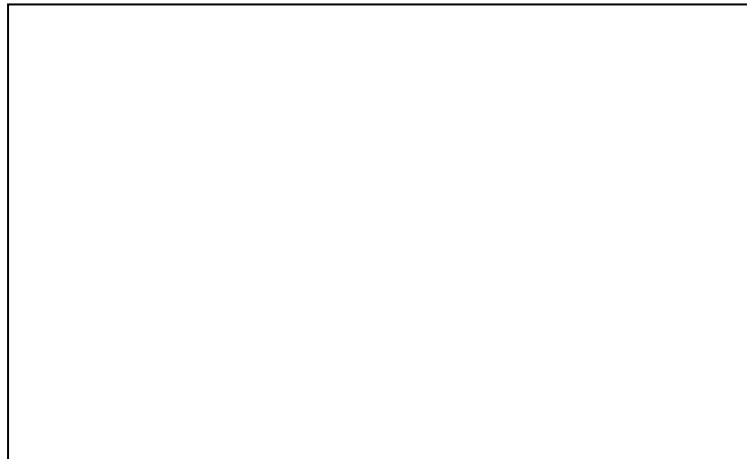# Feelings of identity and belonging amongst Australian born Muslims

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# Declaration

The work presented in the thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Ingrid Myhr

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# Abstract

This study contributes to the understanding of how Australian born Muslims identify themselves in religious, national and ethnic terms. It looks at some of their experiences of growing up in Australia and more specifically in Brisbane, and aims to understand how their feelings of identity and belonging may have been shaped by such experiences.

A review of the literature by leading scholars in the field shows that Islam in Australia has always been, and still is, formed in interaction with the wider society. Mainstream trends are discussed, and the hypothesis of an emerging Australian Muslim identity that unifies the many diverse groups of Muslims in Australia is raised.

A series of in-depth interviews with a number of Australian born Muslims who have grown up in Brisbane shows that they are proud and very devout Muslims who place varying importance upon their ethnic backgrounds and identify themselves as Australians belonging in Australia. A discussion of the findings regarding the participants' perceptions and experiences shows how the salient features of their identities seem to reflect the context in which they have grown up. Whereas the participants' Muslim identities are found to transcend ethnic lines, it is argued that varying levels of religious practice, more than any other factor, is a barrier for the unification of Australian Muslims.

A focus is placed upon experiences during teenage years and it is shown that although the participants had little sense of conflict due to their multiple identities, many felt very different to their peers; a feeling that sometimes resulted in loneliness and depression. The experience of religious and cultural intolerance is also emphasised, and is shown to vary significantly amongst the participants, before as well as after the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001.

# Table of Content

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1. Background: from assimilation to multiculturalism

After the Second World War it was proclaimed that globalisation would create a new world order; a global village where ties such as ethnic and national identities would not matter (Croucher 2004; Kivisto 2002). The seeming decline of religion in the Western world further led to a 'secularisation hypothesis', which argued that religious affiliations would become irrelevant in the future (Bouma 1996). Assimilation theory was central to immigration policies in the West and how these countries treated their immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, Australia being no exception.

Into the 1960s, Australia maintained an explicitly racist White Australia immigration policy and an assimilation strategy based upon the idea of cultural uniformity. The White Australia policy was modified in 1956 in order to allow non-Europeans to enter the country; an act that marked a shift in the basis of immigration from race to occupational skills (Kivisto 2002). By the 1970s, it became evident that ethnic and religious identities would not disappear, and the assimilation approach was replaced by theories of cultural pluralism (Bouma 1996; Croucher 2004; Kivisto 2002). Integration replaced assimilation as an official policy in 1966 and worked as a stepping-stone for multiculturalism, which was officially introduced in 1972. The multicultural approach was further institutionalised through the *Race Discrimination Act* in 1975, an act that clearly stated the government's role in combating racism.

The concept of multiculturalism centres on an assertion that diversity should not only be accepted but also encouraged, and national identity is thus understood to be open, fluid and future-oriented rather than embedded in the past. Multiculturalism is set within the framework of civic duty, a framework of shared values and orientations among the citizens So far, multiculturalism is embraced as an official policy only by Australia and Canada (Kivisto 2002).

Australia is not only a multicultural but also a multi-religious society (see Bouma 1996). Several reports, however, show that the public acceptance of the presence of Islam and Muslims is far lower than might be expected in a multicultural society. A number of researches, e.g. Kabir and Moore (2003) and Saeed (2003), argue that the general perception of Muslims in Australia is stereotypic and has gradually worsened with a range of national and international incidents involving Muslims since the 1990s. In particular, it has been documented how the Muslims experienced increased hostility during the Gulf War in 1991 (see e.g. Deen 2003; Mubarak 1996). More recently, several reports have shown how Muslim communities in Australia, as well as in other Western countries, have faced a significant increase in verbal and physical harassment after the terrorist attacks levelling the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11th 2001, and the subsequent 'War on Terror' (see e.g. Deen 2003; Kabir and Moore 2003; Saeed 2003).

