of alcohol and sexual activity, thereby resisting what is often encouraged in Australian social settings. Although the Quran is easily accessible to Muslim young people both in its original Arabic and English translated forms, the interpretation of the Quran is contentious and requires specific scholarly skills based on a grammatical understanding of traditional Arabic filtered through the examples cited in the relevant Hadith or Sunnah. In this regard many of the Imams that are trained overseas face considerable difficulty, having been trained in memorisation of the Quran and Hadith and its correct recitation techniques, but little in the way of juristic interpretation particularly in a contemporary setting. Such a limited range of interpretative skills falls considerably short of the expectations cited as necessary by their young followers.

Apart from the Imam’s traditional knowledge about Islam and knowledge of Arabic which was obtained from ‘back over there’, most of the interviewees referred to the importance of a contemporary understanding of Australian society. This is particularly challenging for most of the Imams who have a limited grasp of English and are therefore unfamiliar with the discourses that occupy the minds of Muslim young people. Ashraf and Hassan both stressed the importance of being able to speak English in order to ‘understand the community talk’ and communicate effectively not only with the Muslim community but additionally the Australian community. In reality the areas in which the Muslim community needs representative voices covers the entire range of the professional, medical, educational, political and legal areas – in short, Islam as an entity is contested throughout the social arena that the community Muslim and especially young people inhabit. Ashraf emphasized a proactive role of the Imam as he explained:

[He’s] gotta understand what we lack, what we need. [He’s] gotta be wise. And [he’s] gotta have a media way, to talk to the media … to turn the tables around, being able to show the truth, behind the story….My job is to convince people, if I was an Imam, not to do the wrong thing, convince them to do the right thing.
Their desire for specific media training of Imams indicates the need for a proactive voice on behalf of Muslim young men who feel that they are effectively voiceless in the face of ongoing allegations – as was particularly the case in the controversy over Sheikh Al Hilaly – that Islam and its Muslim adherents are incompatible with the political and moral values espoused in Australian society, supporters of terrorism and a potential fifth column seeking to change Australian society into a Muslim state. Although many of the teachings of Islam in relation to obligations for prayer and fasting were considered by Ali to be consistent throughout all of the mosques with little difference between them, it was the contemporary issues in their application that most concerned him:

But when it comes to issues affecting Australia, you need someone who’s grown up in Australia, someone who’s Australian, someone who like understands the environment. You can’t for example, like, ask a Sheik in Saudi Arabia to get a fatwa about something in Australia! He won’t understand the situation. He won’t have lived here.

‘Australianness’ and familiarity with its society, history and culture was an essential aspect of an Imam’s suitability in providing useful and relevant information to Muslim young people. Although many Imams have lived in Australia for considerable periods of time, their separation from Australian society and maintenance of their original culture prohibited them from acquiring the essential understanding of an Australian psyche. Ali also felt that it was important for Imams to ‘represent Islam the correct way’ and that an Australian Imam needed to be ‘Someone who understands Australian society’ and ‘someone who’s able to communicate with the wider community’. This kind of understanding could only be gained by someone who had ‘grown up here’ according to Zreika although it was not necessary that he was born in Australia according to Ali. The critical aspect required here was that they had managed to have extensive interaction with Australian society. Haisam Farache – as reported in an article by Chandab (2008) – represents in some ways the new age in authentic religious leadership for the young men, a surfing Imam who holds traditional scholarship and is also a qualified school teacher. Haisam’s easy going nature and willingness to meet with and visit students
from all backgrounds lends support to Ziyad’s requirement that Imams should be ‘more respectful’ with Aussies, in order for the respect to be returned in that the Australian community would ‘respect us back’.

In this instance as with those cited in Chapter 3, Muslim young men are arguably internalising their responsibility, and in some ways acquiescing to media demands that they are accountable for the reputation of their religion in the wider community. However, the degree of subordination that they have incorporated I would argue is less of a ‘caging of ethnic wills’ as described by Hage (1998) where they are managed as an ‘ethnic object’ and thereby given less access to national space, as alternatively a proactive means of gaining access to the national space. In other words, there was a recognition that it was to the advantage of the whole Muslim community, and also an aspect of the traditional Islamic concept of ‘dawa’ – the process of propagating Islam – that firstly, a correct message be conveyed, secondly, that the purveyors of the message should exemplify it, and thirdly, that it should be delivered in a respectful manner.

Imams and the Media

‘Public Islam’ which is characterised by successive events involving Muslims as portrayed in the media, public opinion and government policies relating to Islam, as well as its representation by suitable spokespeople, is an area that has attracted significant commentary particularly in Europe. Salvatore and Eickelman (2004) have highlighted the need for the Muslim community to address concerns of ‘public Islam and the common good’, while the globalisation of Muslim issues has created a new audience that requires non-traditional responses from Muslim scholars (Birt 2005). The role of Muslim representatives in dealing with the media is necessarily a specialised one. Considering an idealised Imam’s role and in particular how to address the media within the Australian context, elicited different responses from the interviewees. Most agreed with Asaf in preferring that the Imam should keep away from the media and also refrain from engaging in politics. After mentioning the 2006 invasion of Lebanon and the discussion amongst the community concerning returning to Lebanon to fight in defence of homes and property, Asaf was adamant
that such international politics should not be commented on by the Imam as ‘we’re living in Australia … and that shouldn’t be said’. International politics were therefore an area best left to politicians and not local Imams. Conversely, Zreika preferred that Imams should take a proactive stance in relation to political matters in that ‘they’ve got to be more politically friendly’, and supported religious Imams entering the discourse of politics.

These Muslim young men seemed divided on who should accept responsibility for the presentation of Islam to the wider community. On the one hand they appeared to recognise that the Imam holds the traditional knowledge that is necessary in delivering accurate information about Islam. On the other hand, there was a recognition that dealing with the media was a specialised skill that additionally required a solid understanding of Australian society with its contemporary issues and fluent English ability. None of the interviewees were able to cite an Imam that they confidently felt was capable in each of these areas, although a cautious approval was given about Sheik Shadi – a popular young Imam in Lakemba. They were unclear though on specifically who should take the responsibility for dealing with the media. Hassan recognised that the expectations on Imams was possibly unrealistic, that Imams were expected to be ‘this almost perfect person’ and that they frequently could not live up to such expectations. The possibility of appropriate media representation that was solidly grounded in traditional Islamic scholarship supplemented with the critical analysis skills of contemporary Australian social discourse, did not seem to be realistic or achievable at the time of this research.

Using Commonsense

While it was mutually acknowledged that Imams required respect, the interviewees kept their options open in regard to actually following the teaching and advice that they were given. There was no sense from them that they felt an obligation to follow what they heard, rather that it represented a series of choices, some more appropriate than others, on what were possible and correct solutions to the issues they faced. In many ways this was contrary to their own statements that there is only one correct Islam, and the different interpretations of events and responses to them therefore
could not all be correct. In interpreting the mixed cultural and theological messages that they receive, commonsense and logic – or the middle road as it is referred to in the Hadith – was inevitably the deciding factor. Mahdi added that although he consulted many of the sheikhs around him on personal issues, even though one solution might be easier, he would choose ‘the one that you really feel in your heart is right, even if it is harder’. This commitment to the most accountable solution is further indication that the religious framework of living is an important aspect of their daily life. Asaf stated that regardless of the Imam’s qualifications and background, he would apply commonsense if there was a conflict between the teachings of the Imam and his understanding of Islam gained from the home and other sources.

Zreika agreed and stated that: ‘My dad told me, whoever it is, you use your commonsense to judge whether you think it’s right or wrong’. He then referred to the example of an Imam who had discouraged his congregation from attending University, due to the mixing of males and females and the influence of Western tertiary education. Such a teaching was immediately at odds with the requirement to pursue education from the cradle to the grave. This caused Zreika to engage in a re-evaluation of this talk, its context, its practicality and the qualifications of the Imam who gave it. He reserved the right to reject not only such an inappropriate teaching but the Imam himself and instead look for an Imam with more compatible teaching:

If it was something that stupid I wouldn’t believe it anyway. You have to sit, and okay, why would he say something like that? We need education here. And you sift through your head and analysing …

Such a commonsense approach was also utilised by Abdullah who stated that he considered very carefully what he heard from an Imam. Freed from the constraints of a closed culture and able to apply the critical analysis skills learned throughout their high school education as well as having the opportunity to make choices that were not always available to their parents, these educated Muslim young men are engaging in an experimental development of a new Australian Islam – cobbled from
the values that they admire in Australian social society and the cultural attitudes that withstand critical analysis and personal experience in their contemporary settings.

I think with every situation you always have to sort of, use the best judgement possible. So I suppose if some of the information that they talk about doesn’t sound, you know, relevant, or might be conflicting with the majority of teachings that I’ve read then I might take it less seriously, you know, I might, I’ll be careful. With everything you have to be careful.

Shopping Around for A Suitable Imam

Such a critical appraisal of the Imam also characterises the choice in mosque attendance that is available for young men in Australian society. While their fathers would have attended the local mosque as much due to the ethnic origin of the Association which ran it along with the congregation that attended, English speaking young Muslims have more ability to choose a mosque according to its compatibility with the message and the capacity of the Imam himself. Abdullah related an incident where he was surprised that a fellow Muslim student would not join him for the Friday Jumaat at University, despite its obligatory requirement in Islam. According to Abdullah, the student responded ‘yeah, I know, but it’s a family thing. My father sort of says, you know, we stick to our masjid and that’s it’. This reflects a similar transitional evolution discussed by McLoughlin (2005) in Britain, where the encounter with Muslim ‘others’ – non-Arab Muslims in the case of my interviewees - and religious and political freedoms that the youth experience increasingly results in ‘innovative, cosmopolitan and self-critical reformulations’ of traditional Islam (McLoughlin). While their fathers would have acknowledged the superior knowledge of the Imam and seldom questioned his teaching, the younger and more educated young men expressed the importance of maintaining an intellectual distance between themselves and their religious teachers, allowing them to consider critically their teaching and choose between potentially conflicting messages of the Imam and Australian contemporary life. In rejecting the teaching of an Imam who discouraged attendance at University, Zreika was making a conscious decision to override the advice of this Imam in order to pursue a career and success from an
Australian perspective regardless of the potential risks in Western aspirations and influence. Such a choice was justified from a religious point of view by Anas in terms of pursuing education and being in a strong position to provide for his immediate and extended family.

