

Victoria's Islamic Schools: Facilitators of Islamic Identity Construction?

Submitted by

Yasmin Hassen
Bachelor of Arts (Global), Monash University
Post Grad Dip. European and International Politics, Monash University

Dissertation submitted to the School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Arts, Monash University

in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Research)

Submitted December 2014

Monash University

Notice 1

Under the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis must be used only under the normal conditions of scholarly fair dealing. In particular no results or conclusions should be extracted from it, nor should it be copied or closely paraphrased in whole or in part without the written consent of the author. Proper written acknowledgement should be made for any assistance obtained from this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Thesis Declaration	5
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	6
INTRODUCTION	7
Research Question and Objective	8
Why Victoria?	9
Structure of the Dissertation	10
CHAPTER ONE: Background	12
Islam in Australia: A Brief History	12
Faith-based Schools in Australia	14
Islamic Schools in Australia: A Brief Overview	17
Do Muslims Parents Prefer Islamic Schools?	20
Conclusion	23
CHAPTER TWO: The Politics of Education and Muslim Youth Identity: Developing a	
Conceptual Framework	24
Defining ‘Religious Identity’	24
Religion as a Marker of Identity	25
Defining Safe Spaces	26
Defining Double Exclusion	27
Islamic Schools and Gendered Identities	28
Understanding Patriarchy	29
Understanding Islamic Feminism	29
Conclusion	30
CHAPTER THREE: Profiling Victoria’s Islamic Schools	31
Australian International Academy (formerly King Khaled Islamic College)	33
Minaret Islamic College	35
Darul Ulum College of Victoria	37
Ilim College of Victoria (formerly Islamic College North Western Region)	39
East Preston Islamic College	40
Mt. Hira College	42
Al Taqwa College (formerly the Islamic Schools of Victoria Werribee College)	43

Al Siraat College	44
Islamic College of Melbourne	45
Conclusion	46
CHAPTER FOUR: Research Methodology	49
Interviews	50
Interview Transcripts	52
Positioning the Researcher	53
CHAPTER FIVE: Islamic Schools in Victoria as Safe Spaces	54
Islamic Schools: Simply a School for Muslim Students?	57
Victoria’s Islamic Schools and the ‘Bubble-like’ Experience	62
Conclusion	66
CHAPTER SIX: Victoria’s Islamic Schools and the Emergence of Double Exclusion?	68
Victoria’s Islamic Schools and the Experiences of Two ‘Islams’? Analysing the Home and School Gap	73
Alternate Processes of Engagement	77
Conclusion	79
CHAPTER SEVEN: ‘It’s hard being a girl in an Islamic school’:	
Islamic schools gendered Islamic identities	82
Culture, Patriarchy and Constructions of Identity: Muslim Women’s Experience	82
Feminism and Productions of Islamic Identity	90
Conclusion	95
CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion	98
REFERENCES	106
APPENDIX I	113
APPENDIX II	115
APPENDIX III	116

Victoria's Islamic Schools: Facilitators of Islamic Identity Construction?

Abstract

In recent times the popularity of Islamic schools in Australia has become of notable societal and academic interest. The research study unpacks the complex processes Muslim students in Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools go through in the construction of their religious identity. The study also examines experiences of belonging, exclusion and religious identity construction of young Muslims. The research intends to understand how the schooling of Muslim students fosters development of an Islamic identity among students in Victoria's Islamic schools. The research adopts an in depth open-ended interview model as the preferred methodology. An open-ended interview model intends to privilege the knowledge and 'voice' of the subject to develop a deeper understanding of the lived reality of Islamic school graduates.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that the thesis, except with the Graduate Research Committee's approval, contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution in my name, in any university or other institution. I affirm that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Dr Julian Millie and Associate Professor Anita Harris for their guidance, sage advice and support throughout this process. Their advice and friendship has been invaluable and has made the arduous journey easier, for which I am thankful.

Furthermore, I am thankful to the research participants for their cooperation, honesty and transparency throughout this process. Their contribution to the research has made the completion of this thesis possible, valuable and enjoyable.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mohamed A. Hassen and Moumina A. Abdalla, and the memory of my sister Keiriya M. Hassen. Keiriya's memory has being my source of inspiration and strength throughout this process. Without the support and patience of my parents, siblings and friends, without their affectionate nagging and intellectual toing and froing would have been unnecessarily arduous and near impossible. A simple thank you cannot suffice.

Victoria's Islamic Schools: Facilitators of Islamic Identity Construction?

INTRODUCTION

In recent times the popularity of Islamic schools in Australia has become of notable societal and academic interest. Discussions on the *place* and purpose of Islamic schools in the West are often clouded by security concerns (Merry 2007, Cesari 2004, Driessen and Valkenberg 2006, Halstead 2003, and Haw 2010). In spite of the cultural, educational and religious needs Islamic schools provide for Muslim communities in diaspora, opposition to Islamic schools is increasing (Kalervo and Webb 2013, Kalervo 2012, Murray 2009, and Taylor 2005). This research assesses and reviews young Muslims' experiences of Islamic schools in Victoria and the various political, religious and cultural contexts that facilitate Islamic schools in fostering an Islamic identity. As well as providing a literature review on Islamic schooling, generally, and Islamic schools in Australia specifically, the research engages with the main arguments that frame the political and national debate that surround Islamic schooling in Australia. The research study unpacks the complex processes Muslim students in Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools go through in the construction of their religious identity. The study also examines experiences of belonging, exclusion and religious identity construction of young Muslims. It does so in order to ascertain the impact Islamic schools have as specific sites in the construction of Muslim youth identities (Gall, Borg and Gal, 2003).

Conversations on the purpose of Islamic schools in Australia are often framed as matters of national security (Cesari 2004; Halstead 2003; Haw 2010; Merry 2007). In spite of the available scholarship on the experiences of Muslim youth in the West 'very little research has explicitly investigated how increasingly salient articulations of *Muslim identities* connect

with the issue of Muslim schooling' (Meer 2009, 379). However, Islamic identity construction of Muslim youth in diasporic settings has been explored extensively in scholarship in relation to music (for studies of hip-hop and rap, see Drissel 2007, 2009, 2011; Gazzah 2010; Rantakillo 2011); susceptibility to radicalisation and/or self-radicalisation (see Azzi et al. 2011; Jamal 2005; Schmidt 2004); and patriarchy, Islamic feminism and gender dynamics (see Archer 2001; Zine 2004; Khan 2002; Moghissi 2009; and Moghissi and Ghorashi 2010). The dissertation aims to explore in what ways Islamic schools institutions define and/or inform students' experiences of their identity as Muslims.

The role of Islamic schools as vehicles for facilitating Islamic identity construction is a relatively new phenomenon, particularly in the Australian context. The research study seeks to explore and analyse the extent to which Islamic identity is influenced by the Islamic schooling experience of students, as well as the ways in which religious identity construction is overtly assigned to Muslim youths through the school environment. The literature in the Australian context is limited. The national and political conversation of the impact of Islamic schools on their students and society is primarily informed by media narratives that do not wholly appreciate the nuances and complexities that encompass the subject matter. A series of semi-structured in-depth interviews is used to emphasise how Islamic schools are structured and their impact student's Islamic identity formation. In essence, the thesis seeks to explore and understand the 'Islamic' in Islamic schools.

Research Question and Objective

The debate over Islamic schools' influence on the identity construction of their students 'revolves around two fundamental issues: the encouragement of rational autonomy in the [student] and the role of religion' (Parker-Jenkins, 1991: 569). In order to address the issues embedded within this objective, the research project aims to answer the following questions:

To what extent do Islamic schools influence the Islamic identity construction of students? What are the underlying factors in an Islamic school environment that can affect Islamic identity and is it palpable to the student? In exploring these questions I explore how Islamic schools define and/or inform the experiences of students' experiences of self and Islamic identity.

Why Victoria?

According to the 2011 Census, Australia's Muslim population represents 2.2 % of the overall population (a 69 % increase since the 2001 Census), of whom 61.5 % were born in Australia (ABS, 2012). The largest Muslim population, up to half of the Muslim population of Australia, lives in New South Wales; whilst a third of the Muslim population lives in Victoria. Nonetheless, Victoria was chosen as the site for the case study because:

- a. The first Islamic schools in Australia were established simultaneously in Victoria and New South Wales in 1983;
- b. Victoria has only nine self-identifying Islamic schools compared with 19 self-identifying Islamic schools in New South Wales. Only one of Victoria's Islamic schools is non-independent compared with three non-independent Islamic schools in New South Wales.¹ The Islamic schooling educational landscape in Victoria, therefore, offers greater opportunities for diverse analysis than in New South Wales; and
- c. Additionally, given that I'm a Victorian who graduated from an Islamic school in Victoria I am more familiar with the Islamic school landscape of Victoria than that of New South Wales.

¹ Although all faith-based schools are "Independent" schools, the term "independent" here is used to refer to schools that are either administered or governed by a coalition of staff and community members or by a family or group of families. They remain "independent" because the governors make decisions (regarding religious curriculum, services, school uniforms, etc.) independently of a Board. Non-Independent schools are a part of a national group of schools that are run and governed by a national federation of Islamic councils.

Structure of the Dissertation

The research study begins by problematizing the concept of identity construction and Muslim religious education. Chapter One aims to provide a brief survey of Muslim migration in Australia. It also provides background information on the history of faith-based schooling in Australia generally and the history of Islamic schools in Australia specifically. Chapter Two outlines and explores the conceptual frameworks that underpin the research study. It illustrates ‘how the study uses its theoretical frameworks to understand and analyse’ the interviews (Keddie, 2001: 16). It discusses the different concepts used in the research study to explore the relationship between an Islamic school environment and Islamic identity development. It also explores the push-and-pull factors of the school environment that contribute to a student’s sense of exclusion and/or belonging that in turn affect a Muslim student’s conceptualisation of their religious identity. It seeks to address how students explore their Islamic school environment as: (i) safe spaces; (ii) as sites that inadvertently foster double exclusion; and (iii) as sites that facilitate construction of a gendered religious identity. Chapter Three provides a profile of the nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria. This chapter looks into how a school’s environment contributes to students’ sense of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ Muslims (Haw, 2010: 348). Chapter Four outlines the research methodology adopted for the research study.

Chapter Five explores how participants’ experiences of their Islamic school environments as safe spaces inform the construction of their Islamic identity. It explores how participants engage with the environment and its reinforcement of an ‘outside’ world to create a safe space for students. Chapter Five demonstrates how students reflected on their time at Islamic schools as experiences that contributed to a ‘bubble’-like experience for students. Chapter Six investigates how the Islamic school environment unintentionally

creates a space that fosters a sense of double exclusion and its unintended consequences. It looks into how an environment that is designed to be a safe space may have consequences for students who experience the environment as ethno-cultural spaces rather than religious spaces that are welcoming of different experiences of Islam. Chapter Seven surveys the extent to which an Islamic school environment provides a gendered religious identity for Muslim students, particularly for female students.

Chapter Eight concludes with a summary of the research findings and research participants' contribution to our understanding of an Islamic school's role in facilitating the religious identity construction of students. The research study highlights the complex relationship between an Islamic school environment and the development of an Islamic identity. Through open-ended, semi-structured interviews, participants revealed a number of unique insights on the impact of Islamic schools on the religious identity construction of students. The research found that for students from a school's cultural minority group, particularly ethnic minority students, the school environment contributed to the emergence of double exclusion. The research found that for some students Islamic schools were sites that contributed to the development of gendered religious identities. This is to say that students in the research study were conscious of how their school's environment prescribed religious identities that conformed to gendered stereotypes and the impact it had on the construction of their Islamic identity.

CHAPTER ONE

Background

The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of Muslims in Australia and a preliminary discussion of the politics of identity construction for Muslim youth in Australia. This chapter also provides a history of faith-based schooling in Australia and the history of Islamic schools in Australia specifically. Encompassed in the analysis throughout this chapter is an exploration of the social, religious and political context of the arguments both in favour of and against Islamic schools in Victoria. The chapter explores some of the conversations surrounding the establishment of Islamic schools as either ‘cultural protection zones’ (Meer, 2009: 387) for Muslim children or simply as an alternative educational environment for a religious minority group.

Islam in Australia: A Brief History

Historically, the ‘White Australia’ policy had been a mainstay of Australia’s federal immigration policy. The Immigration Restriction Act 1(901-1972), also known as the White Australia Policy, was designed to place strict restrictions on immigration to Australia from non-Anglo Saxon countries. The White Australia Policy was also designed to maintain and sustain a ‘white’ majority in Australia. Given Australia’s geographical proximity to Asia and the Pacific Islands and its geographic distance from the centres of Anglo-European culture (the United Kingdom, USA and Western Europe) previous Australian governments have felt the need to maintain a ‘White Australia.’ It was not until the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 that we saw an end to Australia’s xenophobic immigration policy (Cleland 2002). The late 1970s saw a significant rise in Muslim migration to Australia. However, a substantial number of Muslim immigrants came before then (Humphrey 2005, 132-133). The first wave

of Muslim migrants predominantly came from nation-states of the former Yugoslavia, Albania and Cyprus at the end of the Second World War. Subsequent waves of Muslim migrants came from the 'Muslim World', particularly from Lebanon and Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s. The most recent wave of Muslim migrants consists of a combination of African and Sub-continent Muslims who immigrated to Australia in the 1990s until the present day.

Initially, the Muslim immigrant experiences of the late twentieth century mimicked the migration and settlement narratives of other migrant communities to Australia. Older generations of Australian Muslim immigrant communities were focused on economic gains and upward social mobility. In the pursuit of upward mobility 'the first generation of immigrants arrived with the perception of having a pristine 'ethnic culture' (Roy 2004, 122). The older generations of Muslim migrants particularly focused on *cultural* expressions of Islam rather a puritanical understanding of Islam. This is to say that older generations were particularly focused on interpretation of Islam inspired by cultural and ancestral values (Roy, 2004). These values, some would argue, are derived from particularistic, perhaps patriarchal, reading of Qur'anic and Prophetic texts. In the search of an Islam that second generation Australian Muslims can relate to, second generation Muslims are faced with conflicting notions of what it means to be a Muslim in a non-Muslim society. Scholars have become fascinated with the challenges, opportunities and limitations that this situation presents (Nielsen 2007; Tibi 2002; Ramadan 2005; and Safi 2003).

In the case of Muslims living in Australia, claims to cultural and religious authenticity and its role in identity formation are a useful starting point in exploring questions of modes and means of identification and experiences of religiosity of young Muslims. Interestingly, in the dialogue between Islam and culture, conflict may emerge when the compatibility between

the two are discussed by second and third generation Western Muslims.² Culture as an experienced reality can act as a catalyst enabling various explorations, manifestations and expressions of Islamic consciousness. Concepts of culture and religion are constantly being reshaped and reconstructed. It is this very dynamism that allows second and third generation Australian Muslims to reshape their religion according to their cultural experiences. The Islamic practices of young Australian Muslims, therefore, may not be the same as that of their immigrant parents. Accordingly, it does not have a specific national identity, nor does it have a specific set of cultural norms guiding its expression of religiosity (Uldis, 2008; Tomlinson, 2005 and Samy 2006).

Faith-based Schools in Australia

The preceding section provided a brief insight into Muslim migration to Australia and the challenges early Muslim communities faced settling into an unfamiliar religio-cultural and socio-political landscape. The establishment of institutions such as mosques, musallahs (prayer rooms), halal butchers, interest-free financial institutions and Islamic schools are mechanisms that meet the religious and cultural needs of Muslim communities in diaspora. The educational landscape in Australia has drastically changed over the past three decades, particularly in the non-government school sector not least because of their visibility and their prominence surrounding ‘debates in education policy’ (Buckingham, 2010: 1). Despite the negativity and scepticism that surrounds the debate around Islamic schools in the West; the demand for Islamic schools in diaspora is growing (Buckingham, 2010). Islamic schools are becoming a permanent feature of the Australian educational landscape and as such need to be examined and considered as feasible alternatives for Australia’s growing Muslim population. The following section of the analysis provides a historical analysis of Islamic schools in

² The term ‘cultural identity’ is used to refer to both the ancestral culture (i.e. Lebanese, Pakistani, Somali, etc.) of young Muslims as well as the socio-cultural environment of their homes in the West.

Australia along with background information on the history of faith-based schooling in Australia.

Research on Islamic schools in Victoria, and Australia at large, is still in its infancy. Islamic schools, particularly in the current geopolitical climate, are associated with fostering parallel and exclusive societies (Zine, 2008). Islamic schools, like other religious schools – particularly Catholic Schools – are also often unfairly viewed ‘as intrinsically intolerant [and] inherently misogynistic’ (Zine, 2008: 7). Jennifer Buckingham’s *The Rise of Religious Schools* (2010) notes that the tension surrounding faith-based schools in Australia, particularly Islamic schools, is twofold: (a) the impact on the student; and (b) the impact on the community, ‘with most of the commentary focusing on the potential for [faith-based schools] to undermine social cohesion...by creating cultural divisions’ (Buckingham, 2010: 1). What critics of faith-based schools in Australia neglect to acknowledge is that although faith-based schools may be considered as signifiers and/or facilitators of differences ‘religious schools, as transmitters of values..., play an important role in fostering diversity [and inclusiveness]’ (Buckingham, 2010: 1).

Faith-based schools have existed in Australia since British settlement in the 1700s. These first faith-based schools were Church of England schools administered and run by the Anglican Church (Buckingham, 2010: 1). Over the next few decades attempts to establish non-denominational nation-wide schools were thwarted by both the Catholic and Anglican churches (Buckingham, 2010: 1). It was only in the 1840s that parallel educational systems for both national (state government operated) schools and denominational schools became a part of the educational landscape in Australia (Wilkinson, Caldwell, Selleck, Harris and Dettman, 2006). However, it was only in 1872 that ‘free education’ for public schools was

legislated in Victoria under the Education Act (1872) paving the way for other states in pre-federation Australia to follow suit. Government funding towards secular state schools were typically met with opposition by the Catholic Church placing their denominational schools under significant financial stress (Buckingham, 2010: 2). The situation was reversed in 1964 when state funding for faith-based schools was reinstated by the Menzies Liberal government ‘initially in the form of grants to upgrade science teaching’ (Buckingham, 2010: 2). Government funding for independent and/or non-government schools has taken place since the 1960s.

The most significant changes to the educational landscape and government funding vis-à-vis independent and/or faith-based schools took place under the Howard Government (1996-2007). Two of the most significant changes were:

- Abolishing the restrictive New Schools Policy in 1996, making it easier for new non-government schools to be established; and
- Introducing a new non-government school funding system in 2001 to make many schools eligible for large increases in funding (Buckingham, 2010: 2).

These two reforms paved the way for ‘the diversification of religious schools’ in Australia (Buckingham, 2010: ix). They also paved the way for the establishment of new Islamic schools and ‘Christian schools affiliated with newly popular Christian denominations’ (Buckingham, 2010: 2) at relatively affordable fees, making independent and/or faith-based schools slightly more accessible. In 2009 34% of students in Australia (approximately 1.2 million students of 3.4 million) were enrolled at non-government schools, of which 90% of students attended faith-based schools (Buckingham, 2010: 2). Even though religious schools account for about 90% of enrolments in the non-government schools’ sector, *religion* and the cultivation of religious values is not the only determining factor for

the rise and popularity of faith-based schools in Australia. This is balanced by other factors such as the quality of education and the school environment and its ‘capacity to develop [and foster] the child’s potential’ (Buckingham, 2010: ix) in an environment that complements the parents’ own religious and/or cultural values. It is perhaps the continuation of cultural values that is a great motivator for parents to send their children to faith-based schools. In light of this, faith-based schools have been criticised for weakening social inclusiveness by creating parallel societies that do not facilitate interactions and engagements with the wider society (Buckingham, 2010, Merry, 2007, Zine, 2008). Most of these criticisms are levelled at Islamic schools in Australia and the Exclusive Brethren schools (Buckingham, 2010: ix) in particular.

Islamic Schools in Australia: A Brief Overview

In Australia, Islamic schools have to contend with a variety of external and internal pressures that may impact not only on the functioning and delivery of the objectives of Islamic schools but also on the religious needs and identity development of their students (Yasmeen, 2008: 1). The set of ideas that emerges from the literature on identity development of Muslim youths draws a strong correlation between understandings of marginalisation, inclusion/exclusion and belonging in the context of Islamic schools.