## 1.2. Aims and objectives

Despite vast differences in cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds, Muslims in Australia live side by side in relative harmony, and questions have been raised about whether a unifying Australian Muslim identity overriding cultural differences is developing (see Bouma 1996, Saeed and Akbarzadeh 2001). As yet there is a clear lack of empirical research investigating the hypothesis of an Australian Muslim identity, as most studies of Muslims in Australia have focused upon settlement needs and have been organised along ethnic lines (Asmar 2001; Saeed 2003). Furthermore, studies of Muslims in Australia have tended to focus upon disadvantage, ignoring the need to also understand those not disadvantaged (see Vasta 1995). Despite the importance in understanding the barriers that may hinder Australian born generations of Muslims in feeling a sense of national identity and belonging, remarkably few studies have attempted to do so.

This study was set out to address the above-mentioned concerns through the twofold research question:

1.  How do Australian born Muslims identify themselves?

2. How have feelings of identity and belonging been shaped by the experiences of growing up as Muslims with ethnic backgrounds in Brisbane?

The aim is to contribute to the understanding of feelings of identity and belonging amongst Australian born Muslims with diverse backgrounds, concentrating upon young adults who have grown up within the statistical division of Brisbane. The objective is to obtain an understanding of the relative relationship between religious, ethnic and Australian identities amongst this group and to see whether this relationship reflects the context in which the participants have grown up. An emphasis is placed upon experiences during the teenage period as well as potential experiences of religious and cultural intolerance, with an aim to understand how such experiences may have influenced feelings of identity and belonging.

## 1.3. Organisation of thesis

Chapter 2 opens with a brief demographic overview of the Muslim population in Australia in order to give an understanding of the context in which the participants have grown up. Current literature regarding the development of religious identities amongst Muslim immigrants in Australia is then reviewed in order to create a background for the study. The lack of research on Muslims in Brisbane and literature investigating similarities and differences between Muslims in various parts of Australia is indicated. The general acceptance of Islam and Muslims in Australia is discussed, and the chapter closes with a brief look at a limited number of studies on the feelings of identity and belonging amongst new generations of Muslim Australians.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the assumptions behind the research question, a description of the qualitative methodology guiding the research, and an overview of the participants. Some limitations of the study are highlighted.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the major findings of the research, focusing upon the relative feelings of identity and belonging. The chapter is divided into four sections dealing with four interrelated topics addressing the research question; 1) Feelings of identity and belonging 2) Life as part of a Muslim minority 3) Experiences of being

different 4) Experiences of cultural and religious intolerance. The chapter contains limited discussion of the findings, as this is left to the following chapter.

Chapter 5 deals with the implications of the major findings, as outlined in chapter 4. The findings are discussed in view of the research question, and some comparisons are made with earlier studies on the topic, as described in chapter 2.

# Chapter 2
# Muslims in Australia

## 2.1. Overview

Islam is a small but rapidly growing religion in Australia. While there were less than 3 000 Muslim residents in 1947 and 22 311 at the introduction of multiculturalism in 1972 (Cleland 2001), there were a recorded 281 578 Muslims in Australia at the 2001 census, representing 1.5 percent of the total population. Near 50 percent of Australia's Muslims live in Sydney, constituting 3.4 percent of the city's population, and another 30 percent reside in Melbourne, making up 2.6 percent of the city's population. Of the remaining 20 percent, 13 percent live in other cities and seven percent live in regional centres and towns. Constituting less than 4 percent of the Muslim population in Australia, the 10 468 persons affiliating with Islam in the statistical division of Brisbane represent a mere 0.6 percent of the city's population. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

Australia's Muslims represent more than 70 nationalities and an enormous cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and devotional diversity (Saeed 2003). The largest proportion has a background from North Africa and the Middle East (28 percent), followed by Asia excluding Oceania (16 percent), Europe (9 percent), Africa excluding North Africa (4 percent) and Oceania (3 percent). The largest numbers of overseas born Muslims come from Lebanon and Turkey, but significant numbers were also born in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Iran and Fiji. 74 994 were born in Australia, representing 38 percent of the Australian Muslim population. The Muslim population is very young, with approximately 50 percent of the total population, and 86 percent of the Australian born generation, below 24 years. This compares with 35 percent of the non-Muslim generation being below 24 years of age. The majority of those born in Australia have parents who were both born overseas, but an increasing number have one or two parents who themselves were born in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

The Muslim community in Brisbane has tended to congregate in the southern suburbs since the first mosque was established by Indian and Afghan migrants in the southern suburb of Holland Park in 1908. For many decades this was the only mosque in South East Queensland. The city's Muslim community has grown rapidly since 1972, and today there are around ten mosques and Islamic centres in Brisbane and another two in Logan and at the Gold Coast. There are more than 25 restaurants and food outlets and more than ten butcher shops that specialise in *halal* foods. A number of community organisations and associations work towards improving the welfare of the Muslim community. There are Muslim student associations at the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University and Muslim schools offer education from preschool to high school level (year 10) in the southern suburbs of Karawatha and Durack.