This brings us back to the question of why the interviewees reacted immediately and defensively in support of Sheikh Al Hilaly in the immediate aftermath of the media moral panic. If there had not been an affective aspect, a moral panic and public condemnation, then young Muslim Arab background men in this research would almost certainly have found the offensive aspect of his talk entirely inappropriate and either ignored it as being culturally and locally relevant, that is an irrelevant aspect of Sheikh Al Hilaly’s culture or chosen to remove themselves from his mosque. It was precisely because of the affective nature of the moral panic, and the hostile interference by outsiders in Muslim religious affairs, that triggered the defiant, aggressive response more characteristic of the protest masculinity of marginalised and less educated young men.

In this regard I think it is useful to consider the various elements that make an Imam relevant to these young Muslim men, and also to categorise Imams according to either their traditional or contemporary status particularly in the light of the discourse from contemporary Islamic scholars such as Tariq Ramadan, Jonathon Birt, and Khaled Abou el Fadl. Traditional Imams generally reflected the cultural attitudes and opinions of the home country represented by the majority of the first generation migrants in any congregation. The necessity for speaking English was secondary to traditional language skills and generally khutbahs were delivered in Arabic, Urdu or the local language such as Indonesian. According to one of the Board members of the Lebanese Muslim Association interviewed during this research, only recently have meetings been conducted in English, the lingua franca of all mosque activities formerly being conducted in Arabic. Imams were also not required to deal with the media, their primary role being to maintain the religious rituals of their Muslim community in addition to delivering minimal religious knowledge through teaching and practice, conducting prayers at the mosque and providing essential Quran teaching (Saeed 2003).
It was clear from these interviews that contemporary Imams must continue to have the traditional training that is necessarily obtained from overseas – since no suitable madrasah institution exists in Australia that is recognised as being capable of graduating qualified Imams in the manner described by Sophie Gilliat-Ray (2006). However, they should also be fluent English speakers and familiar with Australian culture having been brought up in Australia or having lived and been actively involved in Australian social life for some time. While the traditional Imams position invariably included an ethnic or even tribal loyalty – as in the case of the Zeidan/Hilali conflict (Humphrey 2002), ethnic familiarity and maintenance of cultural tradition, contemporary Imams should be equally if not more familiar with contemporary issues and able to comment in a politically sensitive manner on these – whether they be related to local or international social concerns.

In responding to questions on how well they interacted with Imams, there was a clear generational divide concerning the Imams that they felt comfortable with. Hassan reflected on his favourite mosque – the Lebanese mosque in Lakemba, and referred to Sheikh Al Hilaly as being more suitable for the old generation, because ‘they can relate to him, he can relate to them, you know, the generation that came from overseas’. Those who were below 40, not first generation migrants, could relate to a more professional and restrained English speaking leader represented by the South African Zachariah Matthews, while Sheik Shadi attracted the young and possibly less professional Muslim young men with his emotional talks presented in a mixture of traditional and Lebanese Arabic along with local English slang.

Those interviewees not close to a younger Imam, tended to go through their father for religious guidance, who would in turn ask the local Sheik on their behalf. Zreika and his brother, who both work in the finance industry for example, had their father approach local Muslim authorities in finance – the Muslim Community Co-operative (Australia) to clarify concerns in relation to halal finance. The executive of MCCA was considered to be both religious and professional and cognizant of the issues being faced not only in Australia but globally. Zreika and his brother also emailed an overseas religious scholar known for his background in Islamic finance for further information as well. This demonstrated that as the community becomes more
professional, educated Muslim young people are developing informative networks both locally and internationally that assist them in this regular problem solving and provision of solutions to daily dilemmas. None of these sources are ethnically or culturally tied and represent a proliferation of alternative and at times conflicting solutions each of which must be considered in the light of their practicality, morality and suitability for the Australian environment.

Abdullah reflected that he had never really needed to seek information or support from an Imam, although he considered them as equal in some ways to other Muslims in terms of the value of their advice stating that ‘I think I view the Imams as more like another brother. I’d go to them for advice’. From this statement Abdullah is removing the Imam from the pinnacle of unquestioned authority and in relation to his own situation, putting himself on a par with the Imam in considering the Imam’s statements as advice to be accepted or rejected accordingly. This attitude was not uncommon amongst the interviewees and presents some potential challenges. In the event that young Muslim men are influenced by Islamist writing or other media, they may possibly be unwilling to listen to the more moderate advice of conservative leaders – regardless of whether they are ‘ethnic’ or ‘contemporary’ Imams – despite these leaders having greater religious education and authority. Genuine religious scholarship is therefore less valued and leaves young Muslim people more susceptible to the emotional attraction of potential leaders as exemplified with Farouk (and detailed in Chapter 4) who responded favourably to religious justifications to ‘hate the West’, because it made him feel good, and ‘it sat well’ with him. This was an affective response, not a learned or logical one and therefore much harder to counteract.

Although not all of the Imams were considered particularly approachable, Sheik Shadi was an exception, as according to Ali – ‘Hes a sheik that answers questions’. At the same time, while Ali recognised that Sheik Shadi was both approachable and considered authoritative, his message was still able to be considered critically, with alternative opinions regularly sought from his closest followers. As Ali explained: ‘Once he gives an answer that's enough for most people. They're a lot of people who would ask two or three, four people before they do anything’.
This choice of alternatives in choosing a source of information also included sending questions overseas to those who were considered to have greater scholarship, although the credentials and usefulness of these overseas sources were moderated according to the context of the question. For example Ashraf stated that: ‘I refer to some of these scholars that are here...I refer to them when I need something, like, only they know about it cause it's in our own country’. Again he cited Islamic finances as an example, because ‘you can't refer to people overseas cause they don't know the situation here. So sometimes you've got to refer here,.. sometimes you've got to refer overseas’. These Muslim young men perceive a range of accessible opportunities in relation to their decision making, with little guidance on selection criteria other than a gut feeling that it is morally right, will be accepted within the family cultural framework, and is explicable to and compatible with the Australian community on the basis of commonsense.

Relevance of the Imam’s Teachings

The Friday prayer is a compulsory requirement for practising male Muslims. As Sydney is a large city it is not always possible to attend the mosque of preference due to traffic, distance, work and study requirements. The choice of a mosque to attend on Fridays is therefore frequently limited to those that are in the immediate vicinity, and therefore may not represent the type of Islamic instruction that the youth favour. In this regard I was interested to discover how relevant they found the khutbah, or whether mosque attendance was a ritual that was largely unintelligible due to traditional language and incompatibility with Australian culture. In the short time span that was available – usually between twenty minutes and an hour of actual preaching, what topics did they find useful and how effective was the Imam in imparting spiritual or practical religious advice? Although many of these young men were active within the Muslim community socially, attended lectures and talks about Islam and were generally well informed about their religion, the most beneficial aspect of the Friday khutbah were values laden reminders based on the example of the Prophet and timeless reminders contained in the Quran relating to family values and good behaviour. These reminders would not be unfamiliar to Jewish and Christian congregations in emphasising how to live a good and moral life.
Abdullah stated that he liked to learn about the life of the Prophet, the benefits of the Quran and inspirational aspects of Islam in relation to Science, particularly the many verses of the Quran detailing scientific facts that could not have been understood at the time the Quran was revealed. He also commented on a khutbah that he had heard which considered the contemporary issues of witchcraft and terrorism – condemning each of them equally. Considering that this khutbah was at Sydney University, it was most probably delivered by a more contemporary Imam. At the same time, he considered carefully what he heard,

I think with every situation you always have to sort of, use the best judgement possible, so I suppose if some of the information that they talk about doesn’t sound, you know, relevant, or might be conflicting with the majority of teachings that I’ve read then I might take it less seriously, you know, I might, I’ll be careful. With everything you have to be careful.

Ali considered that the purpose of the khutbah was essentially to remind the congregation of the fundamentals of the religion rather than to act as a religious commentary on contemporary society. Its function was therefore simple – ‘Because a lot of the youth go there as well, so just to remind them to pray and stuff like that. It’s not for political discussion or stuff like that, it’s not the purpose of it’. Ashraf considered that sometimes the khutbah was relevant, and at other times ‘they could be out of order’. With a continual media barrage of commentary on Islam and the politics of Muslim communities both local and international, the khutbah and Friday prayer seemed to represent the opportunity for reflection on the simple truths of a spiritual religion and its moral message. The intrusion of divisive politics even seemed to be resented by the interviewees.

Mahmoud expressed his concern when the khutbahs became political, preferring that the Imam focussed on the example of the Prophet, ‘Allah's Mercy’ and 'the proper essence of the creed’. This view was echoed by Mahdi and Hassan who complained about khutbahs that were political in nature, reflecting issues of the Middle East rather than issues that were affecting the contemporary community which he felt needed to be addressed more urgently. They would both have preferred a focus on
religion in the family, marriage and other social issues that relate to values and faith in general. It was only through a return to moral behaviour that the Muslim community could effectively progress. Due to Hassan’s work he was acutely aware of the areas that need to be tackled immediately: ‘We've got problems here you know, let's turn the focus back to Australia... Facing the Muslim community we've got major issues, everything you name it, drugs, gangs, prostitution, everything. Let's look at these things, and tackle these issues’.

The important role of contemporary Imams in arresting the problematic social behaviour of disaffected Muslim young men was expressed by Mahmoud:

I believe Sheik Farouk, Sheik Faez, Sheikh Al Hilaly, majority of all of them, even Sheik Abdul Salam, majority of the youth you see today are coming to the fold of Islam. If it wasn’t for the knowledge, partly from the good that they’ve spoken alhamdu lillah, you’d see a lot of youth maybe going on bad roads, the roads of haram. Sheik Shadi, I know there was a lot of youth before maybe on bad roads and he peered them into the religion and they’ve become outstanding members of the community.