In the past forty years there has been the establishment of around thirty-five Islamic schools around Australia, most of which are co-educational schools. Islamic schools have the second highest growth in the non-government independent schools sector, particularly during the Howard Coalition Government (1996-2007). Enrolments for Islamic schools throughout Australia have increased from 4274 students in 1996 to 15874 students in 2006 (Buckingham, 2010: 5). There are two contributing factors that accounts for the increased enrolments in Islamic schools throughout Australia: (i) an increase in the population of Muslims in

Australia (through immigration and an increase in the birth rates); and (ii) federal government reforms vis-à-vis government funding of the non-government independent schools sector (Buckingham, 2010: 5). Figures on enrolments and funding (government, internal, and/or external) of these schools is not easily accessible.

Table 1: A list of Islamic schools in Australia.³

QLD	NSW	ACT	VIC	SA	WA
Islamic College of Brisbane	Western Grammar College	Islamic College of Canberra	Mt Hira College	Islamic College of South Australia	Al-Hidayah Islamic School
Australian International Islamic College	Unity Grammar College		Minaret College		Australian Islamic College
	Salamah College		Ilim College of Australia		Langford Islamic College
	Rissalah College		East Preston Islamic College		
	Qibla College		Darul Ulum College of Victoria		
	Malek Fahd Islamic School		Australian International Academy		
	King Abdul Aziz School		Australian Islamic College of Melbourne		
	Iqra Grammar College		Al Taqwa College		
	Green Valley Islamic College		Al Siraat College		
	Bellfield College				
	Australian International				

³ It should be noted here that there are no Islamic schools in Tasmania and in the Northern Territory; one reason being that the demand (in terms of Muslim population in these areas) is not sufficient enough to sustain an Islamic school (Buckingham, 2010, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils website 2012)

	Academy, Sydney				
	Australian Islamic College of Sydney				
	Arkana College				
	Al Zahrah College				
	Al Sadiq College				
	Al-Noori Muslim Primary School				
	Al Hikmah College				
	Al-Faisal College				
	Al Amanah College				

Table 2: *The table below illustrates the year and location of Victoria's Islamic Schools. Two thirds of Victoria's Islamic schools are located in Victoria's outer Northern suburbs where the majority of Victoria's Muslim population lives.*

Victorian Islamic School	Year Established	Region
Australian International Academy	1983	Northern suburbs
Al-Taqwa College	1986	Western suburbs
Minaret College	1992	South-Eastern suburbs
Ilim College of Australia	1995	Northern suburbs
Darul Ulum College of Victoria	1997	Northern suburbs
East Preston Islamic College	1998	Northern suburbs
Al Siraat Islamic College	2009	Northern suburbs
Islamic College of Melbourne	2011	Western suburbs

Do Muslims parents prefer Islamic Schools?

Islamic schools are similar to other faith-based schools in Australia. Buckley states that Islamic schools have similar aims and objectives as other faith-based schools (1997). This is to say that like other faith-based and independent schools, Islamic schools are obligated to teach the state-mandated curriculum whilst simultaneously incorporating religious instructions (read: Islamic studies classes/lessons), Qur'an classes and Arabic language classes, with some schools also having Turkish language classes (Skelton, 2005). Islamic schools aim to:

- “Achieve the highest possible standard of moral behaviour and ethical attitudes;
- Provide [students] with an Islamic environment free from undesirable social values;
- Develop and foster a Muslim identity;
- Equip [students] with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to enable them to contribute meaningfully to the general harmony, prosperity and good of their community and the overall society; and
- Develop Muslim Australian citizens who will be able to cope with the increasing demand and pressures of the global society and act as "Ambassadors of Islam" to the world” (Buckley, 2003).

The need for Islamic schools for Muslims in diasporic communities arises from the perceived necessity by Muslims to resist cultural assimilation of their host societies and the need to affirm and promote ‘the salience of [a] religious identity’ (Zine, 2008: 14). In spite of the need that Islamic schools fill for Muslim communities in diaspora, Islamic schools (as well as other faith-based schools) are often accused of consciously ‘ghettoizing’ and isolating their students. Islamic schools are seen as ineffective sites in preparing their students for the realities of a socio-culturally and religio-politically pluralistic society that may be different from the ‘particularistic’ orientation of faith-based schools (see for example Zine, 2008; and Merry, 2007). In spite of this, Donohoue Clyne emphasises that that the education students

receive at Islamic schools is aimed to prepare them to contribute to a diverse and tolerant society (Donohue Clyne, 2000). Sanjakdar reiterates Donohue Clyne's contention by stating that Muslim parents are in search of an Islamic school that provides an Islamic environment that is underpinned by Islamic values and beliefs informing the school's curriculum (Sanjakdar, 2000). Drivers include:

- i. Experiences of racism and religious discrimination faced by Muslim students in the public school sector;
- ii. The 'discipline and morality' of the school environment consistent with the desires of the parents (Merry, 2010: 379); and
- iii. The perception that Islamic schools facilitate the construction of an 'identity consonant with one's home environment' (Merry, 2010: 384) so that students do not feel as though they are straddling contradictory sets of values, norms and beliefs (Moll, 2009) negating the need for students to negotiate between these 'two worlds' to prevent an 'identity split' (see Sirin and Fine 2008 and Elbih 2012).

These concerns couple with the role parents assume that Islamic schools play in assisting their students negotiate meaning and understanding of what it means to be Muslim in Australia. According to Merry some of the primary reasons Muslim parents in diaspora prefer Islamic schools are: '(1) religious (2) academic and (3) cultural' (Merry, 2010: 377). To paraphrase Merry it is critical for the 'two worlds' –that of the home and that of the school –to have complementary sets of values in order to strengthen the identity and sense of belonging and positive self-identification of Muslim students (Merry, 2007). Additionally, Zine (2004) contends that the 'pressures of race and social difference coupled with... pressure[s] to engage in activities that are un-Islamic, [may] lead to the loss of Islamic identity and practice' (Zine 2004: 7). The underlying purpose of Islamic schools is, according to Zine (2006), to 'move the realities and experiences of students from the margins to the centre of the educational focuses by centralising their Islamic identity (Zine, 2006: 42).

Ultimately, Muslim parents want Islamic schools to be a site that mediates ‘what it means to belong] through the curriculum, teachers, and pedagogies’ (Elbih, 2012: 161).

Generally, Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools because they value:

- i. A private school education;
- ii. An environment where the student’s religion is not a point of difference or exclusion from the religio-cultural environment of the school; and
- iii. An opportunity for them to become ‘aware of their Islamic heritage’ (Yasmeen, 2008: 37).

The latter two reasons may resonate with Muslim parents primarily because they feel that they themselves ‘are not fully conversant with religious ideas and traditions’ and feel as though an Islamic school would equip their children with an Islamic education (Yasmeen, 2008: 37). However, the possibility of exclusion and marginalisation is not limited to the experiences of Muslim students who attend non-Islamic schools. This is to say that attending an Islamic school does not necessarily protect students from experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. Yasmeen notes that these experiences of what she refers to as *double exclusion* are more heightened for students of Islamic schools given that they are intended to be a safe space free of *discrimination* and *discomfort* for its students (Yasmeen, 2008: 37). *Double exclusion* is used to refer to the marginalisation or discomfort experienced by Muslim students in ‘safe spaces’ such as Islamic schools (Yasmeen, 2008: 37). Yasmeen notes that experiences of *double exclusion* are not just limited to the experiences of students of Islamic schools but may also be experienced by students who attend other faith-based schools (Yasmeen, 2008: 73). The interviews explored whether or not Islamic schools are sites ‘where Islamic identity is fostered and perpetuated’ and how students navigate and articulate experiences of double exclusion in seemingly ‘safe spaces’ (Yasmeen, 2008: 77).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the history of faith-based schooling generally and a brief history of Islamic schooling in Australia. Encompassed in the discussion of the preceding chapter is an exploration of the various reasons that justify the emergence of Islamic schools in Australia's educational landscape: an environment that nurtures religious and cultural belonging; and an environment that normalises and socialises what it is to be Muslim.

As Australia's Muslim population increases so too does the need and demand for Islamic schools in Australia. Nonetheless, Islamic schools have come under intense scrutiny in Australia when international and national crises (i.e. Cronulla Riots; terrorist acts; the death of Liep Gony) occur. Islamic schools are accused of resisting integration and consciously reinforcing an isolationist perspective. They are also viewed as environments that do not prepare their students for the outside world.

In Australia debates on religious education in recent times, particularly discussions surrounding Islamic schools, question 'the limits of multiculturalism' (Zine, 2008: 37). This chapter explored other dimensions to the concerns about the public school sector by considering why Muslim parents favour Islamic schools. Critiques of Islamic schools fail to take into account the nuanced educational, religious and socio-cultural roles these schools play in the Muslim community. Muslim parents prefer Islamic schools over public schools because of the cultural values they espouse (Elbih 2012 and Zine 2006) and their ability to 'Islamise' their curriculum (Elbih 2012: 159) to accommodate the religious component of their students' identity.

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of Education and Muslim Youth Identity: Developing a Conceptual Framework

This chapter explores the different approaches to religious identity development of Muslim youths in an Islamic school context. The term ‘identity’ has historically been explored from different perspectives in the social sciences. This chapter explores the relationship between religious identity construction and Islamic schooling for diasporic Muslim communities in the West. The chapter attempts to establish the relationship between religious identity construction and Islamic schools by exploring (i) the literature on religious identity development of young Muslims at Islamic schools (ii) and the extent to which the latter determines the former. This chapter explores literature on safe spaces; double exclusion; and gendered religious identity. This chapter also explores how students explore their Islamic schools environment as: (i) safe spaces; (ii) as sites that inadvertently foster double exclusion; and (iii) as sites that facilitate construction of a gendered religious identity.

Defining ‘Religious Identity’

In the context of this research religious identity ‘refers to people’s ways of relating to religion, including whether they choose to belong to a religious community, how strongly they feel about their beliefs, and how they choose to demonstrate those beliefs in their daily lives’ (Browne, Carbonell and Merrill, 2003: 2). Ammerman, on the other hand, defines religious identity as ‘an interaction tak[ing] on a religious character when it directly or indirectly invokes the co participating of transcendence or sacred others, invoking a narrative in which they play a role’ (Ammerman, 2003: 216). Ammerman’s definition of religious

identity is primarily linked to an individual's declaration of a 'Sacred Other' from their 'faith tradition as part of [their religious] identity narrative' (Ammerman, 2003: 216). Whilst Browne, Carbonell and Merrill's (2003) conceptualization of religious identity stresses the notion of choice when it comes to religious identity, particularly when it comes to outward displays of identity, i.e. donning the hijab or kufi cap, yarmulke, the crucifix, etc. Browne, Carbonell and Merrill pay particular attention to these 'choices' and 'values' of religious identity because these outward and therefore more visible claims to religiosity 'make statements about who people understand themselves to be' (Browne, Carbonell and Merrill, 2003: 3).

Religion as a marker of identity

There has been notable acknowledgement on the role of religion as a marker of identity among Muslims in the literature since the 1990s. As such it is necessary to understand the factors that contribute to the 'foregrounding of [Islam] in their identity' that has contributed to young Muslim's 'identification on the basis of religion' (Choudhury, 2007: 5). Choudhury observes that the prominence of religious identity 'as a marker of identity among Muslims' in the discourse may also be a response to a perceived sense of isolation and exclusion from society. Gardner and Shuker (in Choudhury 2007) find that the use of Islam as a signifier for Muslims, particularly Muslim males is that 'Islam provides both a positive identity...together with an escape from...being constantly identified in negative terms' (2007: 10). Most importantly though, even when religion is identified as a primary marker of identity this does not paradoxically translate into 'religious practice' (Choudhury, 2007: 10).

The emergence of Muslim identification, Samad contends 'is not related to an increase in religiosity...but it becomes prominent, paradoxically, as [people's religious identity becomes localised]' (Samad, 1996: 17). Additionally, Choudhury has made an

important observation as to how the development of Islam been used as a marker of identity. Choudhury notes that different generations –particularly first and second generations –ascribe different meanings to Islam as a primary marker of identity with particular reference to the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. This is to say that second generation Muslim young people experience Islam differently than their parents and find their parents’ ‘version’ of Islam to be somewhat out dated and therefore irrelevant; allowing for the formation of a British Muslim identity that is rooted in local socio-political realities (Choudhury, 2007). Choudhury observes that ‘the moment at which, and the ways in which, religion becomes important is dependent on [the] context and the options that are available’ (Choudhury, 2007: 8). Islamic schools enable an understanding of the role they play in facilitating the religious identity construction of students. Even when religion has been identified as either a primary marker of one’s identity or as an element of one’s identity Archer (2001 and 2003) and Alexander (1996) argue that it would be misleading to hypothesise the existence of “‘bounded’ Muslim identities” (Choudhury, 2007: 10).

Defining Safe Spaces

The concept of safe spaces is critical in explaining the complexity of an individual’s encounter with their environment (Cornell and Fahlander, 2007: 23). The concept of safe space refers to a space where the ‘multiple dimensions of [an individual’s] identity is acknowledged [and nurtured]’ (Severson, 2011: 26). A safe space can also be referred to as a space where an individual can be comfortable and safe about themselves free from prejudice. Severson notes that for an environment to be considered a safe space those involved in the process of creating the spaces should feel a sense of ownership. This is to say that a feature of that environment that engenders belonging resonates with those interacting with that environment. The interview method adopted in this research was used to test to what extent students think of their Islamic school environments as safe spaces. Adopting safe spaces as

the conceptual framework of the research study enables an understanding of whether or not the school environment explores other facets of a student's identity to emerge other than their Islamic identity.

Defining Double Exclusion

The emergence of Islamic schools in Australia's educational landscape arose from the need to meet not only the religious and educational needs of second generation Muslim youths but to also provide an environment where young Muslims would not have to constantly explain their differences. Double exclusion in the context of safe spaces offers an insight into how students engage and interact with their environment. Within the context of the research study, double exclusion becomes relevant because it provides insight into how a school environment can contribute to a student feeling unwelcome and disengaged even within the context of a safe space such as an Islamic school (Yasmeen, 2008). Julian Le Grand's (1999) conceptualisation of double exclusion refers to a condition where an individual either culturally, religiously or geographically is part of a society but feels that their participation is unwelcomed, questioned or dismissed (Le Grand 1999). This is can be considered double exclusion because Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools to offer a sense of community and belonging and for students to experience exclusion in such an environment can be disconcerting.

Young people who are not from the dominant culture of the school, or students whose family observe Islam differently are susceptible to experiencing double exclusion. Students who experience double exclusion have a tendency to establish parallel societies within the Islamic school environment to counteract these experiences. How students experience double exclusion enables an understanding of how they interact with the school environment to make

sense of their religious identity. How students who experience double exclusion negotiate meaning of their religious identity in an environment that they feel they do not belong to enables an examination of the extent to which they negotiate meaning outside this environment. This ultimately allows an exploration of not only alternative sources that inform their religious identity construction but whether or not Islamic schools actually inform the religious identity construction of students.

Islamic Schools and Gendered Identities

The role of gender in religious identity construction within the context of an Islamic school environment has largely been ignored in spite of the proliferation of literature on women and Islam and the presumed patriarchy of Islam. An Islamic school environment can facilitate the development of a gendered religious identity through understandings of religious texts informed by cultural values that produce gender specific religious identities (Archer, 2011: 83). Much of the way Islamic schools perpetuate understandings of femininity and masculinity are through cultural lenses that may not necessarily be considered religious. It is important to note that rather than defining a gendered Islamic identity the research study explores the processes through which students negotiate gendered religious identities at an Islamic school. The following examines the various ways in which Islamic schools position and construct gender identities for students. Constructions of young Muslim men and women have been conceptualised as either ‘hyper-masculine’ vanguards of Islam or ‘precious’ beings in need of protection (Archer, 2011; Gilroy and Lawrence, 1998; Connolly, 1998). The interviews explore how gender functions under the guise of religion within the parameters of an Islamic school setting. This dichotomy of how students view themselves within the boundaries of the school environment is rooted in the schools’ patriarchal reading of Islamic texts inform understandings of masculinity and femininity that may be problematic.

Understanding Patriarchy

Patriarchy, albeit a broad term, is used to refer a set of political and social ‘differentiation on the basis of sex [and gender]’ that provides material and ideological advantages to men whilst placing constraints on the roles of women (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013). In essence, patriarchy – as it is colloquially and contemporarily understood is ‘used to refer to the systemic organisation of male [superiority] and female subordination’ (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013). In defining patriarchy the reaffirmation of masculinity and the centrality of the male experience are prominent (Connell, 1995). With this in mind the relationship between patriarchy, masculinity, identity construction and gendered structures of the school environment is critical to broadening our understanding of how boys and girls engage with their school environment. The following section demonstrates how manifestations of masculinity and femininity are inter-dependent and are often defined and redefined in relation to one another. Patriarchal readings of Islamic texts by Islamic schools ‘produce particular understandings of gender and regulate and normalise particular behaviours [and values] that promote particular ways of being Muslim (Keddie, 2001: 32) that is rooted in a patriarchal understanding of Islam.

Understanding Islamic Feminism

Recent attempts to understand the role of women in Islam demonstrate that some scholars are quick to highlight the assumed undermining and oppression of Muslim women. Islamic feminism can be perceived as an effort that calls for a rereading and reinterpretation of Qur’anic and Prophetic texts. ‘Mainstream’ feminism and Islamic feminism share fundamental principles. For Badran and other Islamic feminists, Islamic feminism champions the notion that Islam should be understood primarily as a religion centered on spiritual individuality (Badran, 2000; Manji, 2004; and Othman, 2005). A religion where the concern should be one’s personal and spiritual *connection* and *relationship* with God, not a communal

expression of spirituality and/or religiosity, nor a theocratic doctrine of how that connection should be displayed; be it privately or publicly. Islamic feminists take this approach primarily because they believe that a gender neutral reading of Islam ultimately reflects what they would consider to be the true essence of Qur'anic and Prophetic texts.

Conclusion

This chapter explored different theoretical perspectives on religious identity vis-à-vis Islamic schools in an attempt to understand the conceptual analyses of Islamic identity construction. It explored the relationship between religious identity development and educating Muslim students in an Islamic school context. It did this by investigating: (i) available literature vis-à-vis religious identity development; and (ii) the role of safe spaces on the development of Islamic identity of young Muslims. It primarily focused on the issue of safe spaces and gender within the context of Islamic schools in the West. The key concepts of safe space; double exclusion; and the facilitation of gendered religious identity are used in the context of this research study because it tests the research question against available literature on Islamic identity of Muslim youths and Islamic schools. The chapter highlights the complexity that surround religious identity in the literature combined with an under-researched area of study –Islamic schools. These concepts are therefore central to unpacking the research questions. The concepts offer a different perspective of looking at Islamic schools in the literature, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the narratives that emerge from the interviews.

CHAPTER THREE

Profiling Victoria's Islamic Schools

In Victoria, specifically, six of the nine self-identifying Islamic schools have been around for less than twenty years. The analysis of Islamic schools in Victoria is in its infancy. Islamic schools, per se, too are relatively recent. The growing number of Islamic schools nationally and in Victoria specifically illustrates that the demand for Islamic schools is gradually increasing. The key to an Islamic school's capacity to facilitate the construction of an Islamic identity is its ability to provide a curriculum and environment that is derived from Islamic values. Understanding how Victoria's Islamic schools hope to fulfil the overall objective of their mission is important to understanding how Victoria's Islamic schools facilitate Islamic identity construction.

Ethnic minority groups in diasporic settings have created social, religious and cultural infrastructures to create a sense of belonging. An Islamic school represents one of many institutions that a community establishes to create a space that encourages a sense of both cultural and religious belonging for young Muslims. One of the greatest motivators for Victoria's Muslim community's need to establish Islamic schools stems from the need to create a space that encourages a sense of religious belonging. It also stems from the community's 'desire for maintaining [the] religious identity of [their] children (Yasmeen, 2008: 25). These priorities need to be overtly reflected in a school's syllabus, vision statement and an Islamic environment that reflects both their religious background and being Australian. An Islamic school as a space that reinforces the beliefs and practices and nurtures their students' sense of 'Muslimness' is one of the greatest selling pitches of Victoria's Islamic schools.

In analysing Victoria's Islamic schools the research study has observed that there are four different types of Islamic educational settings in both self-identifying and non-self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria:

- (i) A 'school for Muslims' –this refers to a school that provides the features/infrastructure of an Islamic school of which there are six in Victoria. Apart from having typical features of an Islamic school these schools do not differ significantly from a regular state high school.
- (ii) A traditional madrasah-style Islamic school, of which there is one in Victoria;
- (iii) A non-self-identifying 'Islamic' school that is part of an international socio-religious movement, of which there is only one in Victoria; and
- (iv) A non-independent Islamic school that is part of a national Islamic organisation (Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, now known as Muslims Australia) that governs the administrations of nine of these schools nationally, one of which is in Victoria.