## 2.2. Unity and diversity

It is widely understood that individuals' and groups' identities are not predetermined or static, but are actively and continuously formed in social interaction within social structures that in part are products of governmental policies (Bouma 1996; Croucher 2004; Kivisto 2002; Mathews 2000; Song 2003; Woodward 2004). Living as a Muslim in a non-Muslim country is not the same as living in a Muslim dominated country and neither is living as a Muslim in Australia the same as living in another non-Muslim country. Muslims in Australia have had to adapt their religious identities to fit the nation's wider social, political and legal environment. They have to negotiate with state institutions and the public to gain acceptance, e.g. to build mosques, celebrate Islamic life cycle events in an Islamic way, establish Islamic schools and adjust the curriculum in public school to respect Islamic values (Humphrey 2001). Religious settlement is thus a two-way process that requires change in both the immigrating community and the receiving society (Bouma 1994).

Many authors have pointed out the unity and diversity among Australian Muslims. While there is an enormous diversity, the myth of Australian Muslims as a homogenous group is promoted by the state as well as by central figures within the Muslim communities. A homogenous Islam makes it easier for the state to

administrate, while co-operation across ethnic lines and religious affiliations mobilises a sense of unity among Muslims and increases the community's political power (Bouma 1996; Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001; Humphrey 2001; Saeed 2003).

Religious and ethnic identities are, like all identities, learnt and re-learnt. These identities are in particular challenged as people settle in new countries where they have to live as part of a minority (Bouma, 1994; Mathews 2000). Several authors have pointed out that many Muslims living in Muslim dominated countries, and in particular those with a poor educational background, tend to live Islam in an 'automatic' way, perhaps unaware of the distinctions between Islamic values and the culturally specific traditions they have grown up with (see e.g. Bouma 1994; Saeed 2003). Many Muslims find themselves studying Islam after settling in Australia in order to find a stronghold for their identities in the new world, make sense of the various practices amongst Muslims from different countries, ensure the Islamic upbringing of their children and be able to answer questions from non-Muslims. A range of studies proves that Muslims, and indeed immigrants in general, become more religious after settling in a new country, and especially after the point at which they have children (Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001; Deen 2003; Inglis, Elley and Manderson 1992; Mubarak 1996; Yasmeen 2001). Deen (2003) shows that many parents are drawn towards strong Muslim communities because they are afraid a non-Muslim environment may threaten their children's Islamic identity. The threat a non-Muslim environment may represent to the maintenance of a Muslim identity, is for many Muslims symbolised by the story about the Afghan cameleers who from the 1860s were contracted to assist in opening up the interiors of Australia. As the men were not allowed to bring women, many married non-Muslim, predominately Aboriginal, women. Few of their children followed any religion, and none of the ascendants of the Afghans in Australia are today Muslims (Underwood, no date). Although many parents feel more comfortable sending their children to Islamic schools if they have the means to do so, Clyne (2003) finds that the ones who are more confident in their own abilities to teach their children Islamic values and behaviours feel more at ease with the secular education system.

Bouma (1994), Bouma, Daw and Munawar (2001), Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) and Maalouf (1999) all express a belief that Muslims who live in non-Muslim counties tend to either conceal their religion, or conversely, actively promote it as a central aspect of their identity. In the latter case, they are likely to become more religious as a result. Some studies have also found that the parents' strong devoutness is reflected in their children, including the ones born in Australia (Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001; Deen 2003). It should, however, be kept in mind that the Islamic revivalism that has taken place in Australia over the last decades is likely to be, at least in part, a reflection of an Islamic revivalism worldwide (see e.g. Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001). Religiosity might also be encouraged by a more established Muslim community in Australia on the one hand, and improved multicultural policies on the other.

Despite a lack of co-operation across ethnic lines (Humphrey 2001), it is reported that there are high levels of tolerance between the different Muslim communities in Australia, and people live side by side in relative harmony (Bouma 1994; Bouma 1996). Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds are attending the same mosques and the Muslim religious leaders, *imams*, have to consider the diversity amongst the audience and focus more upon scripts than tradition in order to avoid conflicts. In addition, more and more *imams* are holding the sermons in English in order to meet the needs of multi-lingual audiences. Further, Muslims are sending their children to the same schools, including Islamic, Catholic and public schools as well as Koran schools, and like the *imams* teachers have to consider the diversity among the pupils. Young Muslims are getting together in multi-ethnic youth groups, and university students of various backgrounds are socialising through Muslim student associations (Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001; see also Asmar, 2001; Saeed, 2001). Some researchers have found that increased levels of religious knowledge and high levels of interaction between Muslims of diverse backgrounds have led to a stronger awareness of the distinctions between religious values and cultural traditions (see Asmar 2001; Mubarak 1996).