Finding a Comfortable Mosque

Mosques in South Western Sydney can be categorised according to three different sectarian communities – general Sunni of multiple cultural backgrounds, Shia, also representing a multiplicity of cultures and minority sects including the Habashi and Alawi. These three groups tend to dominate the theological divisions of the Sydney Muslim community. When asked whether they would differentiate between mosques, each of the interviewees confirmed that they did not distinguish between the ‘houses of God’, Abdullah, Zreika and Asaf all preferring convenience and location in terms of their choice of a mosque.

I’ll go to one masjid because it’s closest to my house. But if I’m in the area and salat is on at the time and you know we’re not busy or I’m able to go there then I’ll go to any particular masjid.
However, when pressed on whether they would attend a Shia mosque, each expressed a certain reluctance, from praying separately, to praying the Friday prayer only if there was no alternative mosque available locally. Joining a Habashi congregation however was rejected by all the interviewed young men with varying degrees of distaste. Apart from one interviewee who was not clear on the community being referred to, most made oblique comments about those who had deviated or who were not following acceptable teachings in Islam.

In contrast, the politically charged and sensationalised Salafi and Wahabi mosques that had featured in the media and were known to be observed by ASIO – such as the Haldon St mosque were considered as entirely acceptable. In fact most of the interviewees had prayed there and had no hesitation in attending. It was apparent that internal divisions on what was acceptable teaching were far more relevant to the interviewees than political or media pronouncements on the teachings of Islam. Their willingness to consider these mosques also reflects the pervasiveness of the teaching of Salafi Imams, as most of the traditional Imams who have been imported for the various cultural mosques and deliver the sermons in their ethnic languages have also been trained in the same Salafi institutions, although those mosques that have been highlighted as potential breeding grounds for terrorist or radical teachings are generally led by the more youthful, less traditional and more cosmopolitan Imams.

Where the choice of a mosque was possible, different considerations applied, although, as Zreika stressed, the consideration of being made to feel comfortable by the Imam and the mosque congregation was amongst the most important aspects:

... living here and how to apply the religion when living here. And you know, not to take things to an extreme when you're living in a (place) that’s a non-Muslim society. .. Just to know how to incorporate all these things together. And just the way he talks he's very calm. Some speakers you go to and they’re yelling at you, you feel that they're attacking you.

Asaf on the other hand enjoyed this kind of emotional khutbah finding it beneficial and encouraging, saying: ‘I love it when he screams and pumps you up.’ Like Asaf, Mahdi felt that the youth sometimes needed strong words in order to wake them and
bring them into conformity with what was considered to be correct behaviour. However, for Sulaiman an emotional delivery was simply a tactic to maintain attention during a long religious talk. Hassan on the other hand, felt that it was a necessary act of the Imam ‘Like Sheik Yahya Safih might serve a purpose for people that might need the whip out once in a while, you know, just come on guys, get back into line.’ There was considerable variance then on what was an appropriate or necessary form of delivery, and the young men where possible chose their mosques accordingly.

Only one interviewee – Ziyad stated that he chose a mosque according to the type of teaching given there, instead of convenience. For Ziyad ‘I choose it because, it's the correct way - you understand it more’. In other words, he felt familiar and comfortable with the message that was being presented and in a language that he understood, rather than choosing a mosque simply due to its convenient location. Sulaiman preferred a mosque for social reasons, for the friends and family that attended. Although he would pray wherever he was, if he had the time he would prefer to go to the mosque where he could socialise as well. For Hassan, as with most respondents, it depended on what was convenient in terms of location and time, and although he spoke Arabic, he preferred it when there was an English translation available as he was unable to understand all of the Arabic sermons. Lakemba he found to be a mosque where he was most comfortable both socially and in terms of its message.

Perhaps similar to the situation in London described by Ed Husain in ‘The Islamist’ (2007) where he described a political battle for the strategically located East London mosque, Lakemba mosque is considered to be one of the most well known and central mosques in Sydney, and with one of the largest congregations of Muslims in Australia. It is therefore the mosque of preference for young Muslims, as Mahdi described : ‘As a kid, you know, you think of Eid- this mosque comes in your head. You think of anything to do with religion, Lakemba mosque just automatically pops into your head’.
At no time did the interviewees indicate any feeling of loyalty to ethnic, cultural, familial or peer relationship that required them to attend a particular mosque. This was in stark contrast to their parents who often attended the local mosque as much based on cultural and ethnic grounds as on the message or qualifications of the Imam himself. The interviewees in comparison felt free to critically analyse the Imam's message and to 'shop around' until they found an Imam whose message was relevant to them and who made them feel comfortable. From their comments they were not prepared to simply accept what they were told, but apply commonsense and a critical analysis to the Imam's preaching.

Potential for Terrorism

A critical element of finding a ‘comfortable mosque’ is related to the Muslim concept of Ummah – of community. According to Valerie Amiraux (2005), the renewal of the Ummah in a contemporary context, particularly in non-Muslim countries is related to a shared empathy with the victimisation and discrimination incurred by members of the Muslim community. The community then becomes a shared “community of suffering” as argued by Werbner (1991). Such recognition of the distress felt by disaffected young people is a powerful contributor to the attraction of more fiery Imams, most notably portrayed by Sheik Faez when filmed in the British Dispatches series aired on Channel 4 called “Undercover Mosque”. Farouk, a local youth leader explained the attraction of these Imams and the contemporary trend in rejection of more traditional imams as follows: ‘One of the things that you quickly learn is that the leaders and the Imams are not very much liked, and it's apparent that they're corrupt. ..you are quickly taught that the Muslim leaders are corrupt leaders.’ He expressed concern that if the message that traditional Imams gave was too positive in relation to the contemporary situation of Muslims and not addressing the marginalisation and discrimination they felt, disaffected youth would run the potential of being attracted to more fiery Imams with a harsher message. He explained how the young people he knew felt: ‘So you as a young person who has been dealt with unjustly (sic) with a society as a whole, come and find yourself among a group of people that you can relate to..You cannot go to the local Imam who’s preaching all positive things to you and tell(s) me, well what
you’ve experienced is nothing, everything is positive, positive, positive…. At that age it does not sit with you very well’.

Farouk described how disaffected young Muslims felt more comfortable with groups that reflected and recognised their feelings of disaffection and unhappiness. Although many of the young men I interviewed had experienced various forms of marginalisation and discrimination, they were sufficiently educated and skilled to overcome these disadvantages and could not be considered as disaffected youth. Having the resources and skills to find solutions to their immediately pressing problems they were generally content with spiritual reminders that allowed them to include Australian society and its values and systems into their social framework. Disaffected and less educated Muslim young men however, do not have the same opportunities available to them and were more comfortable with a message confirming and justifying their social grievances as Farouk explained: ‘You feel – whack – that’s the one…. They’re the ones that are speaking about anger and hatred and everything else that you’ve already experienced’ which in turn supported a justifiable anger against those who had caused the marginalisation and disaffection of these young people. Therefore they would ‘accept it. Because it sounded good’ and it supported their feelings of anger and injury. This focus on injury and suffering was described by Humphrey (2002) as defining people’s roles and behaviour, assisting with an essentialisation of ‘the Other’ – in this case, with essentialising ‘the West’ as a monolithic entity to be hated - thereby legitimising the relationship between their suffering and a problematic ‘Western’ entity.

For Farouk, these aggrieved and marginalised groups could also become powerful peer influences, supporting the youth, and encouraging them to feel comfortable and welcomed where previously they had felt outside of a socially acceptable community. The leaders of such organisations are generally very young – as evident with the Sheiks at the Global Islamic Youth Centre (GIYC), and included the popular but controversial previous Sheik Faez as well as other sheiks catering for the young men at Farouk’s youth centre. These youthful Sheiks were able to reach out in a way that was not evident in the more traditional mosque which tended to cater for older Muslims in their language of birth. This feeling of belonging and acceptance –
discussed earlier in chapter 4, was related by Ed Husain in his book ‘The Islamist’ where he described his initial encounter with the East London mosque, a mosque considered by his father to be preaching concepts contrary to the true precepts of Islam, but where he felt a vibrancy and welcome that he had not experienced previously. At the mosque that his father had taken him to: ‘Brick Lane mosque the elders only stroked my head to acknowledge me. It was my father they engaged with; I was merely his little boy’. Instead he was recognised as an individual at the East London mosque, ‘the people here were interested in me. To an isolated schoolboy, that mattered’.

According to Walid there has been a deliberate effort by the younger Imams to target the young and disaffected, youth who were considered to have morally digressed, the youth that were ‘on drugs and alcohol’ as he explained:

And that’s what all the Imams are doing nowadays. If you think about Ashraf Dannoun, Sheik Shadi, the Sheik from here, we’re ... aimed at the youth...bringing them back on to what the true meaning of Islam is... A lot of the youth do tend to listen to all of the sheiks and imams nowadays. They’re starting (to) get off those drugs, and they’re all starting to get back to the mosque, listening to lectures.

This generational use of a mosque was described by Sulaiman who described how the elder attendees of the mosque he initially attended as a young boy would be ‘grumpy’ at his brothers running around, telling them ‘if you’re not going to pray, get out!’ and that the traditional mosque was presented to him as:

a mosque (is) to pray, and to keep quiet and to let other people pray. And the youth, they can’t do that you know? ...Minto (mosque is) probably good for the people that are old and have nothing to do, ... so you’re not going to want to walk into there, until you feel you’re about to die, and then you’re going to walk in there.

In contrast however, the GIYC was welcoming, making him feel like a part of a family. Initially he had begun to attend the GIYC because of his friends and the sport
activities, without learning much religious knowledge but simply enjoying the companionship. ‘Because these guys, they felt like your brothers and you know, just sitting there with them was fun enough. And I guess, these guys needed like an excuse to come out to listen, cause they’re all together, it made it fun. And that’s why we kept doing it every week. I don’t think we really learnt anything from it.’ He did not start his religious learning until he married an Australian girl and needed to teach her about the religion of Islam, finding support at the centre in stepping him through stages of practising Islam himself before explaining them to his new wife.

Amongst the young men I interviewed, all but one of whom attended tertiary studies through University of TAFE, I found no evidence of any radicalisation or rejection of Australian society as a suitable environment for Muslims. Nevertheless, it appeared that they may be unable to recognise subtle messages of difference and incompatibility that have been presented to them. As Ed Husain (2007) described, the Islamist message is deceptively simple and appealing – Islam applies in all areas, and is superior – morally and politically. Considering that many of the Imams currently preaching the khutbas through the Sydney Muslim community have been educated in Medina and the Salafi/Wahabi tradition, their message of a pure Islam that can be based on reviving the practice of the Prophet and the first Muslim community for immediate application in contemporary society, without reference to centuries of scholarly adaptation and interpretation, has been a relatively common and accepted part of youth discourse.