The following chapter provides a profile of the nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria. Given that accurate and current data on Victoria's Islamic schools is difficult to obtain, the following represents the first attempt to analyse and profile Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools. Fundamentally, all nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria offer similar yet distinct Islamic educational experiences for their students. All of Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools offer their students an environment that is nominally Islamic. This is to say that the environments they offer acknowledge the religious and moral values of the students' parents; a curriculum that school administrators believes is derived from Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions; and an environment that fosters a sense of religious consciousness and belonging.

The following profiles of Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools are intended to be descriptive rather than analytical. The schools profiled in this chapter have not been

anonymised or provided pseudonyms primarily because the information used to analyse and compile their profiles is publicly available on their websites. The profiles will take into account the following factors, according to a school's own vision and mission statement:

- (i) Ability to create an environment that facilitates the development of an Australian Islamic identity;
- (ii) Ability and willingness to create an environment that focuses on ensuring that a student 'belongs' irrespective of the cultural and religious upbringing; and
- (iii) Commitment to an Islamic values-based curriculum.

Australian International Academy (formerly King Khaled Islamic College)

Victoria's first co-educational grade prep to year 12 Islamic school, the Australian International Academy (formerly King Khaled Islamic College), was established in the early 1980s in Victoria's northern suburbs. As Victoria's first Islamic school the Australian International Academy's organizational structure is intended to be 'student centric.'

As the first Islamic school in Victoria the Australian International Academy's ambitions were grand. The Australian International Academy hopes to produce graduates that will be able to meet the challenges of living as a religious minority in Australia with 'Muslim values' (Australian International Academy, 2013). In an attempt to ensure that students' actualise this vision the Australian International Academy offers 'a well-balanced curriculum with global perspective...in a Muslim environment' (Vision, Australian International Academy, 2013). By facilitating a 'Muslim environment' a term that is not defined by the school, except perhaps through the images on the school's website, the Australian International Academy compliments their students' Islamic education coupled with 'a comprehensive contemporary curriculum' (Vision, Australian International Academy, 2013).

The Australian International Academy is driven and inspired by the importance of education as a right for student in line with core Islamic principles. Given that the Australian International Academy and all the other Islamic Colleges in Victoria derive their values and principles from Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions, one of its primary foci is to ensure that students get a well-rounded educational experience. In doing so, the Australian International Academy attempts to:

- Preserve Muslim heritage and identity.
- Teach Islamic civilisation, history and Islamic achievements.
- Provide an Islamic environment where students are comfortable and free practice Islam and enhance their faith and Islamic knowledge.
- Develop outstanding Australian Muslim citizens.
- Prepare students for active participation in the wider local and international community.

(Vision, the Australian International Academy, 2013)

When it first began the Australian International Academy had a strong focus and attachment to Islam that reflects some of the current more 'traditional' Islamic schools. Nowadays, however, the Australian International Academy has transformed itself into what one research participant coined as 'a school for Muslims.' Referring to the Australian International Academy as 'a school for Muslims' rather than an Islamic school implies that it is outwardly Islamic primarily because it only provides the 'features' of an Islamic school such as providing *halal* food in the school canteen and incorporating *salat az-zuhr* (afternoon prayer) at the school mosque into the school day which is critical for Islamic schools in

Victoria. The Australian International Academy is committed to fostering students who are both proud of their Islamic ‘heritage and identity’ as well as proud Australians.

Minaret Islamic College

The objective of providing a space that facilitates an Islamic identity is central to Minaret Islamic College’s mission. Minaret Islamic College is an Islamic school in Victoria’s south-eastern suburbs. Established in the early 1990s Minaret Islamic College serves a community of more than 50, 000 [Muslims]’ in Victoria’s south-eastern region (Minaret Islamic College, 2013). Minaret Islamic College is co-educational grade prep to year 12 Islamic school that is committed to being a quality ‘grammar school’ equivalent Islamic school (Minaret Islamic College, 2013). Minaret Islamic College considers itself to be an Islamic school that is accountable to the community it serves. It hopes to fulfill the needs of Muslim parents by creating an environment that ensures that young Muslim do not lose their Islamic identity (Minaret Islamic College, 2013). Its own population of around 1300 students is diverse and ever growing.

Minaret Islamic College’s commitment to nurturing a ‘healthy Australian Muslim identity [that is] sincere to its [Islamic] traditions [and heritage]’ is one of its many key objectives (Minaret Islamic College, 2013). How Minaret Islamic College defines a ‘healthy Australian Muslim identity sincere to [Islamic] tradition’ is difficult to ascertain. However, according to Minaret Islamic College ‘a sincere Australian Muslim identity’ encompasses:

- A commitment to self-awareness and God consciousness; and
- A commitment to justice, compassion, mercy, social justice and equality.

(Minaret Islamic College, 2013)

As the first Islamic school in the region, Minaret Islamic College takes its role as providing quality Islamic education seriously. Its mission is to instill a sense of Islamic consciousness in its student population. It attempts to do this through providing an ‘integrated’ curriculum that focuses on ‘Islamic morals, manners, and values’ (Minaret Islamic College, 2013). Through the delivery of their curriculum and the Islamic environment offered at Minaret Islamic College, the school believes that they are able to develop the attitudes, abilities, skills and knowledge, ‘both secular and Islamic’ of their students (Minaret Islamic College, 2013).

Minaret Islamic College is guided by Islamic traditions and principles deriving their mandate, objectives and vision from Qur’anic sources. From analyzing the school’s mission statement it becomes clear that there is a discrepancy between the charter and the school’s objectives even though both the school charter and the school’s objectives are derived from Qur’anic and Prophetic sources. There is nothing particularly unique about these objectives. Minaret Islamic College’s school charter reads like a press release that condemns acts of terrorism whilst simultaneously speaking out against Islamophobia. Some of the declarations of the school’s charter are:

- The promotion of the values of ‘peace and understanding through interfaith and intercultural interactions’;
- To reject acts of violence against ‘children, and old people in order to promote a cause because it is against Islamic principles’;
- To stand against and condemn acts of violence and those who preach hatred against Muslim, the religion of Islam and other vulnerable religious minorities;
- To encourage students to advocate for the needs and interests of Australia’s Muslim community ‘through the existing democratic systems of governance’; and

- To defend Australia against any threat or form of aggression in line with the students' civic responsibilities as Australian citizens.

(Minaret Islamic College's School Charter, 2013).

Minaret Islamic College's school charter seems particularly out of place primarily because they do not necessarily reflect the mandates of a school. Additionally, it is also misplaced within a school's charter because it makes a political statement. Even though Victoria's Muslim community are a minority the focus of the school charter seems to be more of a mandate for the wider Muslim community than specifically for the school's student population. Nonetheless, Minaret Islamic College's administrators incorporate elements of their school charter in the school's curriculum and extra curricula activities. Minaret Islamic College does this to fulfill their expectations as a leading provider of quality education in an Islamic environment but also the expectations of the community that they profess to serve.

Darul Ulum College of Victoria

Despite the differences that would inevitably exist between and amongst Victoria's Islamic schools there are differences in how the similar objectives and visions of the schools are applied and articulated. This is to say that even though facilitating the religious identity construction of their students is essential to an Islamic school how they go about facilitating and moderating this process differs. Darul Ulum College of Victoria represents this difference. Darul Ulum College of Victoria represents a departure from other Islamic educational settings in Victoria's Islamic schools. It is perceived to be a traditional madrasah-style Islamic school in Victoria's northern suburbs. Established in the mid-1990s Darul Ulum College of Victoria is committed to providing a wholly traditional Islamic school experience underpinned by Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions. It represents one of many

international Islamic schools that are committed to the principles of the *Tablighi Jamaat* movement. Darul Ulum College of Victoria considers itself to be more than an Islamic school; it considers itself to be ‘part of a global school of thought based on Deobandi Sunni Islam’ (Fernandes, 2010). Coupled with the desire to facilitate the development of a religious identity, Darul Ulum College of Victoria is primarily committed to creating new leaders in the Islamic world. It does this by adopting a classical madrasah-style education that has a strong focus on the teachings of the Qur’an and Hadith(s) to students.

Darul Ulum College of Victoria is perhaps the most ‘conservative’ of Victoria’s Islamic schools. It was ‘established to cater for those who wish to educate their children within a caring and disciplined [Islamic] environment’ that reinforces Islamic principles and teachings (Darul Ulum College of Victoria, 2013). It adopts a strict separation between male and female students and staff of the school. Darul Ulum College of Victoria’s administrators rely on their interpretations and understanding of the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (s) to create this more ‘disciplined [Islamic] environment.’ Derived from their understanding and interpretations of both Qur’anic and Prophetic teachings Darul Ulum College of Victoria hopes to:

- Create an Islamic environment that is committed to quality education that prioritises ‘the Islamic nature of the school over all other considerations’;
- Create an Islamic environment for the students that encourages them to embrace ‘both Islamic and Australian values through excellence in teaching and learning’;
- Incorporate Qur’anic and Prophetic principles and Australian values into the school curriculum; and

- Prepare their students to be participants and leaders in their respective communities as successful and proud Australian Muslims.

(Darul Ulum College of Victoria, 2013)

Ilim College of Victoria (formerly Islamic College North Western Region)

Ilim College of Victoria, formerly known as Islamic College North Western Region, is committed to providing ‘a safe, stimulating and Islamically enhanced environment’ (Ilim College of Victoria, 2013). Established in the mid-1990s, Ilim College of Victoria is a prep to year 12 coeducational Islamic school that offers a variety of opportunities and subjects to their students. The school’s ‘dynamic curriculum’ coupled with ‘a safe, stimulating and Islamically enhanced environment’ is designed to enhance and develop the skills of their students (Ilim College of Victoria, 2013). The school aims to meet the needs of their students and the expectations of parents by working in partnership with other key stakeholders of the wider school community. Ilim College of Victoria’s attempt to provide an ‘Islamically enhanced environment’ mirrors the attempts made by the Australian International Academy to provide a ‘Muslim environment’ despite the different educational settings they offer. This is to say that whilst, as mentioned earlier, the Australian International Academy is considered ‘a school for Muslims’ Ilim College of Victoria is not considered as such. Ilim College of Victoria offers a more religiously and culturally conservative school environment. It endeavours to offer an Islamic education within the parameters of an Islamic environment. An environment that places ‘Islam’ and Islamic values at the centre of their experiences is part of Ilim College of Victoria’s pitch. Ilim College of Victoria aims to achieve this vision through what it describes as a ‘comprehensive’ curriculum. Although vague, the curriculum intends to:

- Equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure that their students participate fully in their respective communities and the

wider society at large, with the hopes of creating a sense of community consciousness amongst their student body; and

- To develop a sense of ‘Islamic consciousness’ amongst their student body by fostering a love for learning, especially Islamic knowledge and Islamic manners.

(Ilm College of Victoria, 2013)

East Preston Islamic College

On the other hand, East Preston Islamic College is a self-described ‘not-for-profit’ co-educational grade prep to year 12 Islamic school in Victoria’s northern suburbs. It was established in the late 1990s (About Us, East Preston Islamic College, 2013). East Preston Islamic College is different to the other self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria because it does not consider itself to be a conventional private and/or Islamic school in Victoria. This is to say that East Preston Islamic College considers itself to be an ‘English as a Second Language (ESL)’ school. This is primarily because of its diverse student population who are largely from a refugee background. With around 500 students who speak over twenty-four languages other than English at home, East Preston Islamic College believes that it is best placed to be an English as a Second Language (ESL) school.

Nonetheless, East Preston Islamic College endeavors to ensure that students are exposed to an Islamic environment that is committed to Islamic values and beliefs. As such it is guided by the following objectives:

- To foster students in an Islamic environment that encourages them to be proud of both their Islamic and Australian identities;
- To teach students to embrace values of democracy, multiculturalism and tolerance; and

- To ensuring that graduates become valued contributors to the wider Australian society.

(East Preston Islamic College, 2013)

Under the guidance of the school's council East Preston Islamic College has developed an Islamic studies curriculum it believes will equip their students beyond graduation. Even though the school is a coeducational school it only remains so for primary school students. Under the advice of the school's council the boys and girls in secondary school are in separate classes for what the school describes as 'cultural reasons' (East Preston Islamic College, 2013). Gender segregation under the guise of 'culture' may be construed as problematic because East Preston Islamic College considers itself an Islamic school not an 'ethnic' or 'cultural' school. For East Preston Islamic College gender segregation in the classes for their secondary school students is important to creating an educational environment that is committed to 'the development of sound character' of students (East Preston Islamic College, 2013).

As a not-for-profit and ESL Islamic School East Preston Islamic College is conscious of the fact that its students come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Of all of Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools it is perhaps the least assuming Islamic school. It makes no pretenses as to its pitch and what it offers students. This is to say that unlike the other Islamic schools East Preston Islamic College focuses on ensuring that students develop a sense of belonging and contribution in Australia as communities in diaspora. It aligns its objectives closer to those espoused during the 'Australian Values' debate (Hawley, 2005).

Mt. Hira College

Mt Hira College is an Islamic school in Victoria's south-eastern suburbs. Mt Hira College is driven by the principle of 'lifelong learning...within a challenging and supportive environment' (Mt Hira College, 2013). Even though Mt Hira College was established about thirteen years ago it is still one of the smallest Islamic schools in Victoria in terms of its student population with over four hundred students. Mt Hira College is co-educational grade prep to year 12 Islamic school. Mt Hira College aims to 'develop conscientious liberal learners' who become successful participants in the school community and their respective communities at large. Similar to Ilim College of Victoria's aim to develop the 'whole person,' Mt Hira College is also committed to the same objective. It believes that 'the development of the whole person [is a central tenet]' of how it delivers its promise to quality education to bring out the potential in every child (Mt Hira College, 2013).

Unlike any of the other self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria Mt Hira College primarily serves the cultural interests of one community: Australia's Turkish Muslim community. Although it is open to other Muslim students, the founding 'visionaries' of Mt Hira College predominantly designed the school to answer this critical question: 'What does it mean to become 'Australian-Turks' (Mt Hira College, 2013). As such, for a long time Mt Hira College was predominantly considered a 'Turkish school' above being an Islamic school. Nowadays though, Mt Hira College is increasingly becoming diverse because of 'interest from other ethnic and Muslim groups' (Mt Hira College, 2013). Perhaps as the school continues to grow and evolve the association between Mt Hira College being a 'Turkish school' may be a thing of the past. The need to also develop a more diverse and integrated student body has to do with the fact that Minaret Islamic College, another Islamic

school in the region, has an even more diverse and inclusive student population, and the two schools are essentially competing for the same clientele.

According to Mt Hira College the relatively small student population allows for teachers to develop the ‘whole person.’ This ensures that a student’s ‘academic, emotional, social, [religious], and spiritual needs are met’ (Mt Hira College, 2013). Additionally Mt Hira College believes that a small student population allows the school to develop a more integrated and ‘innovative’ curriculum that tries to ensure that students feel a sense of cultural and religious belonging. Mt Hira College incorporates the following core values into the curriculum in order meet the needs of the students:

- Ensuring that all within the school community are treated with respect and equality;
- Encourage a sense of accomplishment and cooperation in their students;
- Encourage a sense of contribution to the wider community and the students’ respective community; and
- Encourage a sense of responsibility and accountability in their student.

(Mt Hira College, 2013)

Al Taqwa College (formerly the Islamic Schools of Victoria Werribee College)

As Victoria’s second Islamic school, Al Taqwa College (formerly the Islamic Schools of Victoria –Werribee College) recognizes the importance of creating an Islamic environment that Islamises the curriculum to achieve this aim. As the only prep to year 12 Islamic school in Victoria’s western suburbs, Al Taqwa College attempts to offer its students a wide range of educational opportunities for their students. Al Taqwa College’s secondary school curriculum seems to have a slightly stronger focus on Islam and Islamic principles than the curriculum

designed for its primary school students. This is because Al Taqwa College believes that the secondary years of an individual's life are critical to the religious identity construction of young Muslims. It believes that by providing a diverse and flexible Islamic studies curriculum guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah alongside the national curriculum secondary school graduates will be 'prepared academically and socially' beyond graduation (Al Taqwa College, 2013). Al Taqwa College is committed to the delivering the following principles:

- Ensuring that students are exposed to the 'richness' of Islamic history, cultural heritage and knowledge;
- Ensuring that the key stakeholders of the school community are treated fairly and equally regardless of 'color, race, religion or gender';
- Ensuring that all students have a the right to quality education grounded in Islamic teachings and values that is affordable accessible to Muslim families; and
- Promoting an 'experientially rich and diverse curriculum' that reflects the need of the school's culturally, ethnically and ideologically diverse student body 'in line with the Islamic concept of *ummah*'.

(Al Taqwa College, 2013)

Additionally, Al Taqwa College hopes to prepare their students' to not only fulfill their own expectations but also 'the aspirations and needs of the College's Islamic community' (Al Taqwa College, 2013).

Al Siraat College

In contrast to Mt Hira College's and the Australian International Academy's educational setting, Al Siraat College provides a more traditional Islamic educational setting. Al Siraat College is a relatively new Islamic school in Victoria's northern suburbs. It was established

in the late 2000s. It is a coeducational Islamic school with a relatively modest, yet growing student population. It caters to students from prep to year ten. Al Siraat College is not a wholly coeducational school similar to some of the other Islamic schools in Victoria. This is to say that from grade five until year ten Al Siraat College adopts a ‘parallel learning model’ in an effort to facilitate a comfortable and appropriate learning environment for students. The ‘parallel learning model’ is a euphemism for gender-segregated classes. It is not an educational model that is unique to Al Siraat College. It is a model adopted by a number of Victoria nine self-identifying Islamic schools in various forms: Minaret Islamic College; Al Taqwa Islamic College; and Ilim College of Victoria. Al Siraat College believes that adopting gender-segregated classes for students in grade five until year ten allows for male and female students to ‘comfortably flourish in their separate learning environments’ (Al Siraat College, 2013).

Al Siraat College’s principles advocate ‘responsibility, positive thinking, perseverance, good manners’ and community participation (Al Siraat College, 2013). The school administrators believe that the Prophet Muhammad’s (Peace Be Upon Him) life and its principles are sufficient enough for their students. They have endeavoured to create an environment that is ‘Islamic, academic, supportive, orderly, safe and enriching’ (Al Siraat College, 2013). Additionally, school administrators also believe that it is their responsibility to ensure that not only they uphold these values but that their students try to live up to these principles (Al Siraat College, 2013).

Islamic College of Melbourne

Different to all the other self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria, the Islamic College of Melbourne in Victoria’s western suburbs represents a departure. The Islamic College of

Melbourne is an Islamic school affiliated, funded and managed by a national body of Islamic organizations that oversee and manage numerous Islamic schools nationally. The Islamic College of Melbourne is one of nine Islamic schools nationally that are affiliated to this federal umbrella body: Muslims Australia, formerly the Federation of Australian Islamic Councils. The fact that the Islamic College of Melbourne is governed externally invites questions of the extent to which the school truly reflects the needs of the immediate school community. This is difficult to answer primarily because not only are the schools insular, but the overarching organization that governs these schools do not necessarily welcome external scrutiny.

The Islamic College of Melbourne is the youngest of Victoria's Islamic schools. It was established just over three years ago in 2011. It is a co-educational prep to year 8 Islamic school located in Victoria's western suburbs. The Islamic College of Melbourne hopes to fully be prep to year twelve Islamic school by 2018. The Islamic College of Melbourne sees itself as being able to provide 'a very modern and comprehensive curriculum' (The Islamic College of Melbourne, 2013). What this actually encompasses is difficult to ascertain given the insular nature of these schools. Nonetheless, the Islamic College of Melbourne believes that 'a modern and comprehensive curriculum' can only be possible by providing 'a challenging and supportive Islamic environment' for its students (The Islamic College of Melbourne, 2013).

Conclusion

Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria are committed to raising and nurturing Muslim students that are simultaneously proud Australians and committed Muslims. The Australian International Academy and Darul Ulum College of Victoria make

explicit references to developing the 'Islamic' identity of their students. Despite the overtness of this objective both schools provide different religious, cultural and academic environment in an attempt to achieve this. Even though the commitment to developing the Islamic identity of students is inherently shared by all Islamic schools each of the schools profiled adopt their own path to achieve this objective.