These seemingly mainstreaming developments within Islam in Australia have made some authors ask whether a unifying religious identity, known as an Australian Muslim identity, is developing. The same persons who address the idea are,

however, quick to argue that while a diverse but integrated hybrid Muslim identity is emerging, this hybrid identity does not constitute a uniform set of community needs and aspirations. The main obstacles to the development of an Australian Muslim identity are said to be ethnic and social diversity, as well as varying levels of religious belief and practice (Akbarzadeh 2001; Saeed and Akbarzadeh 2001). Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001), like Humphrey (2001), stress that the governmental policies of Australia are crucial in mobilising or hindering such a potential unifying identity among Muslims.

Despite beliefs that an Australian Muslim identity is developing, Munawar, through a research study on Pakistanis in Wollongong, found that the participants were still strongly attached to cultural norms and values (ibid). Bouma restrictively argues that although there is a high degree of harmony between different groups, a homogenous Muslim community is, like a homogenous Christian, Jewish or Buddhist community, well beyond reasonable expectations. Huge diversity between Muslim communities in Australia has led to disputes and uncovered perhaps irreconcilable varieties in viewpoints, and it is "probably a mistake to assume that the outcome of community-building will be a single integrated structure which represents all of the people who identify themselves with a particular religion, or even a major variation of a religion" (Bouma 1996:85). While much attention is given to cultural differences as a barrier to unification, Deen's (2003) observation of a very judgemental and close-knit Muslim community in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba strengthens the belief that also varying levels of religious practice is an important barrier to a unified Muslim identity amongst Australians.

Whereas there is a significant amount of research available focusing upon the major Muslim communities in Sydney and Melbourne, there are few contemporary studies looking at the smaller Muslim communities in other areas, including Brisbane. There is further a lack of studies investigating how similarities and differences between the Muslim communities across the country may have derived over time and how the development of religious and ethnic identities may be closely related to local demographic characteristics.

## 2.3. Acceptance by mainstream society

Australia has, since 1972, celebrated multiculturalism as an official policy and encouraged its migrant citizens to value their diverse cultural and religious heritages. Several studies have nonetheless shown that the level of Australians' cultural and religious tolerance is lower than it ought to be in a so-called multicultural society. In particular, this has been found in regard to Muslims, who perhaps are the victims of the most negative stereotypes (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2004; Munawar 1997; Yasmeen 2002; see also Johns and Saeed 2002).

Whereas Saeed (2003) described the period from 1960 to 1990 as relatively calm and positive for Muslims, there are numerous reports of increased hostility and harassment faced by Muslim Australians since the beginning of the 1990s. Levels of harassment were reported to be high during the Gulf War in 1991 and the hostility has markedly increased after the many tragic incidents involving Muslims in 2001, locally as well as globally. Examples of such incidents were the 'Sydney gang-rapes', the high number of asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boats but labelled as 'illegal migrants' or 'queue jumpers', the 'children overboard affair' associated with the Tampa incident, and of course September 11th and the subsequent 'War on Terror' (Deen 2003; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2004; Kabir and Moore 2003; Mubarak 1996; Poynting 2002; Saeed 2003). Two incidences in Brisbane to receive extensive media coverage, was the stone throwing on a school bus carrying children to an Islamic school and the fire bombing of the Kuraby Mosque.

Kabir (2003) points out that whereas the discrimination against Muslims has seen a shift from being based upon race, skin colour and ethnicity to religion, the major factor fuelling discrimination is international conflict. She argues that political 'enemy groups' are commonly perceived as a threat to national security, and that people belonging to such groups thus face hostility regardless of ethnicity and religion. Kabir and Moore (2003) point out that while certain groups of Muslims are blamed for different incidents, Islam as a religion is under attack and the whole Muslim community is simultaneously targeted. The majority of Australians,

according to a 1998 survey, were found to have a perception of Muslims as conservatives and fundamentalists, and a 2002 survey on staff and students at the Macquarie University and the University of New South Wales confirmed widespread antagonism against Australian Muslims (see Kabir and Moore 2003). Whereas Muslim men in general are less obvious targets, the Islamic dress used by many Muslim women, most commonly the head scarf *hijab* and the frock *abayah*, but also the fully covering outfit *nikab* or *chador*, is an outward marker of Muslim identity and has become a negative stereotype of Muslim women as victims of violence and oppression. A number of women have experienced verbal and physical harassment due to the way they dress after September 11th, and many remember a similar escalation in hostility towards Muslims during the Gulf War (Asmar 2001; Bouma 1994; Deen 2003; Kabir and Moore 2003; Mubarak 1996; Saeed 2003; Yasmeen 2001). The hostility towards Muslims was further fuelled by the Bali bombings in October 2002, another terrorist attack by radical Islamists targeting Western interests, and by the Iraqi War in 2003 (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2003).