The lack of trust in a sensational media also ensures that media portrayals of inflammatory or radical Imams is routinely rejected, demonstrated in the respondents’ complete lack of concern with praying in a mosque that was portrayed in the media as having ‘links to terrorism’ and being monitored by ASIO. In reflecting on a conference organised by the Ahlul Sunnah wal Jam’iah, that had been portrayed on a Current Affair as being potentially extreme and including lectures aimed at inciting hatred of western society, Mahmoud appeared to be entirely unaware of any hidden message, explaining the content of the speeches as: ‘verily he said, alhamdu lillah, we’re here living in this country, respect the people, follow by your creed and preach it. Just like everyone else has the freedom to, alhamdu lillah
preach it’. He understood the message of the conference’s speeches to be an encouragement to preach to non-Muslims about Islam through good behaviour, despite the conference having a subtle message of intolerance linked to the immorality of the West and the superiority of Islam.

Criticism and accountability of Imams and Khutbas

Two of the young men I interviewed were engaged as Imams themselves and were asked to reflect on what they considered to be important in preparing their own Friday message. Anas who is the Imam and leads the Jumaat prayer at the University of Western Sydney said that he tried to avoid politics in his khutbah, focussing instead on the character and behaviour of the Prophet . He would address current political issues in terms of the issues that affect the Muslim community, including modesty, dating and divorce. Contemporary social issues affecting young people such as the encouragement to attend University parties, drink alcohol or racism amongst the students, he would address through reference to the well known Hadith and verses of the Quran. He agreed that this was more in the way of religious self-improvement and reminder rather than contemporary political or religious interpretation. Anas was also strongly of the opinion that religious self-improvement would result in improved conditions for Muslims and should begin with the individual, spread to the family and then into the wider community. In this regard he had a clear goal of removing the victim mentality of the community:

We should not go out there blaming the Jews or the Christians or the media, let us blame first ourselves because a lot of us lack Islam, a lot of us don’t understand Islam. A lot of us don’t know how to make wudu. A lot of us don’t even know how to pray. A lot of us don’t even know how to read Surat Al Fatiyah. So we have a lot of sensitive issues we need to fix before we go out blaming any politician or blaming any people.

In his opinion, with such self-improvement the Muslim community would find not only a comfortable and peaceful life, but victory and the lifting of oppression of the Muslim community. This self-improvement message was also echoed by Walid who
regularly led Friday prayers or Jumaat prayers in local public schools, although he
did not include any messianic goal of bringing about the ultimate victory of the
Muslim community as indicated by his friend Walid. Again, steering away from
politics was an essential requirement.

Criticism of other Imams – often on internal sectarian grounds unrelated to the
Habashi and Shia divisions - was justified by both. On contemporary political issues
Anas was at pains to point out the importance of correcting others in his community.
This critical attitude was also held by Mohamed C who considered that he pays
attention to the khutbah: ‘not just for the fact for myself but also to pinpoint out if
the Sheikh has misread some something or he hasn't said something right. Cause
verily, like, any person can make a mistake’.

Such a critical attitude where the young men feel empowered to be able to approach
the Imam and correct him reflects a new attitude in the congregation, not only of
being able to choose an Imam and a comfortable mosque, but also to act in
judgement on the appropriateness of his message, although it does not necessarily
reflect a complete reduction in the respect that has traditionally been held for the
Imam. The ability to internally criticise while maintaining a public deference and
respect for the Imam was described by Mahdi as he explained:

They can be criticised – yeah. But, they should be respected. They should be
respected, more than political figures. They’re religious leaders. I mean if I
see a priest, I respect him. Just like I respect a Sheik, cause they’re a religious
leader, he’s a man of religion, a man of knowledge, a man of God.

Mahdi felt not only empowered but required to correct inappropriate teachings of his
peers, including those more senior to him. He cited an extreme and unlikely example
of an Imam permitting alcohol:

I’d advise him, look Sheikh, you can’t drink any alcohol. The book of God is
a higher authority than you. If he does not stop then I would abstain from
him, or get away from him, till he corrects his beliefs. Once he corrects his
beliefs and he starts following the Qur’an, then I will pray behind him and I’d
have no hesitation.

As each Imam is only accountable to the mosque board that employs him - a situation that is however, not reflected in the Turkish community where the Imam is often accountable to a Foundation or other regulating institution in Turkey – and many members of the mosque board are less educated than the Imam himself in matters of religion, the avenues for religious accountability as discussed in Chapter 3 are far from clear. Apart from political direction the mosque board seldom is involved in the religious pronouncements or teaching of the Imam. As a result members of the Muslim congregations who are not happy with the pronouncements of the Imam, or feel that he has ‘digressed’ or ‘deviated’ from the true message, must approach the Imam directly or simply avoid attendance. This approach of stating that an Imam had deviated from the ‘creed’ of Islam and should therefore be avoided, has more recently been instigated by the Ikhwan – the Muslim Brotherhood Movement and supported by the Salafi/Wahabi teachings undertaken by most Imams in Australia today. It has been the cause of much of the division within the religious community, with each Imam and his community being free to label a rival Imam as bordering on ‘kufr’ or unbelief, there being no independent religious body that could advise, counsel or discipline Imams and their teaching. According to Anas:

Isolating those people is teaching them a lesson to go back to the truth. This is the people of innovation, because innovations in religion are very, very dangerous. If I want to innovate in religion I can create a new way of thinking....There’s no such thing as ten versions of Islam. There’s only one Islam. There’s only one way to God. There’s only one path. Today we have deviated into so many paths.

However, Mahdi referred with dismay to the resultant discord between mosque communities:

What’s a Sufi got against a Wahabi, why are Habashi’s how they are...? We’ve got no right to hate each other cause we’ve all got rights on each other, not matter what we are... You have no right to sit there and call them all Kafir, or whatever they do these days. And we do a lot of stupid things to
each other these days.

This also goes partly to explaining the division and lack of authority in the mosque board in attempting to silence Sheikh Al Hilaly after his controversial statements. They did not have the authority to contradict, sanction or discipline him, as there was no higher religious authority than the Mufti himself. Such an overall lack of accountability of Imams was apparent with the interviewees who considered that the only options in dealing with an Imam who had ‘digressed’ from the true teaching of Islam, was direct counselling and then avoidance of his mosque and lectures. This type of appraisal was indicated by Mahmoud in stating that he chooses very carefully from available Imams, by first listening to their khutbahs and speeches, choosing one that he is comfortable with and that he considers is sufficiently qualified according to the following:

(he) has a high understanding, a high grade of basis from knowledge of the Sunnah, and also from the Quran, knowing that he has got that, and follows up by that, I’d take from him, 100 percent, 100 percent..... If I’ve researched up on the person, I know he’s 110 percent upfront with the truth, and he doesn’t weave, I’d go back to him 110 percent.

From these statements it appears that the interviewees therefore had no difficulty in shopping around for an Imam who made them feel comfortable and then critically analysing his teachings. According to Ali, young Muslims no longer simply accept the information that they are given, with many ‘who would ask two or three or four people before they do anything’. Ziyad agreed and explained that if he was not completely happy with an Imam’s statements, he would listen carefully, then refer the matter to his parents, or the parents of his friends. Explanations for their unwillingness to simply follow their local Imam appeared to be related to a recognition of the limitations of each Imam particularly in relation to his understanding of contemporary political or social issues. However, once an Imam was found who appealed emotionally or whose solutions appeared appropriate and who was also sufficiently qualified, these young men were prepared to follow unconditionally. Without any external authority or accountability for these Imams,
these young men remain vulnerable to potentially extreme teachings.

Other Mentors

There was a mixed response to questions on other mentors who were available to the interviewees, particularly in relation to family support. While Abdullah and Zreika discussed many issues with their parents – frequently seeking their assistance and advice first, conversely Anas was reluctant to tell his father about his extensive bullying at school, as his father was ‘the type that was very aggressive’ and if told about the bullying Anas feared that ‘it would cause a further disaster..he would come to the school and want to be beating up people’. His father was not religious, did not pray and would attend the local pub on occasions. Instead Anas found support and mentoring from neighbourhood friends of an Indian background, and from his mother who taught him about his religion and was his main support at home, while in turn he continually reminded his father to complete his religious duties. Most of the interviewees however, mentioned strong family support and mentoring, that members of their family would be the first they would seek advice and assistance from before turning to outside religious authorities. Ashraf related that ‘I don’t do anything before I ask my dad’. Considering that all of these young men had greater familiarity with the Australian cultural context, and were more educated not only in general schooling, but often also in religion, their parents and family still had a very strong influence on their social understanding of events. Ashraf for example, considered highly the opinion of his parents and particularly his father, on religious matters despite his father being barely literate. Although all had discussed the moral panic resulting from Sheikh Al Hilaly’s comments with their parents and family, they appeared to be relatively independent in their interpretation of the event. Ashraf again described the sources that his friends turned to for interpretation as follows:

One is their parents. Two is their local mosques and musallahs and their opinions, and three – the biggest chunk – is themselves and their own translation of what’s happening before their eyes. And when you have a young person who is already angry and upset from this society and from the media, and from everything that’s happening around him, it doesn’t take him
long enough to realise that I need to support this person. So I can just give it back to them.

The other important mentoring influence cited was the influence of religious ‘brothers’ who mentored and encouraged these young men through engaging with them at their Youth centres, establishing strong relationships with them through private and public schools, at work, or informal ‘brotherhood’ networks which encouraged the interviewees to attend prayer and to study about their religion. In talking about his work mentor Hassan described how:

he was the first Lebanese Muslim police office that I ever knew personally. And I loved it! He was fairly religious’ although not in the stereotypical sense of dress, but ‘he’s very spiritual and he practices his religion and at the same time he’s with the ‘in’ crowd. Everyone likes him whether they’re Muslim or not Muslim, and I liked that.