Faith-based schools are, ultimately, in the business of providing quality education that complements the religious and cultural values of Victoria's Muslim communities. This chapter has provided insight to both the similarities and differences between the aims and the perspectives of the nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria. Islamic schools have 'emerged as the locale where Islamic identity is fostered [and facilitated]' (Yasmeen, 2008: 77). The commitment to the development of an Islamic identity is a principle shared by all of Victoria's Islamic schools. The choice of Islamic schools for Muslim parents is 'prompted by parental interest' believing that they promote an Islamic identity (Yasmeen, 2008: 77).

Islamic schools straddle competing narratives to ensure that that Muslim students do not experience 'both the phenomenon of 'othering' and 'being othered'' (Yasmeen, 2008: 77). Success for Victoria's Islamic schools in their quest to create Australian Muslims is dependent on their ability to adapt to the evolving needs of their growing and diverse student population. This chapter has also attempted to demonstrate that in spite of the similarities in the goals and objectives that Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools share distinct differences: differences in how schools attempt to implement them their goals and objectives, even though the objective of providing a space that offers a place that reinforces the belief that being a Muslim is 'okay' and a space that fosters belonging rather exclusion is shared by all of Victoria's Islamic schools. The empirical chapters, through interviews, tests whether or

not participants' experiences in Islamic schools matched the school's 'pitch' and rhetoric as described in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methodology adopted to answer the research questions outlined in the first chapter. This chapter discusses the qualitative nature and context of the research study; the methodology adopted; the background information on the settings; and the interview participants as well as the processes of data collection and data analysis. This chapter also explores some of the challenges and limitations of the research study in understanding how Muslim students construct their identities and how Islamic schools ‘influence and interact with the construction of their [religious] identities’ (Severson, 2011: 35).

The research intends to understand how the schooling of Muslim students fosters development of an Islamic identity among students in Victoria’s Islamic schools. The research adopts an in depth open-ended interview model as the preferred methodology. An open-ended interview model intends to privilege the knowledge and ‘voice’ of the subject to develop a deeper understanding of the lived reality of Islamic school graduates. In depth open-ended interviews allow participants ‘to define their terms, explain their meaning and identify their own priorities’ (European Union Monitoring and Advocacy Program, 2004: 115). The questions explored throughout the research contribute to an understanding of whether or not Islamic schools provide spaces that facilitate the development of an Islamic identity. The interviews explore how Islamic schools inform and regulate students’ understandings of an Islamic identity. The interviews focus on the effect an Islamic school’s formal and informal culture have on shaping students’ religious identity. A semi-structured interview process that focuses on the narratives of the research participants was designed to

capture how their memories and reflections of their experiences are told through stories and narratives (Haw, 2011: 568). The semi-structured interviews focused on three themes: (i) experiencing Islamic schools as safe spaces; (ii) the emergence of double exclusion; and (iii) the role of Islamic school environments in contributing to the production of gendered Islamic identities for Muslim students, particularly for female students (Keddie, 2001: 117).

Interviews

Ten participants were recruited through two methods: a recruitment flyer at universities in Victoria that have a relatively high Muslim student population (i.e. La Trobe University and Victoria University) and via online news bulletins hosted by Islamic organisations. Additionally a snowballing sampling approach in conjunction with canvassing for participants through flyers in public spaces frequented by Muslims (i.e. mosques, Islamic Organizations such as the Islamic Council of Victoria, etc.) was pursued. Participants were selected because they indicated that they have graduated from an Islamic school in Victoria. Participants and the Islamic schools they graduated from have been provided with pseudonyms so that they remain anonymous. Their participation was entirely voluntary and they were given the option of withdrawing from the whole process at any point in time. Given the scope of the research study ten participants seemed sufficient. However, retrospectively, it may have been ideal to have a few more participants who also attended other Islamic schools to gain a comprehensive picture of the experiences of Muslim students. Nonetheless, it is important to note, from the outset, the research study does not make any illusions of representing the experiences of all graduates in Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with ten graduates of Islamic schools in Victoria. The semi-structured interviews allowed focused on the particular

narratives of the participants that they chose to share enabling them to be active participants in the sharing of their experiences. The interviews with the ten participants took place over a six week period in a variety of locations throughout Victoria. Respondents were aged between 18-30 years of age, comprising six females and four males. The one-on-one interviews examined the reflections and experiences of their schooling at Islamic school(s) and the question of how Islamic identity is defined, experienced, and reproduced over time at their respective Islamic schools. The interviews were intended to go for forty-five minutes, but the interviews exceeded it primarily because the participants felt that they had quite a lot to contribute. I got the impression that the interview participants rarely had an extended opportunity to reflect on their experiences at an Islamic school with another individual that could appreciate the nuances of their experiences. The interviews were also seen as an opportunity for participants to unpack and self-conceptualise how attending and graduating from an Islamic school influenced their religious identity construction. It also provided them with an opportunity to expand on how their nonchalant attitudes, at times indifference and love-hate relationship at graduating from an Islamic school influenced them.

The first section of the interview focused on exploring some of their earliest moments at an Islamic school as well as gathering demographic data. The second section of the interviews focused on how their experiences of the school environment influenced the construction of their Islamic identity. The participants explained and described how they negotiated the politics of Islamic identity within the context of their school environment. The respondents explored how Islamic schools reinforced either explicitly or implicitly an Islamic identity that was palpable to them (i.e. with particular reference to the curriculum, single or co-ed class room arrangement, gender segregated lunchtime and recesses, Islamic studies classes, etc.).

Table 3: *The table above is a brief demographic profile of the interview participants of the research study and the Islamic school from which they graduated. The names of participants and the Islamic schools they graduated from have been provided pseudonyms.*

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Graduating School (pseudonym)
Maya Abdul-Malik	19	Female	Palestinian	Khalifah Islamic College
Adam Abdul-Malik	23	Male	Palestinian	Al-Madinah Islamic College
Sahara Ali	21	Female	Somali	Al-Madinah Islamic College
Zayn Ali	25	Male	Somali	Khalifah Islamic College
Ali Saleh	20	Male	Somali	Al-Madinah Islamic College
Halimah Aydin	21	Female	Turkish	Al-Madinah Islamic College
Sajidah Muhammad	21	Female	Palestinian	Al-Madinah Islamic College
Zara Yusuf	22	Female	Tunisian-Australian	Al Hijrah Islamic College
Salahuddin Ibrahim	23	Male	Middle-Eastern	Al Hijrah Islamic College
Sumaya Ahmed	22	Female	Oromo-Australian	Sultan Fatih Islamic College

Interview Transcripts

All the interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants; and transcribed verbatim, allowing me to revisit and re-examine the material at a later stage. Subsequent to each of the interviews a process of coding began in order to analyse and summarise emerging themes from the interviews and similarities and differences that emerged. Each of the participants received a transcribed copy of their interviews ‘to verify their representational accuracy’ and to gain their permission to either omit some of the material revealed during their interview or to add material to clarify some of their statements made during their

interviews (Keddie, 2001: 114-115). In structuring the empirical chapters the transcripts proved a valuable tool in helping to group similarities and differences emerging from the interviews. Organising the narratives thematically provides an informed and nuanced understanding of the different ways an Islamic school informs a student's Islamic identity construction.

Positioning the Researcher

The relationship between the researcher and research participants was made easier primarily because I had a deeper understanding of their experiences than a researcher who did not graduate from an Islamic school (I attended an Islamic school between 1994 and 2006). Nonetheless, I am conscious of both the advantages and disadvantages that sharing experiences with the research participants presents to perceptions of my objectivity and/or subjectivity. Some disadvantages may be: a perception of bias and lack of objectivity because of my familiarity and 'closeness' with the research; a difficulty of being unable to negotiate the insider-outsider researcher dichotomy; and participants assuming that I know what they are talking about. The interviews draw the reader's attention to the researcher's positionality in the undertaking of the interviews. This is important to disclose from the outset because it is critical to make readers aware 'of the relationship between [the] researcher and [the] researched' (Keddie, 2001: 16). Additionally, given that the research study was small in scale it is not intended to be a generalisable research study outside of the setting of the research. This can be considered an advantage and limitation of the research study. Additionally, a micro-study allows, at a more nuanced level, to explore the complex, dynamic and fluid experiences of all of the research participants that perhaps would not have been made possible if the sample size was larger.

CHAPTER FIVE

Islamic Schools in Victoria as Safe Spaces

The Islamic school environment is designed to engender a sense of belonging for Muslim youths in Victoria. As a result of my analysis of the interview material, it appears that in an attempt to provide an Islamic school ‘environment,’ Islamic schools have the tendency to insulate and perhaps disengage their students from ‘the outside world’, creating a ‘bubble-like’ experience for students. Additionally, it was revealed, through the interviews, that in an effort to provide an environment that facilitates the construction of students who are Islamically conscious, Islamic schools may in fact create parallel realities where students make overt distinctions between the ‘bubble’ world and the ‘outside’ world. When participants use terms like *bubble* in juxtaposition to the *outside world* to describe their schooling experience this indicated that students are conscious of these two worlds that they are forced to straddle. This chapter explores participants’ engagement with their school environment as safe spaces. The concept of safe space refers to an environment that facilitates an individual’s sense of belonging. Muslim students in the context of an Islamic school are exposed to a set of norms and values that complement their religious and cultural values to make the transition between home and school smooth (Mir, 2007).

Some of the interviewees made references to the ‘outside world,’ ‘bubble-like’ and ‘cocoon’ to refer to their lives and experiences inside and outside of the school environment. Maya Abdul-Malik, a 19 year old Palestinian media communications and journalism student who attended state public schools as well as two Islamic schools in Victoria, Al-Madinah Islamic College and Khalifah Islamic College respectively described her experiences at Al-

Madinah Islamic College as a ‘bubble’ environment. When reflecting on what it was like being a student at an Islamic school Maya stated:

In an Islamic school it can sometimes be negative to us because we were too enclosed and we don’t know what’s going on in the real world. But in a public school you actually find out what’s going on in there.

(Maya Abdul-Malik, Palestinian, 19 years old)

Maya’s reflections of her time at two Islamic schools in Victoria provide an insight into an area of Islamic schools that not many people get to see about Islamic schools in Victoria. Maya’s reflection reveals that there is a clear distinction between the school as an ‘enclosed’ space and the outside world as ‘the world’ and therefore open. Maya described her peers at Al-Madinah Islamic College as ‘innocent’ and ‘immature’ as result of being in a ‘bubble’ like environment. However, Maya’s experience at Khalifah Islamic College is markedly different. Her peers at Khalifah Islamic College were neither ‘friendly’ nor naïve. The difference between the two schools, according to Maya, is that Khalifah Islamic College is ‘a proper private school’ and therefore the culture and climate between the schools were different. This air of professionalism she associates with Khalifah Islamic College seems to be absent at Al-Madinah Islamic College. Additionally, even though both Al-Madinah Islamic College and Khalifah Islamic College had a culturally and ethnically diverse environment Maya felt that her peers were accepting of her even though they were different cultures and ethnicities. However at Khalifah Islamic College the cliques and social groups were clearly defined, rigid cultural lines. Similarly, Zayn Ali, a 25 year Somali student who also attended Khalifah Islamic College from year 7 to year 12 described it as:

I would imagine it (Khalifah Islamic College) to be the stereotypical private school. You go there and there are strict rules about how you dress, how you address teachers and rules on how you should comport yourself. You have the way you’re supposed to behave in

front of the teachers and the way you're supposed to behave in front of your friends.

(Zayn Ali, Somali, 25 years old)

Zayn also attended another Islamic school in Melbourne's northern suburbs in Victoria. His experience at Al Iman Islamic College is explicitly different. Throughout his interview it was noticeable that Zayn's first impressions of both his Islamic school experiences not only stayed with him but that the development of his Islamic identity in turn was affected more strongly than any of the other interviewees. This is to say that even though he spoke nonchalantly about his experiences at Khalifah Islamic College Zayn was acutely aware that the school's attempt to create an Islamic environment left him slightly disillusioned about Islamic schools:

There's this façade of maintaining an Islamic identity, at least superficially. This is an issue because parents are worried that if [their children] are sent off to the local school, because of your friends and the social circle that you're with, you will slowly be socialised away from being a Muslim. I'm not sure if that happens or not. I have no experience to substantiate that but that's the fear and's that why they [send their children to Islamic schools]. I think Islamic schools take away that fear from parents. And for the most part they manage to keep a semblance of that, even if it's not producing the Muslim that the Prophet would've wanted or even or society would've produced 200 or 250 years ago, or even 50 years ago. I think what they're getting from these schools is very airy fairy. I don't think they should be expecting anything at all.

(Zayn Ali, Somali, 25 years old)

When asked to comment on what he thought the school expected of students at Khalifah Islamic College, Zayn goes on to say that schools expected:

High grades and a superficial profession of faith, the things I experienced in high school. I would describe myself as one of those extreme Salafis in high school. You know, big beard. Lots of moralising and a lot of faulting other people's for their actions. There was no self-reflection whatsoever and this is something that is socialised. It was all about the public performance of the *deen* (religion) and outward religiosity and not about the internal aspects of it.

(Zayn Ali, Somali, 25 years old)

Zayn's reflections demonstrate some of the intangible outcomes of attending a faith-based school. Not only does it demonstrate how complex and perhaps gradual the process of identity construction is. It also facilitates an appreciation of the personal struggles that a student goes through in the process of understanding what it means to be Muslim in Australia. Despite the best of intentions of Islamic schools to provide a *safe* space for Muslim students, Zayn was cognizant of the fact that this goal may have unintended consequences. For him Khalifah Islamic College merely provided the infrastructure, the 'façade,' if you will of an Islamic school without the ability to nurture not only his but also other students' spiritual growth.

Islamic Schools: Simply a School for Muslim Students?

Maya notes that both Khalifah Islamic College and Al-Madinah Islamic College have the typical and expected features of an Islamic school such as a mosque on the school premises, students expected to wear a *hijab* (headscarf) as part of the school uniform, *Zuhr* salah (midday prayer) incorporated into the school day, and *halal* food served at the school canteen. Consequently, Ali Saleh, a graduate of Al-Madinah Islamic College in Melbourne's Western suburbs, was of the opinion that the aim of an Islamic school was to provide quality

education with the ‘trappings’ of a religious environment. In saying this, Ali believed that it was not an Islamic school’s role to foster a sense of an Islamic identity in its students. For Maya, she felt that Khalifah Islamic College was not as ‘strict’ as Al-Madinah Islamic College. Khalifah Islamic College, on the other hand, was more liberal and a school that socially prepares you for ‘the world’ because it ‘was a bit more open.’ However, Maya went on to say that:

Looking back I think that was the way to have it. What I mean is it was good to go to an Islamic school (Al-Madinah Islamic College first) where they had a more closed environment then go to an Islamic school (Khalifah Islamic College later on) that was a bit more open.

(Maya Abdul-Malik, Palestinian, 19 years old)

According to Maya Khalifah Islamic College is more ‘open’ whilst Al-Madinah Islamic College is ‘strict’ and different because Khalifah Islamic College does not consider itself an Islamic school but rather ‘a Muslim school for Muslim students.’ The distinction between an Islamic school and a school for Muslims seems to be open knowledge amongst students. This is to say that graduates of Victoria’s Islamic schools have known that Islamic schools merely have the ‘trappings’ of a religious environment (Ali Saleh, Somali, 20 years old; Al-Madinah Islamic College graduate). When asked to elaborate on what she means by referring to Khalifah Islamic College as ‘a school for Muslim students’ rather than an Islamic school, she replied that a school for Muslims only provides ‘the basic needs for [students] to be a Muslim’ (Maya Abdul-Malik). A school for Muslims as opposed to an Islamic school is one where, according to Maya, ‘[the school doesn’t] have to actually go by the full religious laws’ (Maya Abdul-Malik). What this means is difficult to articulate. Despite Maya’s inability to articulate the difference between an Islamic school [Al-Madinah Islamic College] and a school for Muslims [Khalifah Islamic College] throughout the interviews I observed

that other students who also attended and graduated from Al-Madinah Islamic College had similar experiences.

Halimah Aydin, a 21 year old Turkish female graduate from Al-Madinah Islamic College, noted that her experiences at Al-Madinah Islamic College did not prepare her for life after graduation. Halimah's experiences stands out compared to all the other participants of the research study primarily because she has only experienced one educational setting. Describing co-educational classes at school and at university as 'weird', Halimah said the school did not prepare her for the 'outside world'. Interestingly, Halimah Aydin reflected fondly on the more 'closed' aspects of her experience at Al-Madinah Islamic College:

[H]ere in Australia we don't hear the *adhan* (call to prayer) but we do at school. At school you didn't have to [make room for] prayer in your life, prayer was a part of your life because once you'd hear the *adhan* you would just go and pray. These days [at university] you would have to look at your watch to remember *salah* (prayer) instead of looking forward to the *adhan* and you would have to go find somewhere to pray. Another thing is you wouldn't have to worry about conforming.

(Halimah Aydin, Turkish, 21 years old)

For Halimah, incorporating the call to prayer and prayer times into the school day provided a spiritual and religious source of comfort. Whilst lamenting about Al-Madinah Islamic College's enclosed environment Halimah was thankful for having an environment where prayer played an important role in the school. As the interview continued, although prayer times and the call to prayer provided a source of comfort and belonging there were other causes of discomfort that she experienced whilst at Al-Madinah Islamic College. One particular example Halimah cited was:

[I]f my parents could get me to wear the scarf at a young age and understand why –which I still can't explain to other people. But at the

school it's forced on you because it's part of the school uniform so you don't really understand why you do things.

(Halimah Aydin, Turkish, 21 years old)

In contrast, Ali Saleh's experiences at Al-Madinah Islamic College 'empowered' him particularly coming from a public educational setting where:

[T]here was no sense of difference as opposed to [the local primary school] where I was one of three students that were Muslim. We went out of our way to do our prayers during lunch while everyone else was outside playing. Ramadan was hard during primary school because some of the students started mocking us and taunting us. There were all these questions 'why do you fast?' Because I was young I didn't have the ability to answer and so it made it hard to express my views and my religion.

(Ali Saleh, Somali, 20 years old)

Attending Al-Madinah Islamic College made it easy for Ali because he no longer had to constantly explain his religious beliefs and practices. Besides having to get used to 'so many girls in scarves in the one place' the school environment:

Gave me more strength and empowered and my Islamic ethics. There was that bond and connection with everyone. We all had to do the same things. It was a very happy moment [when I started at Al-Madinah Islamic College] because there were kids just like me who were trying to get somewhere. There was a very real sense of belonging there at the Islamic school. It was very different to my past non-Muslim school.

(Ali Saleh, Somali, 20 years old)

Although the above excerpt speaks fondly to Ali's first impressions of Al-Madinah Islamic College sadly it only represents the romantic phase of his experience. Despite the sense of belonging, empowerment and strength that Ali initially experienced he believed that he:

[W]ould've still adapted the same way... [and] I would've still been the same me as I am today. I don't think the Islamic school changed me. It just opened my eyes to the world even though it was a closed environment. I found not talking to girls a little difficult because I was used to talking to everyone and because there was segregation it was very hard to adapt [to].

(Ali Saleh, Somali, 20 years old)

What Ali felt was restricting about Al-Madinah Islamic College was its strict observance of gender segregation principles. Additionally, what the above excerpt expresses is that ironically the enclosed environment that Ali laments about is the same environment that provided a sense of empowerment and belonging. Drawing from Ali and Halimah's experiences two interesting points of analysis emerge: (i) the Islamic school environment has dual roles; (ii) Islamic schools engender two and at times contradictory responses and/or experiences. Moreover, analysing the dual roles that Al-Madinah Islamic College played was not isolated to Halimah and Ali's experiences. Sahara Ali, a 21 year old Somali graduate from Al-Madinah Islamic College, had parallel experiences to Halimah and Ali. For Sahara Al-Madinah Islamic College engendered two contradictory experiences. Similar to Ali, Sahara had also experienced the school environment as a very confined sort of space. A space where:

The four corners of the school were the only thing that existed and you were always kept in a little cocoon. I just felt like we were very closed off...it's like you're in a whole bubble. You're not really ready for the outside world until you go to university and you go to a different environment. Everything on the outside wasn't what the things that the Islamic school said it was about. It became clearer to us, me and my friends, once we left of how much of a bubble we were in. When you're in a bubble you don't realise that you're in it until you leave. There's just something there (at the school) that keeps you disconnected from the world.