An extensive study carried out by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 2003, confirmed that there was a significant increase in racial and religious prejudice towards Australian Muslims after September 11th 2001, and perhaps even more so since the Bali bombings in 2002. Two thirds of the sample, consisting of 1423 participants of Muslim and Arab backgrounds in all states, had personally experienced an increase in racism; one third described the increase as notable and the other third described it as significant. Negative experiences included violence, threats of violence, vandalism of property, discrimination and vilification. Most of the participants had experienced 'one-off' encounters with strangers in public; on the street, at shopping centres or on public transport. Some felt they were discriminated against by governmental agencies and others had experienced prejudice from people they knew; in their neighbourhoods or at school, university and work. The majority of the participants, 80 percent, had become increasingly afraid that something should happen to them due to their ethnicity, culture and religion, and many felt alienated, uncomfortable and vulnerable as a result of the increased hostility towards Muslims. Many young people related how they felt angry and frustrated as they believed they constantly had to explain and justify their

religion and their religious practices. Some also felt depressed, scared and had developed an increasing mistrust of non-Muslims. The responses the participants gave to intolerance were highly diverse; while some avoided situations and places where they felt exposed to racism, others tried to ignore negatively loaded comments and to shrug off negative experiences. Some spoke back, a few lodged formal complaints and yet others seized the opportunity to try and establish a basis of understanding of the Islamic community amongst their detractors. Some parents decided to take their children out of the public school system and enrol them in Muslim schools in order to protect them from any form of harm. The participants believed negative reactions were triggered by a Muslim or Arab appearance. While 13 percent of the Christian Arab participants reported weekly encounters with racism, 27 percent of the Muslim participants reported the same. The people most exposed to cultural and religious intolerance were Muslim women who wore *hijab* or other Islamic clothing, and many had restricted their movements in public since September 11th.

The findings by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission indicate that Islamic identity markers are attracting much stronger negative reactions than skin colour and are consistent with Kabir's (2003) argument that Muslims today face intolerance due to their cultural and religious identities rather than because of race or ethnicity.

The power of the media in shaping public opinion is well known, and many scholars believe that the media is responsible for the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of Muslims in Australia (see e.g. Bouma 1994; Humphrey 2001; Matthews 2001). The media is especially criticised in depicting the Muslim culture as violent (see e.g. Poynting 2002), even when most academics have jettisoned the practice of essentialising cultures and religions (see Croucher 2004). Some also argue that the Australian government has fuelled Australians' fear of Muslims (see e.g. Deen 2003; Stephen 2004), although since the Bali bombings it has come forward to protect Australia's Muslim citizens (Kabir 2003). In line with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's study, Deen (2003), Kabir and Moore (2003) and Stephen (2004) explain that many Australian Muslims are afraid to go outside their homes and fear for the future of their children as a result of the increased

hostility towards Muslims. Stephen (2004) also reports that many Muslims feel alienated and isolated from the Australian society as a result of the government's approach to fighting terrorism. Young Lebanese Australians in a study by Noble and Tabar (2002) believed that their ethnic and cultural background would affect their access to certain studies and work places. One informant suggested that he would consider hiding his background if that would make it easier for him to achieve his goals.

Although there is clear evidence that Muslims have faced increased levels of hostility and discrimination since the 1990s, and especially after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, the picture is not entirely black. It should be stressed that one third of the sample in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's study related that they had not experienced any change in cultural or religious intolerance. Many of these told they had never experienced any prejudice or harassment. Some wanted to emphasise that they had positive experiences of non-Muslims being friendly and helpful towards them, before as well as after September 11th. Another finding opposing the predominately negative picture can be found in Asmar's (2001) study of university students, where a male participant found that other students and teachers alike made an effort to be particularly nice and helpful to him when he was wearing traditional Muslim clothing.

Cleland (2004) argues that while the 'War on Terror' has caused anti-Muslim feelings and increased racism, it has also stimulated people's interest to learn more about Islam and made Australians more aware that they have to actively defend multiculturalism from its' enemies in conservative camps. Cleland (2004), Kabir (2003) and Saeed (2003) all state that Muslims, Christian and Jews in Australia are now increasing their co-operation in fighting terrorism, and that the Muslim community has become more involved in inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogues in recent years. Kabir (2003), however, calls for a greater effort by Muslims to participate in the Australian society. Saeed (2003) believes that while the relatively positive period for Muslims in Australia from the 1960s was rocked in the 1990s, the consolidation of Islam as part of the religious plurality in Australia continues. He notes that Australia is still amongst the most tolerant and hospitable of Western countries towards Muslims, and that the vast majority of Australians

have not taken on the hostile views expressed through some media, but have instead shown great tolerance towards the presence of Islam and Muslims.