Mahdi was mentored by older Muslims who had made many mistakes in that they ‘slept with girls and got them pregnant and now they’re married to them and hating their life’. These ‘brothers’ were in turn trying ‘to stop us as much as they can from making the same mistakes’. They felt that their experiences would help them to understand the social pressures affecting younger Muslim men and they could assist them in making better choices. As he explained ‘No one understands a troubled Muslim youth more than a Muslim youth...no one’s going to understand me like Mohammed, my mate’. For Sulaiman, small shared experiences such as religious fasting and breaking fast together developed a strong bond so that other friends would be encouraged to join saying ‘I was jealous from the brotherhood that you guys had’. The influence of both informal and more institutional ‘brotherhoods’ was hinted at by most of the interviewees and warrants further research in terms of their organisation and potential for extremist recruitment and teaching to vulnerable and disaffected youth.

Two of the interviewees – Farouk and Mahmoud had not been practising Islam in their youth. Both had had experiences which frightened them and shocked them into thinking about death and their religion. Farouk had been involved in the drug trade
and was on one occasion in the position of having a gun in his mouth and being told that he was about to die, while Mahmoud was shocked by the violent death of one of his neighbours, followed by the death of a close school friend due to a car crash. Each of these experiences triggered a desire to return to their religion and to prayer.

The social aspect of Islam was also evident amongst many of these respondents. Ziyad explained how he started to attend the mosque with his friends, as he ‘was going to Lakemba gym after the Isha.. me and my friends, we’d get there, we’d listen to the khutbah, we’d pray and we’d go out with all of our friends’. As mentioned earlier, his return to active involvement in the mosque came about through his marriage to an Australian girl, while Zreika and his brother sought out religious connections for advice related to work in the financial sector. Such occasions requiring religious guidance were described by Anas as: ‘sometimes you come to a point in your life where you need someone of a higher authority to give you advice, how to act Islamically. Sometimes you do not know how to act Islamically. So you need to go that person and get advice on your issue’.

Sources of Islamic Knowledge and Mentoring

For most of the young men interviewed, it was evident that they had engaged individually in learning about their religion. Hassan reflected sadly on the lack of direct Islamic influence in his early upbringing, relating how his family fasted but seldom prayed together or discussed Islamic issues when he was growing up. Walid as with many of the young men, was intent on making his own decisions in relation to religious practice stating that:

any bit of knowledge is actually relevant to have. … So, the way we do that is ...to study with Sheikhs or read the books, or go to lessons, go to lectures even.

In 2005 the Howard government initiated a National Action Plan responding to ‘threats to Australia’s social cohesion, harmony and security’. Its second strategic element was ‘building leadership capacity and communication skills in Australian communities’. Included in this strategy was an implicit recognition of the influence
of religious leadership within Australian Muslim communities and particularly on young Australian Muslims. If there was an expectation that in recognising and establishing co-operation with religious authorities such as the Federation of Islamic Councils or the relatively recent Australian National Imams Council, the ‘State’ would be assisted in regulating any potential threats to social cohesion or security as envisaged by Ferrari (2005), the unregulated environment in which Imams operate and in which young people choose a mosque for attendance, or an Imam for guidance would certainly preclude any opportunity for regulation.

The participants in this research demonstrated a modern consumer attitude toward the choice of mosque that they attended, all of them for different reasons than the mosque choice of first generation migrants. Firstly they were chosen for convenience, they were accessible by transport and were local to and held at a time that was suitable for work or study. Secondly they were chosen for their social compatibility and socialising opportunity, thirdly for the correctness of their teaching, that is, they did not represent an excluded group as in Habashi and Shia, while consideration was also given to previous experience in the relevance and accuracy of the content of their khutbahs. Fourthly, consideration was given to the provision of English translations while fifthly and finally, how welcoming the mosque was in the feeling of belonging and acceptance it provided. This last consideration was perhaps the most significant in long term association with a mosque, its community and its religious leadership. A sixth consideration was NOT relevant, that is in relation to negative allegations in the media regarding particular mosques. There appeared to be a complete disregard to any implications for personal security due to attendance at a mosque deemed in the media to be ‘radical’ or with ‘terrorist connections’ or any concern with the possible monitoring of ASIO.

While there was recognition of the importance of traditional scholarship in the training of the Imam, and the absolute requirement of English speaking ability and familiarity with the Australian culture and environment, these young Arabic background Muslim men were ambivalent about the necessity for the local Imam to include religious guidance on international and political events. Mostly they looked forward to moral reminders and encouragement, based on the Quran and Hadith to
avoid what was ‘haram’, fulfil their religious duties and live a righteous life. However, when marginalised and suffering from media misrepresentation, social incivility, and moral panic following incidents such as that following Sheikh Al Hilaly’s 2006 talk, some interviewees indicated a propensity for choosing more emotional and inflammatory Imams that gave legitimacy to their feelings of injustice, and possibly feelings of revenge or hatred. Although most of the interviewees had experienced positive mentoring from various sources, they continued to be strongly influenced by the opinions of their parents – many of whom had little or no education in Australia and were less than capable in speaking English – and drawn to various religious communities through personal mentoring from informal ‘brotherhoods’, many of which had Salafist connections. Unlike the Imams of culturally ‘ethnic’ mosques who were controlled by a mosque board, neither the Imams preferred by these young men, nor the strong religious fraternity which is developing amongst the young Muslim men appears capable of regulation or able to be held to account except by the young men themselves. As the required religious scholarship must still be obtained from significant time studying outside of Australia, with its consequent potential for Islamist Salafi influences, it would appear imperative that religious training institutions capable of providing the required traditional scholarship within a contemporary and relevant Australian context becomes available as a matter of priority.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Although Sheik al Hilaly was appointed as the spiritual head of the Muslim community through the creation of the position of Mufti, it is clear that leadership of the Muslim community is contested, unable to be unified in meeting the diversity of representational needs that the community holds. These needs vary according to the community, their socio-economic and educational status, the gender and the generation. They are also affected by the environment at the time, and often require a juggling of competing interests according to the audience.

The difficulties faced by Sheik Al Hilaly in addressing a conservative ethnic elderly audience and utilising colloquial idioms that were not controversial to his listeners demonstrates the difficulty that Imams have in addressing their diverse congregations. His colloquial idioms were interpreted by them as a legitimate encouragement for families to encourage modest dress amongst their females in order to avoid unwanted sexual behaviour, but simultaneously caused accusations of encouraging those same behaviours when translated into a different cultural framework – an Australian cultural framework – with opposing contextual idioms. Even from a purely generational viewpoint, the Muslim community can be considered to be sufficiently at variance to preclude a single voice that can address simultaneously the non-English speaking and usually older cultural conservatives – those who generally employ mosque Imams - with a Western educated audience more cognizant of feminist discourse and sensitivity within that discourse to patriarchal tendencies. When Muslim congregations are considered further from a multi-ethnic and gendered perspective, it is even less likely that a single authoritative voice can encompass conflicting ethnic cultures and the unresolved and competing aspirations of young men and women seeking to interpret the Scriptures for their own advantage. In fact there are many within the Muslim community who have rejected the suitability or need for the position of a Mufti, a spiritual ‘head’ of the Muslim community. This rejection is also due to ties between the Mufti’s position and the largely discredited political institution of AFIC - a position of spiritual leadership that has now been officially supplanted by the diverse and slightly more representative Australian National Imams Council.
In seeking to respond to the diverse demands of the Muslim community – whether providing Scriptural interpretation for personal purposes, or bridge building between local communities, and more effectively responding to the media in representing the community’s needs and aspirations, there has been an uncontrolled growth in leadership voices, competitively seeking niche spaces in Australian discourse. These include a growth in Muslim community media, media spokespersons (many of whom are well known in the media but unknown even to the young men in this research), unregulated religious schools with their ‘authoritative religious’ voices reflecting internally more than externally and welfare and service based organisations including schools and interfaith organisations. Each of these contribute to an Australian Islamic discourse and agitate on behalf of their clients, and include culturally syncretist ethnic Imams opposing Islamist colleagues, as well as gender based organisations promoting a moderated feminist perspective on events.

This range of voices provides alternative perspectives and opportunities in terms of both spiritual guidance and leadership aspirations which are often at variance with the more traditional and ethnically based mosque Imam. Operating in a competing and unregulated environment, each of these voices seeks to legitimise itself through attracting greater media attention, or follower numbers. There is in reality intense competition between these public and private voices, often becoming a source of internal rivalry between mosques and amongst organisations as occurred in the appointment of Sheik Al Hilaly who supplanted his previous rival – Sheik Zeidan. The young men in this research however, appeared flexible in their choice of leader, organisation and place of worship, choosing mosques initially by their convenient location as well as by the language of instruction supplemented by their sense of comfort with the Imam and the mosque community. Unlike their parents, this was not tied to an ethnic disposition, but reflected the sense of welcome that they experienced and the sensibility of the Imam’s sermon.

There has been a tendency both internationally and in Australia for Islamic leaders to represent themselves as teaching a type of Islam that is purer and closer to the original teaching than their competitors, to the extent of claiming that the latter are polluting Islam with ‘innovation’ or ‘bida’ and therefore should be excluded from
the community of believers. This activity is called ‘takfiring’ – or naming as kufr, as an unbeliever, those who are outside of the accepted community. This is akin to excommunicating a Muslim in that they are no longer privy to membership of the Muslim community or the Global Ummah to the extent that permission to perform the ritual Hajj is denied. Added to this existing competition is a further aspect of rivalry which has encouraged an emotional dimension to leadership, in that leaders attract followers on the basis of the leader follower relationship, instead of an attachment to an ethnic social grouping or the accessing of a religious service. Such an emotional bond was clearly in evidence with Sheikh Al Hilaly who played a series of charismatic roles, including the ‘victim’ or ‘martyr’, as a resistant heroic image, defiantly demonstrating elements of the ‘protest masculinity’ that is more commonly evident among marginalised young men.