(Saharah Ali, Somali, 21 years old)

The above excerpt demonstrates how acutely aware students were of the school's expectations for them. The discussion on Islamic schools as an insular space, from the perspective of the interviewees, also provides a critique on the Islamic school's inability to provide a *neutral* space that may have on the construction of a student's Islamic identity. By insulating Muslim students from the 'outside world' it does not necessarily prepare students for life after their schooling experience. Saharah's reference to Al-Madinah's Islamic College's environment as a 'cocoon', a 'bubble', 'disconnected' and 'closed off' represents one of the two responses that the school environment engenders. The most confining experience at the school for Sahara was the school's insistence on observing gender segregation policies. The school's gender segregation policies 'really takes from the environment', reflected Saharah. According to Saharah, gender segregation is seen as a cultural value rather than a religious value. However, this may be contested by other members of not only the Somali community but the wider Muslim community.

Victoria's Islamic Schools and the 'Bubble-like' Experience

By focusing on the relationship between Islamic schools and religious identity construction the analysis has sought to provide an understanding of how Islamic schools in Victoria 'influence and interact with the construction of [religious] identities' (Severson, 2011: 47). What becomes clear throughout the research from analysing the interviews of the other participants who also graduated from Al-Madinah Islamic College, of which there are five, is that experiencing the school as a 'bubble' is a pervasive narrative. Sajidah Muhammad, a 21 year old Palestinian who also graduated from Al-Madinah Islamic College, succinctly described the school as 'derivative [and] concerned with maintain[ing] power and authority, religious authority'. How graduates of Al-Madinah Islamic College engage with the school environment and the basic infrastructure parallels the experiences of the other participants in

the research. Zayn Ali described Khalifah Islamic College as a ‘stereotypical private school’ that happened to be an Islamic school where ‘there are strict rules about how you dress...and rules on how you should comport yourself.’ For Zayn Khalifah Islamic College was only good for ensuring that Muslim students ‘achieve academically but if you’re going there wanting to produce a Muslim of good character, the school is not going to help or hinder that’. The effect that an Islamic school has on students, according to Zayn, is that it:

Exposes [students] to people that might not have the same values that you might have. And you think that by sending your child [to an Islamic school] it won’t hinder the students and their values and where they came from and their experiences. The only really concrete thing that they provided that was Islamic was the venue to fulfil your prayer obligations. That is the only claim they can really make and deliver. They can’t make any claims about *adab* (Islamic etiquette). They cannot teach your child something useful in any systematic way about their faith. And there is no way that they can possibly deliver on anything else that they promise.

(Zayn Ali, Somali, 25 years old)

Despite the above excerpt, Zayn was ‘grateful for the socialisation’ of Islam that Khalifah Islamic College facilitated. The socialisation of Islam within the school environment substantiates Muslim parents need for Islamic schools to be *safe* cultural and religious spaces. The socialisation of Islam represents the ‘positive’ dimension of the discussion on how spaces are used by Islamic schools in Victoria. The experiences of Zara Yusuf, a 22 year old Australian-Tunisian graduate of Al-Hijrah Islamic College in Victoria’s south-eastern suburbs, represent how the environment had a positive effect on her religious identity construction. For Zara, attending Al-Hijrah Islamic College was a saving grace. She initially attended the local primary school. Al-Hijrah Islamic College was a place where it wasn’t ‘such a struggle to be Muslim’ and a place that made it easy to do ‘the right thing’ and it made being Muslim ‘a lot easier.’ Zara was particularly grateful because:

[I]f I wasn't at an Islamic school I wouldn't have been so confident, so comfortable with the fact that I'm Muslim. I wouldn't have been so comfortable with wearing the hijab or be ready to go out there and be like 'hey, I'm Muslim and there's no problem with that.' I felt really proud and I wasn't ashamed. At my local primary school I wouldn't tell everyone that I was Muslim. But at [Al Hijrah Islamic College] I learnt to love my religion.

Another thing that I am grateful for was having the comfort of saying things like *Alhamdulillah* (Thank God) and *inshaAllah* (God Willing). The fact that it was okay for it to be a regular part of my vocabulary when I'd converse with people who also use it, it made a difference. I don't think I would've had that had I gone to a non-Muslim school. It (Al Hijrah Islamic College) really promoted that it's okay to be Muslim and that you should be proud of that.

(Zara Yusuf, Australian-Tunisian, 22 years old)

It has become increasingly important for Muslim students to feel that it is 'okay' to be Muslim particularly given the increasingly changing socio-cultural climate. For Sumayya Ahmad the realisation that being Muslim was 'normal' came after she had graduated:

I felt like going to an Islamic school prepared me (for university). I reckon if I didn't go to an Islamic school I would've been missing a big thing in my life. When I went to university I had that Islamic background so if I wanted to go and pray I wouldn't be scared to go and pray in the prayer room. If the prayer room wasn't available, I would just go to a corner and pray. Even when I go out shopping or to the movies, when it's time to, I pray. So I feel that going to an Islamic school encouraged me to believe that it's okay to be a Muslim and I should be proud of being Muslim.

(Sumaya Ahmed, Oromo, 22 years old)

Salahuddin Ibrahim, a 23 year old self-identified Middle Eastern male's experiences at Al-Hijrah Islamic College are in stark contrast to Zara's experience. Salahuddin observed that:

Muslim schools were pretty much run like Muslim countries. There wasn't really any effort to engage with the issues going on and no engagement with the students.

(Salahuddin Ibrahim, Middle Eastern, 23 years old)

Salahuddin's description of not only Al-Hijrah Islamic College but all Islamic schools in Victoria being 'run as Muslim countries' implies that they are incompetent, ineffective and ultimately inefficient. Salahuddin's damning assessment of Islamic schools is based on his observations of how they are managed:

At the school I went to, the administration staff were migrants that migrated here long ago and the idea of an education in the places where they had come from are very different. The application, if you like, of certain Islamic principles differs greatly particularly coming from a community that is majority Muslim to coming here where Muslims are a minority. The challenges that Muslim children face here are vastly different than where they came from. That needs to be given consideration and it necessarily wasn't at [Al-Hijrah Islamic College].

(Salahuddin Ibrahim, Middle Eastern, 23 years old)

What emerges from the valuable data from the interviews is that young Muslims are conscious of how culture has become synonymous with religion and how it is been played out within the school grounds. This is to say that the management and administration of some of Victoria's Islamic schools are operated and administered primarily by first wave Muslim migrant communities, primarily those are of Arab or Turkish descent –which is reflective of the majority of the Muslim population of Victoria. What is interesting is that even though the data on student demographics is unknown, there seems to be a growing student population made up of students from countries in Africa (Somalia in particular) and the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

Analysing and understanding Islamic schools as contested spaces and its impact on religious identity construction is a complex process. The preceding chapter has demonstrated that how students engage with and respond to the school's environment plays a great role in the religious identity construction. The preceding chapter acknowledges that students are perhaps more aware than their parents and school administrators of the impact of their surroundings on the intangible part of their development: their Islamic identity. Many of the insights discussed in this chapter reflect the nuanced relationships students have with their schools and their peers.

Students who have attended an Islamic school for an extended period of time, particularly their secondary years, have simultaneously lamented and celebrated an Islamic school's 'bubble-like' environment. They lamented it because it did not prepare them for the 'outside' world and celebrated it primarily because it offered students an environment that did not reinforce their religious difference. However, most of the participants had attended more than one Islamic school and other educational settings and so were less 'bothered' by a school's 'bubble-like' environment. Nonetheless, through a period of 'readjustment' post-graduation, all the respondents tended to reflect positively over their experiences at their Islamic schools. Their experiences facilitates a requestioning of Islamic schools as sites that either ghettoise and isolate their students in an attempt to produce 'good' Australian Muslims. The concept of *safe spaces* within the context of Islamic schools suggests a core and fundamental site in which young Muslims begin to form their sense of self (Mir, 2007). It is within an Islamic school we assume that students begin to form an understanding of who they are. The concept of *spaces* offers critical opportunities for analysis within the context of Islamic schools and religious identity construction of Muslim youths. The concept of *spaces*

allows an analysis of how the infrastructure created by Muslim communities is used and moderated to fill an identified religious and social need. Nonetheless, how this plays out for students is complex and unpredictable vis-à-vis Islamic identity construction for students.

CHAPTER SIX

Victoria's Islamic Schools and Double Exclusion

The experiences of Victoria's Muslim youths in Islamic schools and the 'Islamic environment' suggest dual interpretations of these environments. Islamic schools in Victoria, being 'safe spaces' can be contradictorily described in both positive and negative terms for being in a 'bubble-like' environment. That is the conclusion from the preceding chapter. This chapter explores a different perspective on how students engage and interact with these environments. The following chapter continues the discussion of how students interact with the consequences of well-intentioned Islamic schools, a situation which can be described as double exclusion.

The chapter suggests that the inability of Islamic schools in Victoria to facilitate a sense of both cultural and religious belonging for their students may be experienced as 'double exclusion' (Yasmeen, 2008 and Franz, 2007: 90-91). Double exclusion refers to an experience or condition where an individual feels excluded in an environment that was created to foster a sense of inclusion (Le Grand 1999). Within Islamic schools double exclusion may occur when students experience layered forms of exclusion resulting in the need for them to either disconnect from the environment or create their own sense of belonging outside of the school environment. This chapter explores in depth how students interact with this unintended consequence of double exclusion. This chapter explores how the emergence of double exclusion has had an impact on the religious identity development of some of the respondents, particularly those who spoke about the differences between the 'Islam' they were exposed to within the school environment and the type of Islam they lived

at home. This chapter takes into account the students' experiences of their school environment as ethno-cultural spaces rather than a purely religious environment.

All the nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria were either found, run and administered by members of either the Turkish or the Arab communities. Both these communities have generally been considered to be steeped in culture and use culture interchangeably with religious practices. Feelings of exclusion and isolation are not unique to the experiences of non-Arab and non-Turkish Muslim students in Victoria's Islamic schools. Sahara Ali, a 21 year old Somali graduate from Al-Madinah Islamic College felt that even though she shared similarities with her Arab peers the differences between them however were noticeable. For Saharah her peers' attitudes to marriage represented a significant cultural difference:

One thing that I was never brought up to think about was getting married at a young age; or you're gonna marry your cousin; or you're gonna go to Lebanon and get married from there. That was never my upbringing.

(Sahrah Ali, Somali, 21 years old)

Similarly, comparing her experiences at both Khalifah Islamic College and Al-Madinah Islamic College Maya Abdul-Malik, a 19 year old Palestinian female student, noticed how the different school environments had an effect on how the students engaged with one another. This is to say that Maya felt that the students at Al Madinah Islamic College were 'naïve' and 'innocent' whilst the students at Khalifah Islamic College were 'posh and up themselves with an attitude'. In spite of what may be seen as a condescending description of Al Madinah Islamic College ultimately Maya preferred it to Khalifah Islamic College primarily because of the 'multicultural' student population. Even though both

Khalifah Islamic College and Al Madinah Islamic College had a diverse student population

Maya noted that Khalifah Islamic College was a particularly culturally closed environment:

‘If you weren’t Arab you were kind of left out’. And if you speak another language, like some of the other students who were Indian or Somali would use Arabic words when they would speak. A few of [my] Somali friends basically got used to [this treatment].

(Maya Abdul-Malik, Palestinian, 19 years old)

The high concentration of one particular ethnic group in an Islamic school is not unique to either Khalifah Islamic College or Al Madinah Islamic College. It seems to be a reality in all of Victoria’s nine self-identifying Islamic schools. Sumayya Ahmad a 22 year old Oromo graduate of Sultan Fatih Islamic College was acutely aware of this.⁴ For Sumayya, Sultan Fatih Islamic College:

The school was predominantly Turkish; in terms of the students, teachers as well as the environment. Turkish would be spoken in the corridors; teachers and students would speak Turkish to one another. The environment would make you feel uncomfortable because it was 90% Turkish.

Sumaya Ahmed, Oromo, 22 years old)

What the above excerpt reveals is that perhaps Sumayya’s experience at Sultan Fatih Islamic College was a little more than ‘uncomfortable.’ It is important to note that Sumayya also attended Khalifah Islamic College from year 7 to year 9 and that there are similarities between the two school environments for her. Sumayya’s transition from one Islamic school to another for her parents was primarily because of the high concentration of one cultural and ethnic group in the school. Her parents ‘were worried about that’ and its effect on her and her

⁴ The Oromo people are found in present day Ethiopia. They constitute Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group making up 40 per cent of the population. Although a large portion of Oromos are Muslim religious differences exist among the Oromos (The Advocates for Human Rights, December 2009: 3).

siblings. When asked to reflect on what it was like being an African at both Khalifah Islamic College and Sultan Fatih Islamic College Sumayya noted that:

In terms of being black, people were racist at both schools. I don't know if it was because we were teenagers or not but at [Khalifah Islamic College] our group were the 'multiculturals' the first thing that the other groups would use, if they were pissed off at you, was our colour. The things they would say would be like 'Sumayya you just came out of a solarium' just to draw attention to how dark I was. To me that's really hurtful. I still remember until now.

At [Sultan Fatih Islamic College] there is only one incident of racism that I can remember. It started because I said something bad to someone –I don't think it was racist. A boy in my class was been really rude to me and wouldn't leave me alone. So I just said 'shut up, you flat face' and then he said 'at least I'm not on world vision.'

(Sumayya Ahmad, 22 years old, Oromo)

Sumayya's experience is disheartening. It sadly represents a common occurrence for ethnic minority students in Victoria's Islamic schools like Saharah Ali, Ali Saleh and Zayn Ali. Nonetheless, students who weren't a part of the school's ethnic majority also had similar experiences. The experiences of Halimah Aydin, a 21 year old Turkish graduate of Al Madinah Islamic College, mirror Sumayya's. Even though neither went to the same Islamic school, being from a minority ethnicity was also 'hard' for Halimah:

At [Al Madinah Islamic College] it was majority Arabs. It was hard being Turkish. I couldn't speak the language (Arabic) and if I tried they would just laugh at me.

Interview: Was language the only factor that made it difficult for you to fit in?

Halimah: It was a cultural difference. For example the 'moon wars' during Ramadan, I call them 'moon wars,' every year we would have them and the Turks would be doing it (beginning the month of Ramadan) this day and the Arabs would do it on another day. For me it's just a cultural difference.

(Halimah Aydin, 21 years old, Turkish)⁵

A comparison of Sumayya and Halimah's experiences of exclusion at their respective Islamic schools provides insight into the different levels of exclusion at play here. For Sumayya being a part of a school's ethnic minority at both Khalifah Islamic College and Sultan Fatih Islamic College made her vulnerable to racial discrimination whilst for Halimah the cultural differences between her and her Arab peers made her conscious of difference. Summya's reflections reveal one important observation at both of the Islamic schools she attended: (i) nobody is free from racism even from one's own co-religionists; and (ii) particular ethnic and cultural groups are perhaps more vulnerable to racism and discrimination than others in spite of sharing a religion. Halimah's experience reveals that her sense of exclusion was subtle and culturally motivated but just as palpable as Sumayya's experiences. Additionally, Saharah Ali's experience of exclusion at Al-Madinah Islamic College was also because of the culturally different experiences of Islam Al Madinah Islamic College provided for ethnic minority students. When asked to reflect on what it was like being a Somali at an Islamic school Saharah noted:

I guess we were the second largest community in that school; first it was the Lebanese/Palestinian/Arabs and then I guess it was us: the Somalis. We had a presence at the school. I don't know if we had a say, though.

Interviewer: Do you think that the school catered for your community?

Saharah: No, not really.

Interviewer: Just earlier on you mentioned that the Somali community in the school was the second largest community; did you notice social groups forming?

Saharah: Yes, definitely. My group was all black. All the Bosnians hung out together, and all the Lebanese hung out together. Certain groups didn't like certain groups. The Lebanese girls and the Bosnian

⁵ The term 'moon wars' refers to the internal debate in the Muslim community when determining when the month of Ramadan begins, The 'moon wars' debate whether or not Islamic months should be determined by the sighting of the moon or scientific calculations Rydhan (2010).

girls never got along. They had very different views. The Lebanese were a lot more cultured and traditional and spoke in their language. What I mean by cultured is that they're very into their Lebanese culture and traditions. Whereas everybody else was like whatever, we're all teenagers growing up in the same sort of circumstances.

(Sahara Ali, Somali, 21 years old)

Ethnic minority students such as Saharah feel compelled to displace their own ethnic and cultural identities 'in favour of a notion of [a] 'Muslim' [identity] that conformed to the religio-cultural cues of her peers and the school environment.

One of the key objectives of Victoria's Islamic schools is the ability to not only create an Islamic environment but also to provide 'quality' Islamic education. They reveal this objective in their statements about ensuring that students learn about Islam and Qur'anic texts. In an attempt to ascertain whether or not Victoria's Islamic schools are able to provide this environment, students were asked to reflect on how instrumental their experiences at the schools were in teaching them about Islam.

Victoria's Islamic Schools and the Experiences of Two 'Islams'? Analysing the Home and School Gap

The following section explores the potential for discrepancy between the Islam that students are exposed to at school and the Islam they lived at home and how this contributes to a student's sense of belonging in the school ground. As the only participant in the research study that attended one school, Halimah Aydin a 21 year old Turkish graduate of Al Madinah Islamic College was acutely aware of the gap between the Islam she was exposed to at home and the Islam she was exposed to at school. When reflecting on where in particular she learnt most about Islam and what it means to be Muslim Halimah's knowledge of Islam came from attending classes at her local Turkish mosque. As a young Turkish woman from a 'practicing' background Halimah knew that even though her father made the decision to send her and her

siblings to Al Madinah Islamic College he also made a decision to send them to supplementary Islamic schools because he wanted them to have a ‘balanced’ understanding of Islam. Halimah notes that her father sent them to both Al Madinah Islamic College and the weekend Islamic supplementary school because:

[He] knew that the one thing that [Al Madinah Islamic College] didn’t teach was about the different *madhabs* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence). When you’re raised in a particular *madhab* and your school does things differently –they’re both right at the end of the day –but to someone who is young and grown up thinking that another way (that is different to what your parents teach) is wrong, it’s difficult to get used to. I was raised thinking that the Hanafi *madhab* was correct.

Interviewer: And what *madhab* do you think the school represented?

Halimah: My dad used to say Wahhabi. But I think it’s the Shafi’i *madhab*. Most of the things that I learnt at the school were mainly based on Imam Shafi’i’s interpretations. That’s what I assumed.

Interviewer: What made you and your father think that the school was based on Wahhabi teachings?

Halimah: It’s because of the teachers. Most of the teachers were Arabs. Some of the things they would do were different to things we were taught at home. People didn’t understand that we (the Hanafi’s) do things differently so sometimes when people would say that my opinion was wrong and the things that I was doing wasn’t Islamic there would be tension in the classroom. I knew that what I was doing was right, but different. I was just doing what my parents taught me and I know that what my parents teach me is right because they wouldn’t teach me something wrong. My parents ended up taking my brothers and sisters to another school because the school was too Arab and not really Islamic.

(Halimah Aydin, 21years old, Turkish)

Halimah’s experiences of exclusion are subtle, nuanced and perhaps ideological. These sentiments are also expressed by Ali Saleh a 20 year old Somali graduate of Al Madinah Islamic College. When asked to comment on what role he thought experiences of exclusion had on informing the religious identity of students he noted that Islamic schools should:

Prepare students so that after they've graduated and go out into the real world they're prepared for what can happen. You know, like so they can cope as Muslims in a non-Islamic state.

(Halimah Aydin, 21 years old, Turkish)

Additionally, what is also noticeable from some of the other interviews is that being from the majority ethno-cultural community can have a self-affirming experience for some. This is to say that when Adam Abdul-Malik, a 23 year old Palestinian male graduate of Al-Madinah Islamic College, was talking about his interaction with one particular Palestinian teacher (Mr Isma'el, a senior high school coordinator). Adam was conscious of the fact that being Palestinian 'helped' because they both had being Palestinian in common. Adam goes on to say that Mr Isma'el:

[W]as appreciative of the fact that my parents cared about religion and that we still speak Arabic really well. He liked that my parents preserved the Palestinian in us. Being Palestinian got me out of trouble because of Mr Isma'el liked me and my family more than anything else.

(Adam Abdul-Malik, 23 year olds, Palestinian)

Obviously not every student at Al Madinah Islamic College or any of the other Islamic schools for that matter had Adam's privilege where being from a particular ethnicity 'helped' with student-teacher relations. Even though being Palestinian 'helped' Adam engage with one teacher in particular, as the interview continues, he reveals to us that that only made him vulnerable to racial taunts from his peers:

There were a few incidents of racism. Some of the Lebo guys would tell us (Palestinians) to go and throw rocks. Stupid things like that. The thing is bagging and bullying was rife at the Islamic schools especially racial bullying. Just because we're Muslims doesn't mean we wouldn't care about these things. It's worse than public school because in public schools even if it happens it's frowned upon but at Islamic schools it's so normal.