## 2.4. Identities of the Australian born Muslims

There are few studies of the identities of Australian Muslims (Batrouney 2002), and this is particularly so in regard to second generation Muslim Australians. Moreover, the value of this limited body of literature is constrained by a prevalence of research focusing on disadvantage in the Australian Muslim community, rather than research focusing on strengths and opportunities.

Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992), in their study on young Turkish-Australians in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane early in the 1990s, found that the participants predominately socialised with their own ethnic group. They further reported that for all of the participants, Turkish-ness was an important part of their identity, if not in their daily lives. For the very religious, Islam was said to be a more important part of identity than Turkish-ness, while for the non-practicing Muslims, the opposite was true. The authors found that the closer connection their participants had with the Turkish community on a day-to-day basis, the stronger their ethnic identities were, a point also argued by Bouma (1996). When it comes to the feelings of Australian identity, Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001) argue that the bond second and third generation Muslims have with Australia, in most cases is not made at the expense of their Islamic and ethnic heritage.

Despite the general dismissal of the theory of hyphenated identities, which presented the cultural identities of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds as dualistic and irreconcilable, in favour of the more positive theory of multiple, fluid and hybrid identities (see Noble and Tabar 2002; Song 2003), an increasing number of researchers studying ethnic Muslim Australians have found the picture to be more complicated. As her article title 'Torn Between Two Cultures' indicates, Das (2003) argues that young Muslims in Australia face extensive temptation, pressure and conflicting loyalties. Akbarzadeh (2001) similarly argues that second generation Muslim Australians face conflicting sets of loyalties as they are brought up to feel proud of their religious and ethnic

backgrounds but at the same time seek acceptance and recognition by the wider society. Consistent with these arguments, Deen (2003) found that many of the young Muslims in her research were walking on tiptoes down a path of temptation, continuously bargaining, negotiating and attempting to make compromises with their parents. A male participant in her study explained that he often felt tempted to go to the pub just to feel he was one of the 'boys', while a female participant seemed to solve the problem by distancing herself from non-Muslims. She confessed that her non-Muslim girlfriends had little understanding of her religion and therefore found it easier to socialise with Muslims, as she could feel 'normal' and not have to constantly explain herself. The issue of feeling 'normal' has been touched upon by several scholars and many have acknowledged Muslims face numerous difficulties when socialising with non-Muslims at universities and at work, as many social gatherings usually involve alcohol, and non-*halal* foods are generally not available (Asmar 2001; Inglis, Elley and Manderson 1992; Mubarak 1996).

Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) further found that while the girls in their study had restricted freedom to socialise in the public sphere, most did not perceive their situation as problematic. There seemed to be little conflict between the informants and their parents, and the girls as well as the boys in general seemed very understanding towards their parents' perceptions. The authors describe how the girls were able to operate successfully in two "very different cultural settings" and that they generally managed to keep the settings apart even though they sometimes collided. The authors speak of the girls' ability to "move between very different worlds as they move between their homes and their places of work or study" (p.133). Both the male and the female informants themselves talked of two different cultures and explained how they felt different as soon as they walked in the door. The presence of cross-cultural pressures and conflicts between their ethnic and Australian identities was in some cases obvious, as these informants express:

> 'Everything you do (you ask yourself) how would I justify it in terms of Turkish culture, or what's happening to me, am I becoming an Australian too much… what's right, what's wrong? What's right in one thing may not be right in another culture… then you are torn between two cultures.
> (male, p.134-135).

> 'If I'm going to stay in Australia I'm going to be an Australian. But, if I'm too Australian then I'd be isolated from my own community… if I want to stay within my community then I've got to be a member, an element of it… to be appreciated and be seen to be part of it'
> (male, p.135).

Despite findings of conflicting loyalties, Bouma (1994) and Saeed (2003) argue that many youngsters perceive no conflict between their Muslim and Australian identities.

In order to deal with some of the issues identified as common for many young Muslims growing up in Australia, it feeling is important to understand how their feelings of identity and belonging are developed.

# Chapter 3
# Research design and methodology

## 3.1. Aims and assumptions

The aim of this research is to obtain an understanding of how Australian born Muslims identify themselves in national, ethnic and religious terms, and how their feelings of identity and belonging are shaped by their experiences of growing up and living as part of a small religious minority in Australia, and more specifically in Brisbane. The research question is based on a number of assumptions guiding the approach of this research, as outlined below.

The study is based on the understanding that identities could be conceptualised as something fluid and continuously shaped and reshaped in interaction within social structures (see Bouma 1996; Croucher 2004; Goffman 1990; Kivisto 2002; Mathews 2000; Song 2003; Woodward 2004). For example, Bouma (1996) and Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) maintain that most identities are associated with communities and that the salient features of all identities are likely to vary with the amount of time, effort and energy a person invests in these communities. Although the size of a person's local ethnic and religious community is likely to have an impact upon the formation of identities, most previous studies have tended to focus upon the dominant ethnic groups in the large cities. Little work has been undertaken to identify similarities and differences between Muslims growing up in various parts of Australia. A hypothesis explored in this research was a belief that many Muslims grown up within a small ethnic and religious minority in Brisbane would have a close contact with Muslims from other ethnic backgrounds, perhaps forming trans-ethnic religious identities with common beliefs.