The religious qualifications required for recognition as an ‘authority’ in Islam is an area that is not subject to any government regulation or authoritative body in the Muslim community and therefore is a highly contested area. The early Muslim leaders in Australia had relatively little in terms of qualifications and were often self-taught. As mosques flourished and the opportunity to ‘import’ more qualified Imams became available, traditional aspects of Islamic education were prioritised, including memorisation of the Quran and attendance at a well-known Islamic institution in a Muslim country such as Al Azhar in Egypt. However, there is no authority in Australia capable of providing independent verification of the qualifications claimed by Imams in having completed these institutional studies, mastered extensive memorisation of the Quran or having obtained an ‘Ijaza’ or license to teach from a prominent religious scholar. Although this has resulted in disputes on the validity of the claims of various Imams to Islamic scholarship and authority, Sheik Al Hilaly is widely acknowledged as having memorised the Quran at a young age, completed studies at Al Azhar in Egypt and studied under various prominent religious scholars, giving him a scholarly position matched by few of his peers. This position was reinforced by an extensive history of religious lessons which were seldom challenged on scholarly grounds and which had attracted many followers.
It is clear then that a number of factors influenced the young men in these interviews regarding the controversial Ramadan talk of Sheik al Hilaly. The first factor considered by them was his history and scholarship. Although he had been involved in previous controversies, his regular sermons were highly regarded within the community as demonstrating a deep and scholarly understanding of Arabic, sermons that were recorded and studied by many in the community for their intuitive and spiritual reflections on Islamic scholarship. The young men, most of whom had limited Arabic literacy and equally little Islamic scholarship did not consider themselves in a position to consider critiquing the content and appropriateness of his talk for Scriptural or theological accuracy in its Arabic context, although there was a common recognition amongst the interviewees that Sheik al Hilaly’s lack of English and Australian cultural awareness could have made him susceptible to errors of judgement in avoiding culturally inappropriate statements from an Australian perspective.

The second factor they considered was the allegations against Sheik al Hilaly in terms of his known history and basic tenets of Islam, in other words, whether it was possible for Sheik al Hilaly to encourage young men in the community to commit rape. The answer was clearly in the negative as sexual interaction is strictly regulated in Islam and rape would certainly not be sanctioned by an Imam. The third factor considered by these young men involved the familiar ongoing debate externally in the media and internally within the practising Muslim community on the wearing of the hijab particularly as a defence to an ‘immoral West’. Each of the interviewees confirmed their understanding of the legitimacy of the debate and of their support for what they considered to be his underlying message, that modesty and women’s dress are two aspects of the same ethical practice, thereby demonstrating a strong cultural influence in their religious interpretation of social practice. In this regard the youth clearly evidenced an ability to accept, reject and modify the discourses occurring within their families, work places and media in order to arrive at their own interpretation of events.

More relevant to this research however, is the environment in which the controversy took place. Each of the interviewees had at various stages considered that Sheik Al
Hilaly could have erred in his choice of words and the appropriateness of his message – in other words, they had indicated a willingness for critical reflection on his leadership and his capacity for poor public relations, as Ashraf indicated ‘(he’ll) be doing an interview (and) he’ll mess up the words again’. In understanding why they were not prepared to engage in any public criticism it is necessary to consider the environment in which such critical discourse was publicly aired, including the marginalisation and criminalisation of the Arab and Muslim community that had been occurring for more than a decade, the implications of agreeing with non-Muslim critics of a prominent and popular Muslim leader, and the hostile manner of the criticism, each of which contributed to a sympathetic response to his charismatic call for support.

Although the young men interviewed could not be considered to suffer from socio-economic disadvantage, all expecting or enjoying good employment prospects and many completing tertiary studies, the history of media relations and political discourse prior and subsequent to September 11 had created a palpable tension as explained by Waleed Aly ‘Muslims in Sydney feel they are under constant attack’ (Allard 2007). Such feelings are no longer restricted to socially marginalised Muslims but to a community essentialised in the media and in the perceptions of colleagues and neighbours. This conflation of negative images with anything Muslim had equally affected the educated and the uneducated, English speaking and Arabic speaking, wealthy and unemployed alike. ‘You are hearing this from people who are otherwise doing well, have long family histories in Australia, people who are educated and intelligent’ said Aly, and contributed to what Ahmed Kilani, convenor of the popular website Islamicsydney.com considered to be a justifiable ‘siege mentality’ (ibid.). In such a hostile environment it would not be possible for an impartial and calm analysis of media critiques, as the media itself had been equally essentialised by these young men whose only experience was one of vilification, the frequency of which was expressed by Ashraf: ‘you can cop it while you’re standing up and saying the truth. And you can cop it while being quiet,’ a situation that he felt should be avoided as far as possible as: ‘it’s always the loser’s territory’. The youth then were not prepared to accommodate media demands, but actively resisted them by publicly supporting a besieged but popular Muslim leader.
The young men were also aware of the implications of publicly acknowledging Sheik al Hilaly’s propensity for inappropriate metaphors, as this could potentially recognise that such misogyny was an integral part of Islamic thought, or alternatively, that the community’s leadership was not worthy of respect, any more than those elements of the community which had already been widely discredited. Finally, although as Farouk mentioned, ‘there wasn’t one person that came out and said what Taj said was one hundred percent right’ amongst the members of his Muslim youth centre, the extent of media coverage was so extreme, with derogatory cartoons, insulting epithets including ‘deranged’, ‘vile’, ‘repugnant’ and even ‘pig-ignorant’ that as explained by Eman Dandan, ‘it becomes incredibly difficult to question’, to join the ranks of the mud-slingers and thereby become a traitor to the Muslim community.

Perhaps the most significant feature of his ability to maintain credibility amongst his followers was the manner in which he managed perceptions amongst his followers in the immediate aftermath. Presented in the media immediately following the initial publicity of his alleged comments as sick and ailing, Sheik al Hilaly delivered one of his most fiery sermons the following Friday utilising the type of charismatic leadership described by Weber which incorporated aspects of martyrdom and divine inspiration. Associating his own message with that of those praised in the Quran, and associating his critics with those described as enemies in the Quran, he delineated the boundaries of those within the Muslim community as necessarily supporting him and those outside of the community as rejecters of the message of Islam. In addition, by refusing to step down ‘until the White was clean’ he defiantly and aggressively resisted the actions of the perpetrators of Muslim marginalisation, in a manner indicative of the protest masculinity demonstrated earlier by marginalised younger Muslims. Each of these actions contributed to an emotional response in attracting support from his existing followers and from those who were not previously active supporters, in seeing his behaviour as heroic, withstanding the ‘hidden injuries of racism’ that they endured on a daily basis and regaining respect and pride through such defiance in the process.
These elements of ‘protest masculinity’ that have been associated primarily with disadvantaged youth in restoring their manly dignity, I would argue are also demonstrated by some Muslim leaders of marginalised communities in defiantly and aggressively challenging demands made by the wider community, as a means of uniting alienated and aggrieved members of their community, while consolidating their own leadership. If Sheikh Al Hilaly for example, had responded in a less aggressive manner and accepted that he had erred in his use of metaphor, his credibility within the community would arguably have lessened. At the same time, if the media had not engaged in such extensive vilification of such a popular religious leader, the outcome could conceivably have been resolved with less marginalisation and greater intercommunal respect as there would have been less community dignity at stake.

It was also apparent from this research that alienated young men are susceptible to displays of protest masculinity by their leaders which build on the emotional aspects of marginalisation and increase the isolation of the besieged community. In restoring a sense of pride through resisting aggressive entities – like the media – there is a potential for ‘radical’ Imams to provide a sense of agency to young Muslims, an acceptance within a justly aggrieved community and security against feelings of powerlessness.

Many of the concepts that are contentious in Islam have an ethical basis which is not dissimilar from other religions, particularly the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Judaism. However, there continues to be a difficulty in developing a dialogue that is free of the Oriental and Occidental framework, which allows those ethical values that are common to be presented in an acceptable and culturally relevant form to both sides. This type of dialogue – a bridging dialogue – is a necessary development for the emerging Australian Muslim leadership to defuse potentially controversial or contentious situations which currently continue to increase misunderstanding and distrust unnecessarily. A ‘bridging dialogue’ could establish those values and ethical standards that are not in contention, gradually developing their acceptable interpretation within the diverse Muslim cultural community into the known discourse of a diverse Australian culture. This could limit the number and
frequency of marginalising instances which continues to see Islam as ‘the Other’ and an unacceptable intrusion into Australia’s diverse society.

A case in point is the recent announcement by the National Australia Bank on interest free loans (Gardner and Russell 2009). Associated with the title of ‘Muslim finance’, this venture has attracted considerable hostility which is surprising considering the current financial crisis and the enthusiasm with which any lowering of interest rates is usually greeted. There has been no suggestion that invested capital with this bank would not attract interest returns when non-interest attracting loans are provided. It is also surprising considering that concern with capitalist ‘greed’ has featured prominently in media coverage of the current global financial crisis and resultant ‘toxic debt’ accumulated in ‘toxic banks’. This opportunity for Australians to obtain finance with zero interest however has attracted considerable hostility simply because of its association with the label of Islam and Muslim. It is only through the continued development of an ‘understood’ dialogue which similarly refers to ethical issues, albeit in different but Australian and ethnically based cultural contexts – ethical issues such as integrity, individual rights, modesty and spirituality – that this type of immediate association with ‘the religious Other’ can be reduced.

It is not within the confines of this research to propose methods by which to restrain the media and thereby lessen its inflammatory disposition towards the Muslim community and its leadership, however the importance of providing alternative modes of leadership which are more cognizant of media strategies, methods of negotiation and sensitivity to Australian cultural discourse is a relevant and important finding. This type of leadership is already encouraged through existing social institutions including schools, universities and various non-profit organisations and many of the young men interviewed for this research demonstrated the ability to rationally consider the arguments presented on each side, encouraged by their education in Australian schools. However, despite the emergence of Australian educated and English speaking young practising Muslims, they demonstrated a growing frustration that these skills have not been utilised effectively and emerging young leaders have not been permitted the opportunity for public discourse or leadership opportunity. This could potentially fuel the belief in the
futility of continuing efforts to improve the acceptable ‘face of Islam’ in Australia, and contribute to an ongoing pessimism that was demonstrated by what Ahmed Kilani referred to as ‘the sheer quantity of negative stories about Islam and the ‘completely unbalanced’ nature of the reporting’ (Allard 2007).