(Adam Abdul-Malik, 23 years old, Palestinian)

Zayn Ali, a 25 year old Somali graduate from Khalifah Islamic College, provided perhaps one of the more intriguing insights into how attending an Islamic school had a negative effect on ethnic minority students like him. Zayn revealed that whilst at Khalifah Islamic College he felt that he was ‘stripped’ of his Somali identity. When asked to reflect on what it was like for him being Somali at an Islamic school Zayn said:

I wasn’t Somali. I was part of a clique that was not based on cultural groups. You had the Lebos, and then you had the Turks who socialised together and knew each other and then you had everyone else and we had to socialise with each other, which was forced.

Interviewer: Forced?

Zayn: Well you didn’t have to. Even though we would occasionally mix, we are aware that there were two dominant cultural groups: the Arabs (the Lebos) and the Turks. That was like 80 per cent of the population and then that 20 per cent was everything else: Afghans, Persians, Somalis, Eritreans, Indians, Pakistanis, etc. I had one other Somali classmate and she was a sister and we couldn’t sit there chatting, that just wouldn’t work not just because of the environment but because my conservative Salafi values wouldn’t let me do that. My development of Islam and Islamic identity seesawed from normalcy to Salafism to traditionalism and then you kind of come across something kind of like anti-reason. But then you kind of find equilibrium that you develop based on your experiences. I think that’s where I am now.

(Zayn Ali, 25 years old, Somali)

As the interview continues Zayn reveals that although he attended supplementary weekend Islamic and Qur’anic classes he had similar experiences there also. Zayn looked to other sites, both actual and virtual, to make sense of what it meant to be Muslim. Internet blogs and conversations with his peers were critical sites for enabling him to explore a more meaningful conceptualisation of his Islamic identity.

Zayn revealed that he attended *duksi* (Somali word for Qur'an school) however:

[T]hat was more about hitting you with the Qu'ran, figuratively, of course. This is the worst possible manner to get you to understand how to read Arabic and Somali. They have no pedagogy of any kind whatsoever.

Interviewer: Were there things about Islam that you missed learning about at the Islamic school and the *duksi* you attended?

Zayn: Missed? Yes, all of it. Before high school my conception of Islam was you behave well, if you make a mistake you atone for it, you pray and you have *yaqeen* (certainty in faith), this was what I knew. That was my conception of Islam. This milieu (in the Islamic schools) that you come into now is all about the observations of outward forms of faith.

Interviewer: What would be an example of 'outward forms of faith'?

Zayn: It was the emphasis on the beard, the kufi and looking like a Muslim. Behaving like a Muslim was secondary, though. So you develop, in your mind, a hierarchy that reinforces the belief that we're so smart, we're so religious, and we're so intelligent. Before I went to [Khalifah Islamic College] and met all these Salafis, and I apologize if the nomenclature is wrong, I was inculcated in a culture I felt like my spirit was been nourished. It was all about making sure that what I was doing was moral. So I went through a period where everything became external and it was all about performing Islam.

(Zayn Ali, 25 years old, Somali)

The preceding discussions on students' perceptions of exclusion vis-à-vis the different experiences of the Islam they lived at home and the Islam they were exposed to at their Islamic schools reveals that ethnic minority students were perhaps more vulnerable than their peers. The previous two sections have primarily focused on the factors that were imported into the school environment and its effects on an ethnic minority student's sense of belonging and/or exclusion.

Alternate Processes of Engagement

The following section takes into account how students respond to, interact and engage with their school's ideological cultures in an attempt to conceptualise their Islamic identity.

Sajidah Muhammad, a 21 year old Palestinian student-teacher who graduated from Al-Madinah Islamic College, was acutely aware of how certain Islamic ideologies were filtered down to students through their teachers. What is interesting in Sajidah's experiences at Al-Madinah Islamic College in comparison to Zayn's experience at Khilafah Islamic College is that at Al-Madinah it was both a conscious choice on one level and unintentional on another to expose students to certain perspectives. The conscious level took place at the school mosque during Friday prayers where international and national guest speakers hosted by the school, alongside the school Imam, would deliver the *khutbah* (Friday prayer sermon). The unintentional filtering of different perspectives of Islam and Islamic practices came from the teachers, similar to Zayn's experience. Sajidah provides an example of the unintentional dimension of this filtering and the impact it has on students' religious identity construction:

Our teachers each had a different view to each other. Each one was unique in the way they practiced. So it led to some confusion with some of the students that didn't research the issues we would come across. For example, is music *halal* or *haram*?

Interviewer: How would the teachers responses differ when a student asked this question?

Sajidah: For example one teacher might say that it's all forbidden and the only time you're allowed to use the *duff* (drum) is only at weddings. You might have another teacher that would say that only the *duff* is *halal* at all times but other instruments are not. Some teachers might say that computerised instruments are *halal* but not real instruments. And some would say the instruments are *halal* but not the lyrics. It all really depends on the teachers' understanding more than anything else. They only know their own opinions because that's what they've learnt but they don't know the validity or the background evidence of other opinions. This created conflict.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

The above excerpt reveals that Sajidah and her peers were exposed to different jurisprudential perspectives. Whilst this allowed students to be exposed to 'a diversity of opinions' because it 'created curiosity' this also had an inadvertent effect on students.

Sajidah noted the extent to which the lack of filtering is deliberate is particularly worrying because she felt as though Al-Madinah Islamic College did not fully appreciate the impact it may have on students, particularly the impact that international guest speakers may have on young Muslims:

I felt that when they did it [invite international guest speakers] it was more the conservative kind of people. They had both conservative political and religious views. For me I was always really excited about politics and I had people in class that would say ‘oh it’s *haram* to vote.’ It’s frustrating because you don’t want people to say or believe that. Sometimes we had the *khutbahs* (Friday prayer sermons) and they would talk about certain issues that wouldn’t allow for activism.

Interviewer: What would be an example of a *khutbah* topic?

Sajidah: For example they would say ‘look at the Western governments and western societies and this is all because of freedom and democracy.’ They’re making political statements but they don’t really realise it. The message to students is that you’re supposed to disengage or that this society is corrupt and there’s nothing positive about it. You can’t say that the school doesn’t have an ideology, because it does.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

Sajidah’s reflections serves to reaffirm what is common knowledge amongst student at Islamic schools: Islamic schools have cultures and ideologies that are palpable to students. Furthermore, the preceding discussions highlighted the extent to which students straddle the discrepancy between the Islam they were exposed to at school and the Islam they lived at home and how this contributed to their sense of belonging and the development of their religious identity.

Conclusion

Victoria’s Islamic schools were established and administered by first generation Muslim migrants to Victoria to cater to the needs of second –or third generation Muslim. The concept of double exclusion allows for an examination of how students interact with the school

environment to ascertain whether or not it fosters a sense of belonging and whether or not students experience exclusion. How students who experience double exclusion negotiate meaning of their religious identity in an environment they feel that they don't belong to enables an understanding of the extent to which they negotiate meaning outside this environment.

What emerges from the narratives of the respondents is the emergence of double exclusion that is overtly palpable to some of the respondents who are ethnically and culturally different even in an environment where there is a fundamental similarity. The interviews revealed that the emergence of double exclusion has had an impact on the religious identity development of some of the respondents, particularly those who spoke about the differences between the 'Islam' they were exposed to. Some of the graduates believed that not only did their experiences offer the 'trappings' that make an Islamic school 'Islamic,' the school culture(s) they were exposed to had an impact on the development of their Islamic identity. It enabled them to experience, first hand, the gap between rhetoric and reality. This is to say that some of their experiences enabled them to see for themselves that experiences like these led some of the participants to believe that perhaps it is not an Islamic school's role to foster a sense of an Islamic identity.

A sense of exclusion may exist for students who either do not come from 'practising' or 'observant' homes but identify with Islam (Yasmeen, 2008: 73) and may perhaps be subjected to 'varying degrees of exclusion' within the school. This is important because the barriers of the different forms of exclusion and isolation differ from one Islamic school to another. The chapter has also shown that graduates in the research study 'developed [their own] frameworks of analysis that assist them in understanding' the nuanced nature of

religious identity development (Yasmeen, 2008: 10). For some students who do not have access to alternative sources, narratives and languages, these can influence their understanding of a distinction between religious and cultural practices.

Conversely, within the parameters of Islamic schools interview respondents were aware of how the school environment contributes to a sense of exclusion. When focusing on the experiences of Victoria's Muslim youths in Islamic schools and the 'Islamic environment' it becomes noticeable that graduates express multiple interpretations of these environments. This chapter explored how students interact with the unintended consequence of well-intentioned Islamic schools and the impact of this on the emergence of experiences of double exclusion in ethnic minority young Muslims.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

‘It’s hard being a girl in an Islamic school’: Islamic schools and gendered Islamic identities

The focus on graduates’ experiences of gender discourses enables an exploration of how gendered identities are constructed in an Islamic school environment. This chapter explores how graduates, in particular female graduates, interpret their school experiences as fundamentally gendered experiences. In examining the narratives in this chapter the analysis adopts an Islamic feminist perspective. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a critical focus on the interplay between the development of gendered identities, understandings of patriarchy and constructions of Islamic identity in Islamic schools. The chapter also explores how both males and females interact and engage with the Islamic school environment to accept, omit, reject, filter and/or moderate, subtly or otherwise, the layered gendered cues that they receive.

Culture, Patriarchy and Constructions of Identity: Muslim Women’s Experience

The following section explores how graduates in the research felt their schooling experiences determined constructions of femininity and masculinity and the extent to which their engagement with the school environment informs their understanding of their Islamic identity as gendered. Some of the females in the research reported that their schooling experience belittled them by enforcing the notion that Muslim girls were ‘the precious ones in the schools’ and in need of ‘protection’ (Maya Abdul-Malik, 19 years old, Palestinian). Despite the construction of Muslim girls as ‘precious’ and as *objects* worth ‘protecting’ from their male peers, it is an expression of patriarchal values that one respondent referred to as ‘not even Islamic.’ However, students also received mixed messages because schools ‘also

thought that boys and girls were equals' (Maya Abdul-Malik, 19 years old, Palestinian). Maya comes from an upbringing that encouraged active female participation and the contradictory messages she received confused her and her peers. The Islam Maya read about and lived at home did not reflect the Islam she experienced at Al Madinah Islamic College. For example, a notable feature of patriarchy-based gender roles Maya experienced both at Al-Madinah Islamic College and Khalifah Islamic College was the school's belief that the female students' need 'more because they are sometimes afraid to speak up' than their male peers' (Maya Abdul-Malik, 19 years old, Palestinian).

The belief that female students 'need more' might be viewed as positive by some because it acknowledges that male and female students have different educational needs. It may even be considered a feminist approach. However, Maya felt that Al Madinah Islamic College's treatment of female students as 'precious' beings that 'need more' undermines and undervalues female students' understanding of themselves as Muslim girls. In spite of this Maya reveals:

Even though the school made it important for girls to be considered precious, they also thought that boys and girls were equals. But, I think girls do need more because they are sometimes afraid to speak up.

Interviewer: What do you mean by girls needing more?

Maya: For example if girls are being harassed by guys they would either just walk away and cry or let the boys do and say whatever they want.

(Maya Abdul-Malik, 19 years old, Palestinian)

Another experience that is in line with the notion of female students at Al Madinah Islamic College as 'precious' beings deserving of protection was a school rule that ensured that they didn't play soccer. As absurd as this may sound, this issue of female students not being able to play soccer was referred to by four of the other participants in the research

study –Adam Abdul-Malik; Ali Saleh; Halimah Aydin; and Sajidah Muhammad –who also graduated from Al Madinah Islamic College. Halimah Aydin, a 21 year old Turkish graduate of Al Madinah Islamic College, also noted that:

There was this thing that we weren't allowed to play soccer. My sister and her friends formed a team to play soccer but the teachers said they weren't allowed. My sister and friends weren't happy about it.

(Halimah Aydin, 21 years old, Turkish)

Halimah's experience reveals that this rule had implications for female students' conceptualisation of femininity and by extension an understanding of themselves as Muslim girls. It highlights that Al Madinah Islamic College's construction of being a 'good' Muslim girl is not always rooted in religious values and principles. In light of this Al-Madinah Islamic College sees itself as being the leading Islamic school in Victoria. As such Al-Madinah Islamic College is committed to the delivering the following principle:

Ensuring that students are treated fairly and equally regardless of 'color, race, religion or gender'

(Al-Madinah Islamic College, 2013)

This is ironic. Al Madinah Islamic College enforces a rule that does not allow for the full participation of female students, something which contradicts the school's own policy. In spite of this principle, as Maya's interview continues she reveals that the equal treatment of male and female students was subject to the whims of the teachers:

In the classroom, depending on the teacher, we were sometimes treated differently. I realised that the female teachers would always stand up for the boys and the male teachers would be closer to the girls. I don't know what that was about, though.

(Maya Abdul-Malik, 19 years old, Palestinian)

Even though Maya acknowledged that the school environment tried to foster a sense of equality their overall inability to do so impacted female students' conceptualisation of their sense of self and their role as Muslim women in an environment that is created to foster belonging irrespective of gender. Similarly, Halimah reveals that Al Madinah Islamic College was not an empowering Islamic school environment for her because 'I never thought of myself as a girl [at Al Madinah Islamic College]' (Halimah Aydin, 21 years old, Turkish). When asked to elaborate on and reflect on what it means to be a girl at Al Madinah Islamic College Halimah stated that:

I just thought of myself as someone normal. Just as a person. In my head I'm just a person. It's so hard being a girl.'

(Halimah Aydin, 21 years old, Turkish)

From the above excerpt an interesting, albeit contradictory, insight into Halimah's experience becomes noticeable. Whilst acknowledging the environment at Al Madinah Islamic College as a place that made her see herself 'as someone normal' may be considered as an empowering and feminist perspective, the revelation 'it's so hard being a girl' tell us otherwise. Saharah Ali, a 21 year old Somali graduate from Al-Madinah Islamic College also made references to Al Madinah Islamic College's preoccupation with female students' appearance and how they were made to feel:

Really aware of the way you look(ed). You can't have your clothes too short; you can't have your clothes too tight. You had a very strict uniform. You can't go around the boys. When you're outside (of the school) you're just a human being, you're just another person. But at school they're so focused on us being girls and telling us what we should and shouldn't be doing. There are certain expectations that are sometimes too much for a female especially at an Islamic school.

Interviewer: Do you think the expectations were different for the males?

Saharah: According to the way the system worked there, girls are supposed to be modest; you're not supposed to go around chasing boys. Even if they (the school) said we're precious or we're important that would be okay because that's a compliment but it seems like they're keeping us from a world that wasn't all that evil.

(Saharah Ali, 21 years old, Somali)

For Saharah, gendered identity construction manifested itself contradictorily at Al Madinah Islamic College through its ability to socialise both the experiences of visibility (a focus on what you look like) and 'invisibility' of constructions of femininity. Saharah's reflections are important in the context of the wider conversation on how patriarchy informs constructions of gendered religious identity. They are also important in highlighting Al Madinah Islamic College's attempts to coddle female students to produce what it perceives to be good Muslim girls. The different gendered expectations for male and female students at Al Madinah Islamic College and the treatment of female students with kid gloves in need of protection produces complex understandings of female students' *place* both in and outside of the school community. Despite this Saharah acknowledges that an Islamic school does have a responsibility to foster a sense of an Islamic identity without patriarchal features because:

[Students] are there from 9-5, Monday to Friday, five days a week for every month, every year. So a lot of the student's ideology is based from the school.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ideology?

Saharah: I don't mean it to sound loaded in the way I use it. What I mean is that they use a little Islam and a lot of everything else they make up. It's mainly rooted in what they want. A lot of it doesn't come from what's in the religion and what the religion teaches us.

Interviewer: What would be an example of that?

Saharah: Segregation of the boys and girls in different areas; girls not being able to play soccer; and girls not being able to go on [school] camps.

(Saharah Ali, 21 years old, Somali)

Saharah, like most participants, was conscious that the school's policies, particularly student behavioural conduct policies, were derived from 'what they (the school) want' with 'little Islamic basis.' Students were also aware that the school culture and environment did not provide a 'space' for students to create alternative understandings of themselves as Muslim girls/women. Saharah's experience at Al Madinah Islamic College is not unique. Sajidah Muhammad, a 21 year old Palestinian student-teacher, had a similar experience. Sajidah reflected that:

Sajidah: For grade 5, 6, 7 and 8 I had been at a girls' school so that was a big change for me. And then to see the way they (Al Madinah Islamic College) applied Islam was interesting: the way they tried to segregate the students even though it was a mixed school and the way that they applied certain rulings and tried to teach you (students) your role.

Interviewer: Your role as what?

Sajidah: Your role as a female and your role as a male. All of that was something that I hadn't experienced anywhere else at any other school. I think that was something unique about the school.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Sajidah: I guess because you always want to be a good Muslim and when you're in your early teens you don't exactly know what expected behaviour is so you learn it as you grow up. There are certain rulings on how you should behave with the opposite gender. The school sets out what they consider is correct. The school, even though expected both (boys and girls) to be present on the premises it expected no interaction at all, which wasn't realistic. They'd be with you in class and you'd have to at least learn how to have respect relationships but the school expected no relationships at all. And that sort of made it hard because there's a lot of guilt involved. It makes the girls feel a bit marginalised because they're expected to always be quiet or to be at the back of the room. I found that a bit of an issue. If you wanted to put forward your point of view or share and be a full participant you were made to feel like you were outside your role. To the school that's not considered very appropriate. I felt like female participation was always pulled behind. Anything done inside of the school you, as a female, weren't the one that that was encouraged to take leadership roles. I think a lot of girls reacted to it negatively because it's really hard to suppress half of the school.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

Before unpacking the insights of the above excerpt, as the interview continues, Sajidah stated that students at Al Madinah Islamic College were exposed to expressions of Islamically-inspired constructions of behavioural conduct policies that come from external sources. This is to say that, as we have explored in the previous chapter, the lines between the local Muslim community and the school community at Al Madinah Islamic College were blurred. This too had an impact on constructions of female students' religious identity. Students received blurred messages on constructions of gendered Islamic identity from visiting scholars and Imams invited to make religious and motivational talks:

They had both conservative political and religious views. Just because they have an opinion it doesn't mean that theirs is the only valid or articulate one, you know? Sometimes we had *khutbahs* and they would talk about certain issues that doesn't allow for activism. For me I would go on Islamic forums and try to debate with people who had these views that were similar to the ones with the people at school. I would go on islamonline.com for example and I would find articles on the compatibility between Islam and democracy and the real role of women in Islam and I would bring these and show them (teachers and some students) that what they said doesn't make sense.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

When asked to comment on how Al Madinah Islamic College facilitates or filters students' engagement with patriarchal cues Sajidah stated that:

The school tries to bring people from outside to do *khutbahs* or in Ramadhan to do activities. And the reasons why they do it is because they consider it as part of *da'wah* (proselytising mission) and providing something for the community. What tends to happen is that the people they invite are of a certain view. Sometimes they invite someone who is popular. Usually people with different sort of background (than to those invited to speak at the school) are seen as troublesome because they raise issues in the *khutbahs* that can be troublesome for the school to deal with later, so they don't usually get invited by the school. They don't want people to come in and say women can be leaders for example. I don't know why the school sees that as a threat. They would appeal to those dominant voices in the community and therefore the school won't get in trouble and won't have too many complaints from people in the community. Imagine if they brought someone who is always talking against domestic violence

and talking about how we need to be politically active and someone who thought women should be full and equal participants in society. I don't think there's anything wrong with bringing someone who thought like that. A lot of people in the community don't understand it yet. They think 'oh, look the school is becoming feminist now,' and they consider this western thinking. They (the school) might not consider it a popular view. They don't see it as part of its role –to create change. Education should ultimately be about changing and developing a person's character and developing their views and creating leaders for the future. So ultimately you (as a school) are creating change but it's about what you implant in your students. I don't feel like the school is really taking on much leadership in terms of social change.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

Before attending a co-educational Islamic school, Sajidah went to an all-girls school in metropolitan Melbourne. Restricting the agency and sense of empowerment of female students in an Islamic school setting was a new experience for her. For Sajidah, the idea of being in a co-educational environment without being able to engage and interact with peers of the opposite gender was bizarre and had a negative effect on female students' conceptualisation of their femininity and Islamic identity. Prescriptions of gender roles for female students, in particular, were new experiences for Sajidah. Being at Al Madinah Islamic enabled her to explore the distinction between patriarchy and gender roles derived from Islamic texts that reaffirm Muslim women's empowerment and what was taking place within the school environment. Aside from Sajidah's belief that is derived from her family upbringing; young people are susceptible to wanting to please their elders. Sajidah finds that young people are increasingly questioning what schools consider as *appropriate* and *correct* behaviour for female and male students, respectively. Furthermore, Sajidah's interview reveals that students, in particular female students, face external demands for their attention vis-à-vis constructions of appropriate gendered behaviour.