The research assumed that growing up as part of a small religious minority in a liberal Western society like Australia would have been a difficult experience for many young Muslims, especially during the teenage years. It was anticipated that the personal aspirations of many young Muslim Australians would have been in conflict with their parents' expectations at times, and it was seen as important to

obtain an understanding of how these experiences may have affected feelings of identity and belonging.

Given the recent political events that followed September 11th and the seemingly increasing hostility towards, and harassment of, Muslims in Australia, this research also aims to understand how these experiences would influence the feelings of identity and of belonging of Muslim Australians.

Because of the lack of research and literature on the identity and belonging among Muslims growing up in Australia, this research is decidedly qualitative and exploratory (see Mason 1996; Maravasti 2004 for a detailed description of the qualitative approach). Because of limitations in terms of time and resources, the scale of this study is also restricted. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a glimpse into the life experiences of a group of young Australian Muslims in order to enable a reflection on how multiculturalism fares in practice.

## 3.2. Sampling

Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds, who were between 18 and 35 years of age and who had been living in Australia since at least from the age of five, were invited to participate in the study. Given the limitations of time and resources, this study could only aim to interview a total of eight women and eight men. The age bracket set up for this study was meant to allow an identification of how the salient features of different identities might have developed during the various stages of the participants' lives. The recruitment of an equal number of male and female respondents was intended to maintain a gender-balanced sample so that any gender bias could be minimised in observing the identities of the respondents.

The selection of respondents for this research was first done through two *imams* in Brisbane and the leaders of three Muslim Student Associations in different universities in Brisbane. In short, in utilising the snowball sampling method a number of volunteer participants were first contacted by phone and e-mail and invited to participate in this research. Time constraints reduced the sample to a final total of 12 interviewees, 8 women and 4 men. Their ages ranged from 19 to 36

years, with half of the participants below 25 years, four being 28 or 29, and the remaining being 33 and 36 years of age. Eight participants had an ethnic background from the Indian sub-continent including Fiji (Fiji-Indians), India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, while the others were of Indonesian, Malaysian and Middle Eastern backgrounds. Five of the informants had at least one parent who was born in Australia, and three had an Australian parent who was converted to Islam.

Three participants did not have any tertiary education, while three had finished their studies and six were still studying. Four participants had children and the three women were all full time mothers. Most of the participants had participated in the work force, but only three were working full time at the time of the interviews.

## 3.3. Data collection

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews (see Berg 2001; Denscombe 2003; Maravasti 2004; Mason 1996). Each informant was interviewed once, and the conversations lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. In some cases, additional information was sought by phone and e-mail. The questions directed at the participants regarded the topics of identity, experiences of growing up and going through school, and experiences of cultural and religious intolerance. The questions were fairly broad in order to provide room for the informants to express themselves freely, which led to many unexpected answers and surprising findings. Specific questions were merely used to clarify issues already addressed.

## 3.4. Data analysis

The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The process of analysis was inductive in line with grounded theory (see Corbin and Strauss 1990), and the data was analysed in an interpretive, reflexive and literal sense in order to ensure the validity of the findings (see Mason 1996). 'Concept trees' were developed based on varying levels of details in concepts emerging from the data. Some topics were of common concern for all of the participants and were therefore identified as of overlaying importance. Important and pressing issues that were of concern for only one or two of the participants could not be discussed in detail although they are

identified as topics that deserve to be investigated in detail in future research. Such topics include family relationships when one parent is a convert and the consequences of untraditional career choices for Muslim women.

## 3.5. Ethical considerations

In conforming to the University's code for ethical clearance, information sheets were provided to all invited informants to seek their consent to participate in the research. Before the interviews commenced, informants were also requested to declare their consent to participate in the research by signing a consent form. In addition, they were informed of their rights to withdraw from the interview without prejudice should they feel uncomfortable with the questions or the interview process. Confidentiality was ensured, and as a gesture to provide feedback to the informants, they were offered to view the final draft of the thesis upon request.

## 3.6. Limitations

As a non-Muslim and a non-Australian from a non-Muslim country, my role as a researcher required me to remain an 'outsider' in this study (see Mason 1996). As expected, it became evident early on that those who volunteered and consented to participate in the study were confident and open, perhaps curious about my interest and pleased to be able to assist. It should be kept in mind that the study is a quick snapshot into the feelings, perceptions and experiences of a limited number of individuals, and although some generalisations could be made about the participants in this study, the findings are not likely to be representative for all Brisbane born Muslims.