There are a number of implications from these findings in considering avenues for a more socially cohesive society. The first relates to the necessity for critical empowerment and discourse amongst younger Muslims through the availability of Islamic education and the regulation of such education to ensure its compatibility with Australian culture and social attitudes. Although registered Muslim private schools have been in existence for more than two decades, like their Christian and Jewish counterparts they are not seen as a valid source of religious training, the curriculum prescriptions in each state limiting significantly the opportunity to provide a more thorough religious qualification. Private Islamic community colleges (not registered Islamic private schools) have flourished since the 1990’s, but this has been significantly resourced by the availability of graduates from sponsored education in Islamist institutions, particularly in Saudi Arabia, and do not provide the type of critical analysis that is necessary for an informed discourse within the Muslim community.

Without the availability of appropriate Islamic training institutes, that can combine both the Islamic scholarship with which Sheik al Hilaly is reputed, and the critical discourse that can resist Islamist interpretations of a more fundamental and oppositional form of Islam, the Muslim community and particularly young Muslim men are increasingly susceptible to emotional arguments based on resistance to marginalisation. They are therefore limited in their ability to engage in the necessary discourse on an authentic Australian Islam which will elevate Islam from an exotic and threatening religion to an accepted and acceptable religion of Australia as sought by the Chairperson of the Community Relations Commission cited earlier. With limited Islamic scholarship they are dependent on the religious interpretations of overseas and Islamist trained scholars, who are engaged in a competitive, frequently divisive and often self-serving effort to increase the size of their congregation, and who have little incentive for developing a more harmonious and inclusive social
environment. In the unregulated and competitive space for representational voice and community leadership, there are an increasingly large range of organisations providing potential leadership opportunities for young Muslims who have the social and cultural capital to engage in a meaningful dialogue capable of bridging the Oriental Occidental perceptions of common ethical and religious values. However, such opportunities seldom carry with them the authenticity of religious scholarship. As such, the pre-eminence of traditional and often Islamist influences is likely to continue stifling the emergence of a native religious leadership with its more authentic Australian Islamic discourse, and continue also to provide sensational media coverage with its consequent marginalisation and essentialisation of the Muslim community.

This research considered the ways in which young Muslim men of an Arabic background are informed about such contentious events. From their responses it would appear the tabloid media, followed by word of mouth from family and friends are the most significant sources of information. Most had limited Arabic literacy and were therefore unable to access directly informed sources in Arabic. Suspicious of the media and apparently not having access to more conservative and balanced social discourses, these young men reported being confronted with news about the Mufti by workmates and friends in a hostile and humiliating manner. Only two of the respondents had gained access to details of the Mufti’s talk, perhaps unwilling to be confronted with the truth, but more possibly reflecting their distaste for media coverage, as described by Mahmoud: ‘I find them they’re pouncing, they’re like panthers. Unbelievable’. Not one of the interviewees expressed any optimism of the Muslim community gaining a fair or balanced reporting, or of obtaining a Muslim spokesperson that would be other than apologetic or unimpressive in representing their community. This limits the sources of reliable information that are available to young men and encourages the risk of misinformation spread through informal networks, text messaging, online groups and word of mouth. Such a dangerous and rapid spread of inflammatory information was evident during the Cronulla riots and also contributed to a planned rally at the time of Sheik al Hilaly’s controversial sermon which could have resulted in further social disturbances. It is therefore
necessary to consider sources of information that are easily accessible to Muslim young men and that provide a more balanced coverage of sensationalised events.

The inability to raise critical concerns in a safe and public environment or find any avenue within Muslim community institutions for internal criticism of the statements of their religious leaders, has meant that young Muslims often engage in a dual process of dialogue. Internally young Muslims along with various members of their families lament the inability of their religious leaders to provide a more positive image of their religion, to grasp the subtleties of the English language (and sometimes even the rudimentary skills of English) and their often inappropriate responses to external calls for accountability or explanations. Publicly however, they maintain solidarity with their religious and ethnic leaders, as to counter them publicly would be seen not only as disrespectful, but as akin to joining with the ‘enemy’, a position possibly exacerbated by strong parental and family connections with the latter’s continued links with countries of origin. This has restricted severely any opportunity to make Muslim religious leaders accountable, as any overt criticism can be labelled as supporting the deliberate misrepresentation and wilful marginalisation of the community as a whole.

A common and alternative approach cited by the interviewees was a simple withdrawal from the event and its associated discourse, in the hope that by not engaging with it either in the workforce or the community at large, and even avoiding exposure to media reporting in general, the matter would pass and ‘normality’ could resume. Hassan changed the channel of his radio when shock jocks commented on Sheik al Hilaly, while other interviewees stated that they avoided reading the papers during this time. In this sense young Muslims seem impelled to withdraw altogether from the discourse, actively disengaging in order to remain confident and avoid submitting to the sense of powerlessness that such engagement provides.

Each of these strategies effectively silences the opportunity for young people to encourage more appropriate and contemporary interpretations of Islam. They also inhibit the development of an ‘authentic Australian Islam’ as the lack of engagement in these discourses within the wider community limits a critical reflection on the
practical application of Islam in Australian society and its potential contribution to resolving conflict. Without such critical reflection and engagement in problem solving, Muslim young people are more likely to leave the provision of alternative solutions to those who have the least skills in this matter – competitive Imams and public spokespersons whose agenda is based on attracting followers from their rivals or Islamist agendas.

Despite the marginalisation experienced by the young men in this research, there is still a positive sense that Australia is the source of their desired ontological security, that they can and generally do find a sense of acceptance and a sense of belonging as Australian citizens. There was little evidence of mentoring or support for them through the socialising institutions of schooling – whether primary, secondary or tertiary, or external mentoring organisations through sport or other activities. They maintain close and influential links with their family, consulting with them before other groups and are therefore still subject to influences that may be less in touch with a balanced and more widely held ‘Australian’ viewpoint. This could go partly to explaining the concern expressed by one interviewee that ASIO may have been involved in the taping and later alleged campaign of misinformation regarding Sheik Al Hilaly’s Ramadan talk, as conspiracy theories are frequently aired amongst these families. The main source of support and understanding that has been provided to these young men has occurred through individual Muslims – either as teachers, youth workers or colleagues at work, and a network of contacts, an informal ‘brotherhood’ that was mentioned by most. This brotherhood was often associated with Islamist groups and religious venues, not always working openly and often working in secret. The two young Imams that were interviewed for example, refused to name their religious mentor and required that I respond to his vigorous questioning over a mobile phone regarding the purpose of my research prior to agreeing to participate.

Although the limits of this research precluded a more extensive analysis of the data in relation to identity formation there was found no evidence of the type of hybrid identity mentioned by earlier researchers, and which would appear to be a reductionist integration of different cultures according to the social situation. Instead
most of these young men appeared to have a range of identities that they could adopt at any given time – Muslim and professional businessperson or tradesman, Lebanese Australian and also practising visual Muslim – occupying multiple identities at any one time. Although occasionally requiring a certain amount of confidence in explaining the differences in their lifestyle and practice, as in Asaf’s story in explaining his lack of attendance at social drinking sessions, they have developed the confidence to modify their Australian identity sufficiently to move comfortably in the professional, social and ethnic environments. This feeling of belonging however, and the social progress it ensures, can be easily threatened through the social incivility and everyday racism that is the common experience of young Muslim people. Religion appeared to be uppermost in all of their discourse and explanations, cited far more frequently than references to culture and ethnic practice. In this regard these young men adopt a religious ‘framework of living’ far more than a cultural framework. However, this religious framework, called the Deen or ‘way of life’ in religious discourse, also provides an alternative perspective when these young men are marginalised, a way of finding their ontological security in a more global community of Muslims – the Ummah. However, the support network promoting the global Ummah to these young men, frequently referred to as a ‘brotherhood’, is currently characterised by overseas trained and influenced Imams with a more Islamist agenda, despite the Western education that they have acquired and the social and cultural Australian capital that they have obtained, a source of mentoring that is worthy of further research.
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Glossary

Ahlul Sunnah – the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Alhamdu lillah – Praise be to Allah

Alawi – a sect of Muslims more associated with the Shia community than the Sunni community of Muslims

Allahu Akbar – Arabic for ‘Allah is Great’

Ayat – verse of the Quran

Bida – ‘innovation’, an allegation that something new is being brought into the religion that was not authorised by either the Prophet or later scholars

Dawah – the invitation of others to Islam through teaching and exemplary behaviour

Deen – way of life in Islam; comprising the various regulations of the Shariah and recognising the authority of Islamic law

Eid – day of celebration for Muslims held twice annually – at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and also at the time of the annual pilgrimage for those not in Mecca.

Fitnah – a word used in the Quran to denote disorder, turbulence and evil. Also used to indicate lying or deceptive behaviour.

Habashi – a sect of Muslims originating in Lebanon, who have grown in number in Australia.

Hadith – the sayings and recorded actions of Prophet Muhammad

Haj – the pilgrimage to Mecca which is held once a year and is one of the five compulsory pillars of Islam to be performed at least once in a believer’s lifetime.

Halal – that which is permitted
Haram – prohibited, usually referring to what has been prohibited in the Quran or by the Prophet’s practice, but also referring to what is generally considered culturally as prohibited.

Hijab – head covering for Muslim women, usually referring to a scarf covering the hair and the neck but not the face.

Imam – religious leader. Also a temporary position in that the person who leads congregational prayer is the Imam, which may include the most knowledgeable Muslim present at that time.

Ijaza – permission to teach about Islam provided by a known scholar or recognised institution to a student; Imams are generally required to have an ‘ijaza’ before they can assume a paid position as Imam of a mosque or community.

Isha – evening prayer – the last of the five obligatory, daily prayers

Jumaat – the Friday congregational prayer at the mosque held at midday

Kafir – a person who is a non-believer; applying to the person who rejects belief in God, or in Islam

Kufr – unbelief, or rejection of belief in God. Also used to apply to those who reject the message of Islam; associated with the term ‘takfir’ or calling another person kufr – or rejecting of Islam.