Feminism and Productions of Islamic Identity

Constructions of masculinity and conceptualisations of Muslim boys in Islamic schools have gone under-researched (Archer, 2003). The following analysis explores how both male and female graduates engage with their schools' understanding of religious texts to contribute to the development of gendered Islamic identities. In Victoria's Islamic schools Muslim girls are more likely to confront conflicting standards of being a 'good' Muslim than their male peers. Zara Yusuf, a 22 year old Australian Tunisian, who graduated from Al Hijrah Islamic College in Victoria's south-eastern suburbs, faced difficulty in responding to the question 'what's it like being a girl in an Islamic school?' Zara's schooling experience imparted an understanding of being a Muslim girl/woman that was primarily focused on ritualistic performances or expressions of Islam. She highlighted expressions that focus on teaching students to distinguish between *haram* (non-permissible) and *halal* (permissible) behaviour for students as well as teaching students the fundamentals of what it means to be a 'Muslim' without gender-based signifiers.

Zara reveals that Al Hijrah Islamic College adopted this particular approach because a majority of the students came from families that were not necessarily 'practicing' or 'pious' even though they had a strong connection to Islam. The school was responding to families' needs to have their children to have a greater understanding and connection to Islam. For Zara the school's primary focus was on stressing the importance of being Muslim and a sense of pride in 'being Muslim' more than making distinctions between appropriate behaviour for male and female students (Zara Yusuf, 2012). Encompassed in this seemingly gender-neutral conceptualisation of being Muslim is Al Hijrah Islamic College's promotion of academic excellence and success and a moving away from prescribed gender behaviour.

Zara reflected that:

As well as caring about Islam they also emphasised being studious and getting an education and going to university. There's no such thing as TAFE for our parents, you're an engineer, you're a lawyer, and you're a doctor and that sort of thing. They had an Arab mentality of 'university is important, studying is important, getting an education is important.' Everyone was encouraged to, even students who may not have had much interest, capacity or potential. Al Hijrah Islamic College still encouraged them to go to university. I think it can be a positive culture but at the same time I think that it can be overwhelming for students. My brother, for example, is not all that academic, he's graduating this year and I think it's important for students like him to also feel welcome and that they feel like they have alternatives outside of university. I think they need to be a little bit more open in that regard. But I think as with any minority, because Muslims are a minority, we need to make a place for ourselves in society. We have something to prove. And I think they have that mentality also and I think that's why becoming an artist or an athlete is not a viable option.

(Zara Yusuf, 22 years old, Australian Tunisian)

The above excerpt reveals that Al Hijrah Islamic College was an environment that focused on fostering a gender neutral understanding of being Muslim. In contrast to Zara's reflection, Sajidah Muhammad and Halimah Aydin were perhaps hyperaware of their gender at Al Madinah Islamic College. For Sajidah being a girl at Al Madinah Islamic College 'felt like you had to battle even against the other girls who had certain views about being a woman that I felt were really marginalising' (Sajidah Muhammad, 2013). In an attempt to counter these narratives she felt were marginalising, Sajidah had resorted to using the internet to find a more inclusive and comprehensive conceptualisation of being a Muslim girl/woman:

I would go online and search for *fatwas* (non-binding religious opinion) about how a woman can be a leader and that she can be a head of state. They (some teachers and students) would be like 'where'd you get this from?' and wouldn't consider the opinions I researched to be mainstream. I didn't really need the support of someone at school to tell me what things were; my parents had more progressive views anyways. But for a lot of the girls I think they missed out on knowing the alternative views about their role as a woman. Some of the girls in my class couldn't reconcile being an

empowered and successful woman and being Muslim. They couldn't bring it together. So now those who did become empowered and successful and took on leadership roles did it by leaving their Islamic identity behind. I know almost all my friends took off their hijab after they left and they got jobs and they're happy. They're leading fulfilling lives but they did it because they left behind their Islamic identity. They felt that being Muslim was limiting. This is part of the problem about the way the school teaches you how to be a woman.

(Sajidah Muhammad, 21 years old, Palestinian)

In both of Zara and Sajidah's reflections at their respective Islamic schools there is an element of 'self-regulation' and 'positive peer pressure' at play in the process of gendered Islamic identity development. What is interesting about Zara's experience at Al Hijrah Islamic College's attempt to provide a gender-neutral is that it can result in a stripping of female students' gender. Similarly, Sumayya Ahmed, a 22 year old Oromo graduate of Sultan Fatih Islamic College in Victoria's northern suburbs, commented on how her school experience made her gender redundant. For Sumayya being a girl for was not something that 'mattered in [her] overall experience at a Muslim school [because she] never thought of [herself] as a girl or woman' (Sumayya Ahmed, 2012). As the interview continues it becomes noticeable that Sumayya was in fact conscious of herself as girl/woman but only in relation to how she relates to her male peers. Being conscious of an individual's gender in an Islamic school has an impact on the development of Islamic identity for both boys and girls. Ali Saleh's, a 20 year old Somali graduate of Al Madinah Islamic College, response to the question 'what's it like being a boy at an Islamic school?' is particularly interesting:

Ali: It was very different from (being a boy/male) at a non-Islamic school. You were obviously seen different. You were seen as someone more authoritative as opposed to at a non-Islamic school. At my other school (the local state primary school) the boys and girls we were pretty much treated the same. Being a boy at the local primary school was different to being a boy at an Islamic school.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Ali: I got the feeling that males always got more rights than the females at the Islamic school.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on that?

Ali: Well, in terms of freedom the females there was always a problem with makeup and jewellery and that instigated some fights and arguments between female students and the school coordination unit staff. We, as males, didn't have to go through all that. There were a few girls that expressed their views about this and they got suspended. And some girls weren't happy. Some actually did leave the school.

(Ali Saleh, 20 years old, Somali)

In contrast to Ali's experience at Al Madinah Islamic College as a *space* that reaffirms patriarchal values, Adam Abdul-Malik's experience at the same school was markedly different. Adam Abdul-Malik a 23 year old Palestinian felt that male students were 'cheated' of a comprehensive experience because:

Adam: The guys always had the bad stuff. So we had all the bad religious teachers like Sheikh Othman, Sheikh Jamal and a few short stints of Sheikh Abu Bilal and Yusuf Abubakir. We were always given the junk of Islamic studies' teachers who were never there for a whole year. Girls would have a proper teacher who was there the whole time. When a guy in my class has to go and talk to my mum because she was a religious studies teacher about his problems because there's no proper male religious studies teacher than you, as a school, have a problem. There's no support for guys in terms of having someone to talk to. Guys have problems too. There was never anyone to talk to.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate more on what you mean by 'the boys got the junk?'

Adam: In terms of support yes they did. But the guys might've had it easier in other things just because they were guys. I think the guys got off lightly for doing stuff that girls weren't doing.

(Adam Abdul-Malik, 23 years old, Palestinian)

What the two excerpts of Adam and Ali illustrate is that even though both of them attended the same school their experiences differed. This highlights the fact that a Muslim

students' development of their religious identity is an individualised process informed by a socialisation of patriarchal understanding of Islam. They also provided insight into how male students at Al Madinah Islamic College were acutely more conscious of gender than their female peers. Whether or not this was a product of the school environment's emphasis to communicate particularly masculine perspectives of Islamic identity or the school environment's attempt to 'strip' female students of gender consciousness is difficult to ascertain. However, reflections of (in)visibility of gendered experiences of their school environment are not unique to the female participants in the research study. Zayn Ali, a 25 year old Somali graduate of Khalifah Islamic College stated:

Zayn: I don't think I was ever conscious of my gender at [Khalifah Islamic College].

Interviewer: Why do you think that is? And is it indicative of anything?

Zayn: I don't know. But what I do know is that I was privileged because I am a boy. But I probably wasn't conscious of the fact there was anything wrong with it. I was very uncomfortable with how the girls were restricted, though. And segregation was done in a way that didn't make sense.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Zayn: We are segregated (in the class room) when we're really not aware of the opposite gender (primary school and early high school) but the moment you are aware and conscious of the opposite gender, say in year 12, segregation no longer exists. I just couldn't understand it, it's insane. This is the most stupid policy I've seen. I never understood why they would even do it. Is it more about performance: this (gender segregation) is Islamic and therefore the students should be segregated? I realised that this was what it was about.

(Zayn Ali, 25 years old, Somali)

Zayn's acknowledgement of his privilege had the opposite effect than reaffirming the position of boys as superior whilst othering female students, 'manifest[ing] in their exclusion' (Keddie, 2001: 75). In contrast, Salahuddin Ibrahim's insight of whether or not Al Hijrah Islamic College provides a gendered experience for students provides another male

perspective. Salahuddin reveals that being a male at Al Hijrah Islamic College wasn't 'particularly different to being a female' however:

They (the school) liked the idea of having charismatic Muslim males present at public places. But it didn't have an impact on me too much because before I was in year 12, I didn't really get too involved in school activities. So being a man at a Muslim school didn't have much of an impact on me. But you can tell they expected more from the guys.

Interviewer: Why do you think that was the case?

Salahuddin: It's hard to say. It has a lot to do with the traditional understandings of patriarchy that's quite common in the backgrounds of a lot of the people that you see at Muslim schools. Whether or not that played a part is quite possible. They expected more from the guys.

(Salahuddin Ibrahim, 23 years old, Middle Eastern)

The above excerpt contradicts Zara's reflection of Al Hijrah Islamic College as an environment that does not necessarily provide distinct experiences of gendered religious identities. Salahuddin notes that Al Hijrah Islamic College as an environment with 'traditional understanding of patriarchy' which in turn informs how gender is played out in the school yard. The experiences of the male graduates in the research study highlights a level of hyperawareness of their male privilege within the parameters of the Islamic school environment; an awareness that comes at the expense of their female peers' consciousness of themselves as girls/women and its impact on religious identity construction.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how patriarchy, understandings of feminism and gender dynamics are at play in Muslim students' identity construction. The chapter drew on a range of examples to highlight how graduates understand and make meaning of their religious identity as gendered. By doing so, it is acknowledged that even as *spaces* that are intended to engender a sense of inclusiveness and belonging, Islamic schools may not necessarily be able to do so. The

preceding chapter has demonstrated that participants in the research study felt that their experiences were gendered largely as a function of the school's culture more so than a particular reading of Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings. The challenges that both genders face in developing their religious identity in Islamic schools guide the parameters of the analysis. Here, the study took into account whether or not students construct understandings of femininity and masculinity in response to their engagement with the school environment. How gendered Islamic identities are scripted and re-scripted in Islamic schools is important in the wider discussion on the role of Islamic schools in constructions of femininity. In examining constructions of gender 'within a faith-centred paradigm' it is important to understand how students mediate, facilitate accommodate or redefine the school's own '[religious scripts] that implicate the ways in which gender roles [manifest themselves in the school yard]' (Zine, 2008: 183 and 187, respectively). This would allow an understanding of how students create alternative understanding of their role as Muslim girls and boys and the limitations they face in achieving this goal.

In the broader debate on how patriarchy informs the role of Islamic schools the conversation seems to be confined to the internal environment of the school. In the case of Al Madinah Islamic College the lines between the school and the community are blurred. The implications of the blurring of the lines between the internal and external do have an impact on female students' conceptualisation of their identity. This chapter explored how students engage and interact with the school's notion of appropriate gender-based behaviour for students. The experiences provided have illustrated that Halimah, Saharah, Sajidah and Maya were conscious of the school's inability to create a space for students to explore what it means to be a woman/girl in at an Islamic school in a manner that resonates with them. This is to say that the narratives revealed that although there were aspects of their schooling

experience (i.e. the lifelong friendships they made), the environment at the school made them conscious of the ‘rhetoric/reality gap.’

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

The research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Victoria's Islamic school as sites for Islamic identity construction. If Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools were to be arranged along a continuum ranging from traditionalism and religio-cultural conservatism on one end to a more 'liberal' 'school for Muslims' at the other, participants in the research study experienced both environments. Victoria's Islamic schools provide a structure to each day that sequesters them from 'the outside world' (Parker, 2008).

Victoria's Islamic schools are a relatively new addition to Victoria's educational landscape. They have all been established by the first wave of Muslims migrating to Australia, primarily from the Middle East, Turkey and the Indian subcontinent. The research has provided a descriptive profile of Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools. It has also taken into consideration the impact and influences that early group of Muslims migrants have on developing infrastructure such as Islamic schools.

The research study has provided an analysis on how the different environments in Victoria's Islamic schools influence the religious identity construction of students. Although limited, the literature on Islamic schools in Victoria provides valuable insights into the history and rationale of their emergence in Australia's educational landscape. This research study represents a continuation of the discourse that seeks to understand the impact of Islamic schools on young Muslims beyond their educational outcomes in these institutions. The research study primarily sought to understand and analyse how attending and graduating from an Islamic school can influence a student's religious identity development. The themes that

emerged from the interviews explored participants' reflections on being a student at an Islamic school and their reflections on their experiences of: (i) Islamic schools as a 'bubble-like' environments; (ii) the schools' inability to foster a sense of belonging therefore inadvertently facilitating double exclusion; and (iii) Islamic schools as facilitators of gendered Islamic identities for Muslim students, particularly for female students.

The research has demonstrated that Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools are not similar in terms of the 'Islamic' environments they foster; the administrative culture within the schools; and how Islamic studies are taught in schools. The research did this primarily to also highlight the complex and dynamic role that an Islamic school has on the religious identity development of its students. Although outwardly 'Islamic,' Islamic schools in Victoria tend to adopt a religio-cultural understanding of Islam that may not implicitly align with that of their students. This may take place as a result of either their practices, the school culture, the religious school of thought that school administrators may ascribe to or 'socially [and religiously] constructed categories' (Zine, 2006: 188). Even though these outward declarations of religious identity are critical to fostering a sense of religious identity, interview respondents noted that there was a gap in the way that the schools catered to them beyond the outward physical expressions of being Muslim. The inability of the school community, teachers and its administrators to cater to the needs of all their students causes students to experience the school environment as space that excludes them, which is contrary to their ultimate aims of objectives of providing a safe and inclusive space for students.

The research began by addressing and problematising the issues that assist in understanding how Islamic schools influence religious identity development of students. Chapter One provided a brief survey of Islam in Australia, background information on

Australia's faith-based educational landscape and a history of Islamic schools in Australia. It looked into understanding why Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools. Muslim parents' choice to send their children to Islamic schools can represent an exercise of their agency that reflects the limited options of culturally and religiously appropriate educational environments available to them. It is perhaps the latter that motivates parents' 'choice of school' because it has more to do with a question 'of [emotional and religious] security and well-being than for the purpose of religion' (Berglund, 2012: 45). Additionally, the choice of Muslim parents to send their children to Islamic schools may primarily be perceived as an attempt by them to insulate their children from environments that would make their 'difference' hyper-visible. This motivates them to choose an educational environment that allows them to accept, embrace and perhaps even redefine their differences. Furthermore, as a comparatively young religious community in Australia, Islamic schools for Muslim communities in diaspora may be considered as spaces that 'convey Islam as the norm for both learning and living [for Muslim students]' (Berglund, 2012: 47).

Chapter Two outlined the key conceptual framework that underpinned the research study. It explored how the concept of safe spaces was used to make sense of the experiences of young Muslims in Victoria's Islamic schools. It also explored the different approaches to religious identity development of Muslim youths. The chapter analysed the relationship between religious identity construction and Islamic schools by exploring the literature on religious identity development of young Muslims at Victoria's Islamic schools. The concepts of safe spaces and double exclusion provide an opportunity to rethink how Islamic schools are perceived. This is to say that whilst Islamic schools offer a haven from the pressures of 'the outside world' for some students they can be isolating and exclusionary environments for others. The literature has also demonstrated that how male and female students use and

operate in an Islamic school environment differs noticeably. What this indicates is that Islamic school environments can be sites that reinforce gendered understandings of Islam. The concepts used to underpin this research are critical to understanding the role of Islamic schools play in facilitating students' religious identity construction.

Chapter Three showcased profiles of Victoria's nine self-identifying Islamic schools. It provided insight into both the similarities and differences between the aims and the perspectives of the nine self-identifying Islamic schools in Victoria. Islamic schools have 'emerged as the locale where Islamic identity is fostered [and facilitated] (Yasmeen, 2008: 77). Therefore, 'the very essence of Islamic school is the teaching of Islam' (Keyworth, 2011: 5). This chapter explored how an Islamic school's environment contributed to a student's sense of 'being' and 'becoming' Muslims (Haw, 2010: 348). Based on the profiles of Victoria's self-identifying Islamic schools, they are environments that would ideally accommodate the needs of any students. The impact of adopting a 'one size fits all' approach may have detrimental effects on students who do not fit in. These environments do not ultimately suit all students despite the differences that exist between all of Victoria's Islamic schools. Chapter Three provides descriptive profiles of the range of Victoria's Islamic schools but concludes that their success and sustainability vis-à-vis religious identity construction and as a space that fosters belonging is contingent on their ability to adapt to the needs of Victoria's diverse second and third generation Muslims.

Chapter Four outlined the research methodology. The open-ended semi-structured interview approach adopted for this research study enabled the ten research participants to speak openly and freely. Even though the research study had a set of predetermined open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews enabled participants to direct the fluidity and

direction of their narratives. It also provided an opportunity for other questions to emerge from the dialogue that might otherwise not have emerged if another qualitative research method was adopted. Additionally, the open-ended semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for participants and the interviewer, alike, to explore in-depth the nuances of the experiences and narratives participants shared about their Islamic school experiences that a survey or group interview may not facilitate. An open-ended semi-structured interview is the preferred method for this context because it allows the interviewer, in the analysis of the material, to ascertain the shared understandings and challenges of graduates of Victoria's Islamic schools.

Chapter Five explored how participants in the research experienced Islamic schools as sites that simulate a 'bubble' like environment in an attempt to create a safe space for students. It illustrated how students engage with Islamic schools as safe spaces and its impact on their sense of self as Muslims in Australia. For example, for Halimah Aydin, a 21 year old Turkish student who attended Al Madinah Islamic College from prep to year 12, being in the school's 'bubble' had a particularly negative impact. It impaired her interaction post-graduation with not only other Muslims outside her school and cultural community, but her peers at university and colleagues at work. Her poignant reflections, however, indicate that in spite of the insular environment at Al Madinah Islamic College it gave her the 'distance' she thought she needed to survive in 'the outside world.' The fact that Halimah only attended not only one Islamic school but only one educational setting may have influenced her understanding of how to be Muslim in Australia. For other students, Adam Abdul-Malik and Sajidah Muhammad, they were not particularly fazed or concerned about a school's 'bubble-like' effect. For Adam Abdul-Malik and Sajidah Muhammad, in particular, they had access to supplementary Islamic schooling environments. Halimah's, Adam's and Sajidah's

experiences represent that Victoria's Islamic schools, on their own, are not sufficient enough to meet the needs of students in terms of Islamic identity construction.

Chapter Six explored how students experienced their school environment as spaces that contributed to exclusion, particularly for ethnic minority young Muslims. Saharah Ali, Sumayya Ahmed, Zayn Ali and Ali Saleh, who were members of ethnic minorities at their respective Islamic schools, can recount a number of examples of exclusion that tainted their schooling experiences. Zayn Ali's experiences provided a narrative that encompasses identity confusion, discrimination, and exclusion. His example is possibly becoming a norm for young people graduating from Victoria's Islamic schools, particularly those from a school's ethnic minority, as Australia's Muslim population diversifies. Even though this is difficult to substantiate, it is a possibility that has serious implications. If the environments that are intended to engender belonging and inclusion have the opposite effect it calls for a serious internal questioning of the impact of Islamic schools. These could offer less of the 'trappings' of Islam that is symptomatic of Victoria's Islamic schools and more of an environment that is accommodating and inclusive: moreover, an environment that does not constantly expect students to straddle the gap between the Islam they experienced outside the school environment and the Islam they are exposed to at school.