Khutbah – the Friday sermon given in the mosque at midday

La illah illah Muhammad ar rasulullah – the shahadah or statement of belief of Muslims meaning – There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

Lailiyya – night time dance celebration (from the word Lail or night) held particularly amongst the Arabic community, particularly for weddings

Latif – one of the 99 Names of God, meaning The Gentle One

Madrasah – Arabic word for ‘school’ but commonly used to refer to Islamic religious schools

Masjid - mosque

Mujrimeen – Criminals, those who defy the word of God
Musallah – small prayer halls often established in places of work, airports and educational institutions for Muslims to conduct their daily prayers.

s.a.w. – Arabic short form of ‘sallallahu alaihi wassalaam’ meaning blessing and peace on him; commonly placed after the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

Salafi – purist teachings of Sunni Islam claimed to be based on the earliest teachings of the Prophet, his companions, and their companions; also related to the Wahabi teachings

Salat – five daily prayers proscribed for Muslims

Sirah – life story of the Prophet Muhammad

Shia – a sect of Muslims

Sufi – spiritual or mystical teachings and sects in Islam

Sunnah – the practice of the Prophet

Sunni – those who regard themselves as adhering to the practise of the Prophet; majority sect as opposed to Shia, Habashi, Alawi etc.

Surat Al Fatihah – the opening chapter of the Quran recited in each repetition of the five daily prayers

Tarawih – prayers held only during the month of Ramadan in the evening after the Isha or evening prayers. They are usually held at the mosque every night of the fasting month.

Ulama – scholars of Islam

Ummah – the community of Muslims whether local or global

Wahabi – Sunni religious school of thought relating to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab an 18th century religious figure in Saudi Arabia

Wudu – the ritual washing that is done prior to the five daily prayers
ATTACHMENT A:

1. Abdullah was born in Australia to a Lebanese mother and an Australian convert father. He was a full-time student, 18 years old and had limited ability in Arabic. His father was a senior accountant in a large company and his mother had lived in Australia for many years and was employed as a primary school teacher. He had studied in both public and Islamic private schools.

2. Ali was born in Australia although also had Jordanian citizenship and was from a Palestinian background. He had lived all of his life in Australia apart from one year in Jordan and was aged 19. He could speak, read and write limited Arabic and was able to understand some of the Arabic news reports. He was a full-time student and had studied in both public and private Islamic schools. His parents had both completed their high school education and could speak English fluently.

3. Anas was aged 25, had resided in Australia since he was aged 6 and was a full-time student. He had been educated in public schools and as his mother had been a teacher in Lebanon she also taught him Arabic. Both of his parents were Lebanese. Although he was not entirely fluent in reading and writing he was confident of understanding Sheik Taj’s talks. Both Anas and Walid were interviewed together.

4. Asaf was aged 22, was a full-time student and had attended Australian public schools. He had very limited fluency in Arabic and had spent most of his life in Australia. His parents were both Syrian and his father had been well educated prior to migrating, obtaining work for the local Council as an engineer prior to retiring.

5. Ashraf was aged 21, with a Lebanese background but had been living in Australia since the age of 7. He regularly returned to Lebanon to visit his extended family. He had been schooled in both public and private Islamic schools and was fluent in Arabic including reading and writing. Although he had completed study at TAFE and was working full-time he was preparing to study at University. Both his father and mother had received limited education although his father read widely and was self-educated.

6. Hassan was aged 25, had Lebanese parents but had limited Arabic literacy. He had studied in public schools, completed his education and now worked in the police force. His mother had decided to return to study at University when her children were in high school, while his father drove a taxi.
7. Mahdi was aged 20 and worked full-time in a youth centre. His parents were Lebanese with his mother marrying her cousin at the young age of 14 or 15. His father had also had limited education, being a self-supporting orphan from a young age. Mahdi was Australian born, had attended public schools and had limited Arabic literacy. He had studied at TAFE, but as he was supporting his parents and younger siblings, he worked full-time at the youth centre.

8. Mahmoud was 24 with Lebanese parents, worked full-time and was born in Australia. He had been educated in Australian public schools, completed some TAFE training and had limited Arabic literacy. His parents had had limited education in Lebanon although his father had completed trade qualifications in Australia.

9. Sulaiman was aged 19 and had Palestinian parents. His Arabic literacy was limited and he was educated in Australian public schools. His parents had limited education, and his father was a taxi driver. He was studying at TAFE but marrying at a young age (he was the only interviewee who had married) he had to work as an apprentice to provide for his young family.

10. Walid was aged 24 and was a full-time student. He had been educated in the Australian public school system. He was born in the US with an American mother (who had converted to Islam) and an Egyptian father and as with Anas had been in Australia since he was 6 years old. He had limited Arabic literacy skills although like Anas, he was able to understand Sheik Taj’s Arabic talks.

11. Ziyad was 21 years old and had Lebanese parents. He was born in Australia, had limited Arabic literacy and had attended Australian public schools. He had only recently completed a TAFE course and was looking for work. His parents had had limited education in Lebanon, his father working for the Council after migrating but had since retired.

12. Zreika was 23 years old, was a full-time student and had Syrian parentage but was born in Australia. He had limited Arabic literacy and had been educated mostly in an Islamic private school. His father had been highly qualified prior to immigrating to Australia but had since worked as a taxi-driver, while his mother had received a good education but had limited English skills and did not work.

The mentors interviewed included:
• Farouk (not his real name) a youth worker who organized a gym for young disaffected Muslims and had courted controversy of his own through his youth activities and public statements on youth issues. He was of a Lebanese background, migrated when he was young and had attended public schools.

• Rahman (not his real name) was of Lebanese background and was a senior educator in the public education system in a school with a high proportion of Lebanese and Arab background students. He was considered a mentor to many of them.

• Sheikh Shadi was a popular Imam and mentor to many young Muslims, running a popular youth centre and giving many talks to the youth. Although he was educated in Australia he had spent many years in Muslim countries obtaining a traditional Islamic education.
ATTACHMENT B:

Interview Questions:

Section A:

Identifying Data:

- Date of Interview:
- Place of Interview:
- Age of interviewee:
- Citizenship:
- Ethnicity: - how would you define your ethnicity?
- Do you speak, read or write Arabic?
- What pseudonym would you like to adopt?

Section B:

Educational Background:

- What sort of school did you attend (public/private)?
- If private – Christian, Muslim or other?
- What year did you leave school?
- What educational level did you achieve?
- What level of education did you achieve after you left school?
- Are you currently working or not working, part or full time? If so, what as?

Section C:

Mosque Religious Influence:

- Do you go to the mosque for Friday prayer or Eid prayers?
- Which mosque do you go to?
- Do you ever listen to the khutbahs?
- How relevant to your situation are they?
- Do you ever see any other religious persons either in the mosque or outside of the mosque?
- How often do you see them?
- When would you see them?
Section D:

Other Influences:

- Explain how you felt about your school –
- Did you have many friends at school?
- Did you establish good relationships with any of the teachers or support staff?
- Have you kept in contact with any of them since that time?
- What other groups have you been involved in during your school days? (after school tutoring, youth groups, support networks)
- How did they support or not support your development as a person?
- Where have you worked since you left school?
- How supportive and understanding of you as a person is/are the place(s) that you have worked?
- Do you talk about issues in the community with your friends?
- Do you trust their opinions?
- Do you agree with their opinions?

Section E:

Family Influence:

- Did your mother and father attend school in Australia or Lebanon?
- Do they intend to stay in Australia or go back to Lebanon?
- Do you talk to your mother/father about issues affecting your life, the community?
- Who do you talk to most in your family?
- Whose opinion do you listen to most in your family?
- Who gives you the most support in your family?
- Do they understand you and accept you?

Section F:

What do you think about the religious leaders in the community?

- Have you or your family been to see an Imam that you can remember?
- Did he help with a family, community or a religious problem?
- What do you think about the Imams at Lakemba mosque?/Haldon St/ that you have seen on the TV (Sheikh Zoad)
- What do you think their role in the community is – what do you think they should be doing – representing the community perhaps? Teaching only in the mosque perhaps?
- What do you think about the media coverage of our Imams? What can you remember about what you have seen? Did you agree or disagree with the comments?
What do you know about Sheikh Taj Al Hilaly?

- Do you remember the reporting of his sermon which referred to women and a reference to meat?
- What was your impression of the reporting of that sermon?
- Where did you read/hear/learn about this issue?
- Did you read any Arabic version of the sermon?
- Did you read the full transcript of the sermon?
- What do you think about what he actually said?
- Do you think that his allegory was justified?
- Who did you talk to about this issue?
- What did your family think about it?
- What did they say?
- What did your friends think about it?
- What did they say?
- Did you talk to any people at work/Uni/other institutions about this issue?
- What did they say?
- What did you think about what they said?
- Did you hear any religious persons/mentors/sheikhs talking about this issue?
- Did you talk to any of them yourself about this issue?
- Did you access any internet chat forums, text messaging, emails or other internet media about this issue?
- What did it say? Did you agree with it?
- Did you respond and if so, what did you say?
- Do you agree with the way the media has presented this issue?

- Do you remember the reporting of calls for Sheikh Taj’s resignation, refusal to give khutbahs or talking to the media?
- What was your impression of these requests?
- Where did you read/hear/learn about this issue?
- Did you read any Arabic version of these requests?
- What do you think about what Tom Zraika, Dr. Mohamad Abdulla and Dr. Jamal Rifi actually said?
- What do you think about what John Howard and Kevin Rudd actually said?
- Do you think that his allegory was justified?
- Who did you talk to about this issue?
- What did your family think about it?
- What did they say?
- What did your friends think about it?
- What did they say?
- Did you talk to any people at work/Uni/other institutions about this issue?
- What did they say?
- What did you think about what they said?
- Did you hear any religious persons/mentors/sheikhs talking about this issue?
- Did you talk to any of them yourself about this issue?
- Did you access any internet chat forums, text messaging, emails or other internet media about this issue?
- What did it say?
- Did you respond and if so, what did you say?

- How did the media reporting of Sheikh Al Hilaly make you feel as an Australian?
- How did the media reporting of Sheikh Al Hilaly make you feel as a Lebanese?
- How did the media reporting of Sheikh Al Hilaly make you feel as a Muslim?
- Did you support Sheikh Al Hilaly before these reports?
- Did you support him after these reports?
- Did you change your attitude towards him and the role of the Imam at any time during the media coverage and his comments?

- What do you think are the important criteria for leadership in the Muslim community?