Chapter Seven surveyed how students experienced their Islamic school environments as sites that facilitated gendered Islamic identities. It provided insight into the challenges male and female participants experienced in understanding their religious identity. Participants' experiences provided insight into how a school's prescribed gender roles affect, primarily, female students' construction of their Islamic identity. Some key questions that emerged from a gender-based inquiry of Victoria's Islamic schools are: What does it mean to

be a woman/man to students at Victoria's Islamic schools? How are notions of 'being a Muslim woman/man' articulated from students' perspectives? These questions enable an understanding of whether or not a gendered religious identity is being articulated in Islamic schools and how gendered religious relations particularly impact female students. The discussion on an Islamic school's impact on the development of a gendered Islamic identity is explored primarily through graduates' reflections on 'scripted' gendered religious roles and identities.

An Islamic school's ability to facilitate the religious identity construction of their students hinges on a school being engaging and relevant to students. Using Islamic schools in Victoria as an example and the Islamic environments they cultivate, it becomes visible from the interviews that it takes more than having an Islamic 'infrastructure' such as a mosque or prayer space; a canteen that serves halal food; and enforcing *hijab* to facilitate a sense of Islamic consciousness and an Islamic identity. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that the participants in the research looked to other sites –the internet, university social clubs, supplementary weekend Islamic schools, etc. – to develop their own framework for understanding their Islamic identity.

The limited research on Australian Islamic schools reinforces the need for further research. As the Muslim community in Australia grows, so too will the demand for Islamic schools (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). The existing number of Islamic schools in Victoria specifically is unable to accommodate the demand (Clyne, 2001; Rahani and Gurr, 2010: 4-5). Therefore, it is critical that we deepen our understanding of how Islamic schools not only facilitate religious identity development but other facets of a student's emotional, religious, spiritual and psychological development.

In spite of the criticisms levelled against Islamic schools as environments that isolate students, as environments that encourage disengagement, the interviews revealed that Islamic schools did not have this effect on students. Rather, Islamic schools elicit diverse and complex responses from research participants. What emerges is that participants were conscious of the fact that their Islamic school experiences did have an impact on their understanding of being Muslim in Australia, but not always in ways perhaps intended by the schools themselves. It is important to note however, that the development of a student's Islamic identity was a process that was consolidated long after their schooling experience at an Islamic school. The role of Victoria's Islamic schools in the construction of student's religious identity construction is therefore complex and layered. As such, the development of a student's religious identity construction is not bound to the length of time they spent in these environments. These experiences inform a component, albeit critical, of a student's religious and self-identity in the most formative years of their lives. In times of geopolitical tension and uncertainty these environments need to facilitate many options for belonging and religious identity construction.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, C. (1996) *The Art of Being Black: The Creation of Black British Youth Identities*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Al Siraat College (2013) <http://www.alsiraat.vic.edu.au/asc/>
- Al Taqwa College (2013) <http://www.al-taqwa.vic.edu.au/>
- Ammerman, N. (2003) Religious Identities and Religious Institutions in Michele Dillon (Eds.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, L. (2003) *Race, masculinity and schooling: Muslim boys and education*. London: Open University Press.
- Archer, L. (2011) 'Muslim Brothers, Black Lads, Traditional Asians': British Muslim Young Men's Constructions of Race, Religion and Masculinity. *Feminism & Psychology*, SAGE Publications
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012) "Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013." <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>
- Australian International Academy (2013) <http://www.aiahome.net/msc/>
- Azzi, E., X. Chrysochoou, B. Klandermans, and B. Simon, eds. (2011) *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Badran, M. (2000) Exploring Islamic feminism. *Woodrow Wilson Center*. Stable URL: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1426&fuseaction=topics.event_summary&event_id=42775
- Berglund, J. (2012) Muslim Schools in the Nordic Countries in Lauwers, G. De Groof, J. and De Hert, P. (Eds.) *Islam (Instruction) in State-Funded Schools*. http://www.academia.edu/1552546/Muslim_schools_in_the_Nordic_countries
- Browne, M., Carbonell, D., Merrill, J. (2003) *Intercultural Inquiry of Religion and Identity-Making*. Carnegie Mellon University.
- Buckingham, J. (2010) *The Rise of Religious Schools*. Centre for Independent Studies.
- Buckley, S. (1997) "Islamic Schooling in Australia." *Insight*. <http://www.ifew.com/insight/v12i03/schling.html>
- Buckley, S. (2003) "Islamic Schooling in Australia" *Insight* Vol. 12 www.ifew.com/insight/v12i03/schling.htm.

- Cesari, J. (2004) *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and the United States*. New York: Palgrave.
- Choudhury, T (2007) *The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation (a study in progress)*. 2007 Department for Communities and Local Government: London Communities and Local Government Eland House Bressenden Place. University of Durham.
- Cleland, B. (2002) *The Muslims in Australia: A Brief History*. Melbourne: Islamic Council of Victoria.
- Connell, R. (1995) *Masculinities*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children: Social Relations in a Multi-ethnic, Inner-city Primary School*. London: Routledge.
- Cornell, P. and Fahlander, F. (2007). *Encounters, Materialities, Confrontations: Archaeologies of Social Space and Interaction*. United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Press
- Clyne, I. D. (2001). *Educating Muslim Children in Australia*. In A. Saeed & S. Akbarzadeh (eds.) *Muslim communities in Australia*. (pp. 116-137). Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Darul Ulum College of Victoria (2013) <http://www.dulum.vic.edu.au/index.aspx>
- Donohou Clyne, I (2000) 'Seeking Education: the struggle of Muslims to educate their children in Australia', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne.
- Driessen, G. & Valkenberg, P. (2000) *Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Compromising Between Identity and Quality?* *British Journal of Religious Education*. 23:1, pp. 15-26.
- Drissel, D. (2007) "Online Jihadism for the Hip-Hop Generation: Mobilizing Diasporic Muslim Youth in Cyberspace." *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 2 (4): 5–19.
- Drissel, D. (2009) "Hip-Hop Hybridity for a Glocalised World: African and Muslim Diasporic Discourses in French Rap Music." *Global Studies Journal* 2 (3): 119–142.
- Drissel, D. (2011) "Hybridizing Hip-hop in Diaspora: Young British South Asian Men Negotiating Black inflected Identities." *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations* 10 (5): 197–222.
- East Preston Islamic College (2013) <http://www.epic.vic.edu.au/>
- Elbih, R. (2012) *Debates in the Literature on Islamic Schools*, *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 48:2, 156-173

- European Union Monitoring and Advocacy Program (2004) British Muslims and Education- Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens. *Open Society Institute*. Available via: http://www.fairuk.org/docs/OSI2004%207_Education.pdf
- Franz, B. (2007) Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Volume 18, Number 1, winter, pp. 89-112. Duke University Press. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/med/summary/v018/18.1franz.html>
- Fernandes, E. (2010) Inside the Muslim Eaton: 20 hour days starting at 3.45am with the aim of producing Muslim elite of leaders. *Daily Mail UK*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1288053/Inside-Muslim-Eton-Their-day-starts-3-45am-goes-disciplined-20-hours-Their-aim-produce-Muslim-elite-leaders.html>
- Gall, M., Borg, W., Gall, J. (2003) *Educational Research: An Introduction* (7th Ed.) New York: Longman.
- Gazzah, M. (2010) "Maroc-Hop: Music and Youth Identities in the Netherlands." In *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, edited by L. Herrera and A. Bayat, 309–324. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gilroy, G and Lawrence, E. (1988) 'Two-Tone Britain: White and Black Youth and the Politics of Anti-racism', in P. Cohen and H.S. Bain (eds.) *Multi-Racist Britain*. London: Macmillan.
- Halstead, J. M (2003) 'Schooling and Cultural Maintenance for Religious Minorities in the Liberal State.' In McDonough, K. & Feinberg, W (eds.), *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 273-295.
- Haw, K (2010) Being, Becoming and Belonging: Young Muslim Women in Contemporary Britain. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 31:4, 345-361
- Haw, K. (2011) The 'changing same' of an 'in-between' generation: negotiating identities through space, place and time, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32:4, 565-579
- Hawley, R (2005) Brendan Nelson Addresses Islamic Schools on Australian values. *ABC – The World Today*. <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1445094.htm>
- Humphrey, M (2005) An Australian Islam? Religion in the multicultural city, In A. Saeed and S. Akbarzadeh (ed.), *Muslim Communities in Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press
- Igbelina-Igbokwe, N. (2013) Africa: Contextualising Gender Based Violence within Patriarchy in Nigeria. 30th May <http://allafrica.com/stories/201305311347.html?viewall=1>
- Ilim College of Australia (2013) <http://www.ilimcollege.vic.edu.au/>
- Islamic College of Melbourne (2013) <http://www.icom.vic.edu.au/>

- Jamal, A. (2005) "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness." *American Politics Research* 33 (4): 521–544.
- Kalervo, G. (2012) 'Islamic Schools and the New Suburban Edge of Fear and Race.' Australian Association for Research in Education.
<http://www.aare.edu.au/publications-database.php/6594/Islamic-schools-and-the-new-suburban-edges-of-race-and-fear->
- Kalervo, G. and Webb, T. 2013) 'We had to hide we're Muslim': ambient fear, Islamic schools and the geographies of race and religion. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34: 1, 628-641
- Keddie, A. June (2001) *Little Boys: The Potency of Peer Culture in Shaping Masculinities*. Faculty of Education. Deakin University.
- Keyworth, K. (2011) *Islamic Schools of the United States: Data-Based Profiles*. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding.
http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/609_ISPU%20Report_Islamic%20Schools_Keyworth_WEB.pdf
- Khan, S. (2002). *Aversion and Desire: Negotiating Muslim Female Identity in the Diaspora*. Canada: Women's Presss.
- Le Grand, B.T., J. and Piachaud, D. (1999) 'Social Exclusion in Britain 1991-1995', *Social Policy & Administration*, September 1999, Vol. 33, Issue 3, pp. 227-244. Cited in Samina Yasmeen, (2008) *Understanding Muslim Identities: From Perceived Relative Exclusion to Inclusion*. Centre for Muslim States and Societies. University of Western Australia.
- Manji, Irshad (2004) *The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*. Random House Australia, Australia
- Meer, N (2009) Identity articulations, mobilization, and autonomy in the movement for Muslim schools in Britain, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12:3, 379-399
- Merry, M. (2007) *Culture, Identity, and Islamic School: A Philosophical Approach*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Merry, M. (2010) *Culture, Identity and Islamic Schooling: A Philosophical Approach*. US: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Minaret Islamic College: Islamic College of Melbourne South and East. (2013)
<http://www.minaret.vic.edu.au/>
- Mir, S. (2007) Where you stand on dating defines you: American Muslim women students and cross-gender interaction on campus. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 24(3), 69-91.

- Moghissi, H. (2009) *Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture and Identity*. UK: Routledge.
- Moghissi, H. and Ghorashi, H. (2010) *Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging*. Vermont: Ashgate.
- Moll, Y. (2009) Screening faith, making meaning: Islamic Media for Muslim American Children and the Politics of Identity Construction. P. 155-179. In Haddad, Y. Y & Sensai, F. & Smith, J. (2009). *Educating the Muslims of America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mt Hira College (2013) <http://www.mthira.vic.edu.au/>
- Murray, E. (2009) 'Churches Oppose Islamic School'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22nd April. <http://www.smh.com.au/national/churches-oppose-islamic-school-20090421-ae1i.html>
- Nielsen, J. (2007) The question of Euro-Islam: restriction or opportunity? in (ed.) A. Al-Azmeh, *Islam in Europe- Diversity, Identity, Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Othman, N. (ed.). (2005) *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*. Sisters In Islam, Malaysia.
- Parker, L. (2008) The Experience of Adolescent Students in Modernist Islamic Boarding Schools in West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Asian Studies Association of Australia*. <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mai/files/2012/07/lynparker.pdf>
- Parker-Jenkins, M. (1991) Muslim matters: The educational needs of the Muslim child, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 17:4, 569-582
- Rahani, R. and Gurr, D. (2010) Parental Involvement in an Islamic school in Australia: An Exploratory Study. *Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference*. <http://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2010/1797RaihaniGurr.pdf>
- Ramadan, T. (2005) *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rantakillo, I. (2011) "Making Music, Making Muslims: A Case Study of Islamic Hip Hop and the Discursive Construction of Muslim Identities on the Internet." <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/28505/makingmu.pdf?sequence=1>
- Roy, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. UK: Columbia University Press.
- Rydhan, I. (2010). Moon Wars: Should Muslims Adopt Moon Sighting to Establish Ramadan. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/almihrab/2010/08/moon-wars-should-muslims-adopt-moon-sighting-to-establish-ramadan/>
- Saeed, A. and Akbarzadeh, S. (Eds.) (2001). *Muslim Communities in Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press

- Safi, O. (Ed) (2003) *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*. UK: Oneworld Publications.
- Samad, Y. (1996) 'The Politics of Islamic Identity among Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in Britain', in Ranger, T. Samad, Y. and Stuart, O. (eds.) *Culture Identity and Politics: Ethnic Minorities in Britain*. Avebury: Aldershot.
- Samy, A. H. (2006) *Re-inventing Islam with Unique Modern Tones: Muslim Hip Hop Artists as Verbal Mujahidin*. *Souls*. 8: 4
- Sanjakdar, N. (2000) 'Why do Muslim Parents Choose King Khalid College of Victoria?', unpublished M. Ed. thesis, University of Melbourne.
- Schmidt, T. G. (2004) "Islamic Identity Formation among Young Muslims: The Case of Denmark, Sweden and the United States." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24 (1): 31–45.
- Severson, A. J. (2011) "Social identity construction of Muslim women: A case study" *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 10247 <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/10247>
- Sirin, S.R. and Fine, M (2008) *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods (Qualitative Studies in Psychology)*. New York: New York University Press
- Skelton, R. 'Muslims sound alarm over schools,' *The Age* (31 July 2005).
- Taylor, M. (2005). 'Two Thirds Oppose State Aided Faith Schools' *The Guardian*, 23rd August. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/aug/23/schools.faithschools>
- Tibi, B. (2002) 'Muslim migrants in Europe: between Euro-Islam and ghettoization', in AlSayyaed, N. and Castells, M (eds.), *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: politics, culture and civilization in the age of globalization*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Tomlinson, J. (2005). Global culture, deterritorialisation and the cosmopolitanism of youth culture. *Resituating Culture*. Council of European Publishing, 21-29.
- Uldis, O. (2008) *Diaspora, Islam, Australia: reflections on Australian Arab case studies* *Journal of Australian Studies*. 32:2
- Wilkinson, I.R, Brian J. Caldwell, R.J.W. Selleck, Jessica Harris, and Pam Dettman, (2006) *A History of State Aid to Non-Government Schools in Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training).
- Yasmeen. S. (2008) *Understanding Muslim Identities: From Perceived Relative Exclusion to Inclusion*. Centre for Muslim States and Societies: University of Western Australia.
- Zine, J. (2004) *Staying on the Straight Path: A Critical Ethnography of Islamic Schooling in Canada*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario

- Zine, J. (2006). *Canadian Islamic schools: Unravelling the politics of faith, gender, knowledge, and identity*. Toronto University Press.
- Zine, J. (2006) Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school. *Equity and Excellence in Education* (Special Issue: Ethno-Religious Oppression in Schools), 39 (3), 239-52.
- Zine, J. (2008) Honour and Identity: An Ethnographic Account of Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School. *Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*. 19: Spring.
- Zine, J. (2008) *Canadian Islamic Schools: Unravelling the Politics of Faith, Gender, Knowledge and Identity*. University of Toronto Press

APPENDIX I



EXPLANATORY STATEMENT FOR INTERVIEWEES

Dr Julian Millie
Faculty of Arts
Monash University
Clayton Campus
Victoria 3800

Ms Yasmin Hassen
Faculty of Arts (PSI)
Monash University
Caulfield Campus
Victoria 3145

Project Title: The Politics of Schooling and the Western Muslim Subject: A Case Study of the Educational Experiences of Victorian Muslims

Dear Participant,

Monash University researcher Ms Yasmin Hassen invites you to participate in a research project: The Politics of Schooling and the Western Muslim Subject: A Case Study of the Educational Experiences of Victorian Muslims. This project is a part of Yasmin's Masters research.

The research primarily intends to understand how the schooling of Muslim students in Islamic schools relates to the development of an Islamic identity among its students. The research study intends to answer the following questions: How do Islamic schools influence the development of an Islamic identity amongst their students? What are the underlying factors of Islamic identity in an Islamic school environment and is it palpable to the student? In exploring these questions we explore how Islamic schools define and/or inform the experiences of students' experiences of self and Islamic identity.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have indicated that you have graduated from an Islamic school in Victoria. Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do choose to participate in this research you may withdraw at any time.

Being interviewed for this research will take about 45mins and at the maximum one hour. You will be asked if you are happy to be recorded.

No participant will be identified throughout the process of the research. All participants will be provided with a pseudonym to ensure the privacy of the participants.

You may also refuse to participate or withdraw at any time throughout the research.

Any information that is obtained, relevant to this study and that has the potential to disclose your identity will not be used without your consent, unless required by law. Information and data obtained from participants will only be seen by the researcher and the supervisors as

indicated above. Any and all of the information you provide throughout the research, will be managed in compliance with Monash University's ethical standards.

Information gained in these interviews will be used in academic and practice journals. If requested the information will be anonymised shortly after collection in order to protect your identity and that of your organisation.

Information obtained from you whilst conducting this research has the potential to be used by the researcher for future research purposes. However, you have the option to refuse the researcher's future use of anything divulged by you, the participant. If you choose to refuse the use of data obtained in the form of audio recordings for future research purposes, will only be maintained until the completion of this research.

Information gathered will be stored in secure cabinets to which only the researchers have access for five years then destroyed.

Participants will also be provided with the contact details of a Melbourne Muslim Counselling service –Nasihah Consulting [REDACTED]—to speak with a professional counselling service that caters to the specificities of the Melbourne Muslim community if at any time they experience discomfort, distress or inconvenience.

If you are willing to be interviewed for this project please call Ms. Yasmin Hassen on [REDACTED] Interviews will be conducted at a time and venue that is suitable for you.

If you have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact: [REDACTED]

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans at the following address:

The Secretary
The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)
Building 3D
Research Grants & Ethics Branch
Monash University VIC 3800
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX II



MONASH University

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEES

Project Title: The Politics of Schooling and the Western Muslim Subject
A Case Study of the Educational Experiences of Victorian Muslims

I agree to take part in the above Monash University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

- 1) I agree to be interviewed by the researcher Yes No
2) I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped Yes No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time prior to approving the interview transcript.

I understand that, unless I have given permission for my name to be associated with my comments, that any information I provide will be anonymised, and that no information that could lead to the identification of my comments will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data relating to my interview for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

Future research projects:

I agree that my data may be used for future testing in similar research projects.
Yes No

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX III



Sample Interview Questions for Interviewees

The questions below are for the purpose of gathering personal information

Gender:

Age:

Country of Birth:

Ethnicity:

Schools you've attended:

Islamic School you've graduated from:

PART I

Please note that the following questions are only draft/sample questions:

The School Experience

- For those who have attended other schools or other Islamic schools from the one they graduated:
 - How does your experience compare?
 - Did you experience any difficulties transitioning?
 - What are your first impressions of your Islamic school?
 - What in particular did you first notice different between the school environments? Were there certain things you were allowed to do at one school that you were not encouraged or allowed to do at the other school?
 - How do you think graduating from an Islamic school may have affected your educational development or post-graduation prospects?
- What did you think you would gain from attending an Islamic school? What did your parents think they would gain from attending an Islamic school?
- Are there and differences between your expectations and those of your parents? Were these expectations met?
- Was there a particular incident or moment during your school experience that either made you thankful or regret attending an Islamic school? What is it about this incident or moment that resonates with you? And how does that relate to your sense of being a Muslim?

PART III

Islamic Schools: Facilitators of Islamic Identity Construction?

- Is religion important to a sense of being who you are or are there are aspects of yourself that are more important (gender, race, ethnicity)?
- What are the challenges young Muslims face in reconciling their different identities? Is there room within the school for students to express these different facets of their identities without conflict? Was this explored during certain subjects or not at all?
- How do you think your school allowed you to explore your religious identity? Or was there no room for exploration?
- How do you think your school emphasised Islam and Islamic practices and observances (congregational prayers, interactions between male and female students/staff, etc.) as a part of the school's understanding of what it means to be a Muslim? Does some or any of that align with what it means to be a Muslim to you?
- Do you think it is the school's role to shape or form the students understanding of an Islamic identity? If so, why or why not?