The participants were all extremely welcoming, warm and open, and I am very grateful for their willingness to invite me into their homes and lives. I was left, however, with an impression that some participants felt strongly about some of the negative images perpetuated by the media about Islam, Muslims and the role of women in Islam. In order to challenge these stereotypes, they might, at times, have avoided relating their negative experiences about life as Muslims in Australia.

The scope of the research was clearly too small and restrictive to gain a comprehensive picture of how the experiences of growing up would impact on the participants' feelings of identity and belonging.  With a low number of male participants, findings of the research also have limited capacity in generalising gender issues. Given the exploratory nature of this study, it nonetheless provides a first step for a larger and long-term study of identity and belonging amongst Australian born Muslims in the future.

# Chapter 4
# Research Findings

The findings of this study have been divided into four interrelated topics; the participants' feelings of identity and belonging, their perceptions of living as part of a Muslim minority, their experiences during teenage years and their experiences of tolerance or intolerance towards their ethnic backgrounds and religious identities. The relationship between the themes, and further how the findings of this study correlate with the literature outlined in chapter 2, is discussed in chapter 5.

## 4.1. Identity and belonging

### 4.1.1. Integrated identities

It became apparent that all participants had experienced conflicts of value between Islam, the cultural traditions of their ancestors, and the Australian way of life. However, this did not seem to constitute a major problem in terms of how they felt about their identities. The participants were comfortable with their identities; they had successfully integrated their Muslim, Australian and ethnic identities and acknowledged that all had varying degrees of importance in helping them to identify who they were.  That the participants did not see their identities as separate entities in conflict, at least not in an adult age, was well expressed in the following statements:

> I think there were internal conflicts, you know, finding my identity. And I mean, every experience has impacted upon who you are, but I've just stopped and I've said, well I'm a Muslim, I'm an Indian and I'm living in Australia and I'm never gonna change (laughs).
> (Female a, 19)

> You can't differentiate, you can't just put it in a separate box, like these are the Pakistani values, these are… It's all mixed up. It's just the way it is, it's because we have our Pakistani genes and background, and we are brought up in Australia, and we are Muslims! So like I mean, we've always been like that, it's the way we are! We are still Pakistani and still Australian and still Muslim! (laughs)
> (Female a, 28)

This is not to say that the participants necessarily identified closely with the majority of Muslims, Australians and people from their parents or ancestors' homelands alike. As one male participant explained, he identified himself as a

Muslim who had been brought up in Australia and who had a Bangladeshi background, but he identified only with a certain group of Muslims and not with the majority of Australians or Bengalis. This did not imply that he felt trapped between identities; rather, in combination they had given him a unique identity he shared with a limited number of people:

> I don't identify myself as a Bengali – as Bengalis are in Bangladesh, cause I've gone there like four, five times so I know what they're like and I don't think I'm like them. I'm not like any other Australian either, like a non-Muslim Australian is very different to me, I'm more of a Muslim who is an Australian. That's how I identify myself… I don't share the majority of values that the majority of Australians share, like opinions or values… however my… I'm different from other Muslims, like I don't know how to say it… the Muslims that are committed to Islam, I'm probably very, very similar with them all over the world, but some opinions might be a bit more relaxed to me or they might have some more relaxed opinions but… It can be pinpointed to being an Australian or it might not be, I don't know.
> (Male, 19)

Despite a close relationship between the religious, national and ethnic identities, most of the participants could explain a clear hierarchical order among them. For all but one participant the single most important identity was Muslim.

## 4.1.2. A dominant Muslim identity

Except one participant who claimed that religion came secondary to her identity as an Australian, none had any hesitation in asserting the great importance of Islam to their identity. For them, Islam was a way of life and a moral guide to one's proper behaviour. When their Islamic beliefs conflicted with Australian norms and values, or even with the cultural traditions from their parents' or ancestors' homelands, the Islamic way was always perceived as the right one. Typically, some of the statements made by the participants were illustrative:

> I'm an Australian born Muslim, but a Muslim first.
> (Male, 33)

> First I identify myself as a Muslim and then, as I was born in Australia, I identify myself as an Australian, and then also I recognize my Fijian-Indian background.
> (Female, 21)

> I guess first and foremost [I am] a Muslim, that's the most important thing to me, and then I am Australian-Pakistani, a mix in terms of that…
> (Female a, 28)

It was evident that most participants were highly conforming in their religious practices. For instance, all participants observed the fast and avoided alcohol, cigarettes, non-halal meat and foods with even a trace of disputed ingredients. Many went to the mosque or prayer rooms many times a day to pray, and at least one male participant proclaimed that he would pray openly in public if he could not access a prayer room at the time of prayer. Some also indicated they were careful about what kind of music they listened to, many placed a great emphasis on the sin of having intimate relations outside marriage and some even advocated avoidance of socialising with persons of the opposite sex altogether. Some of the men wore the Muslim beard and all the female informants, except one young woman whose situation is explained below, wore *hijab*. Some also wore *abayah* and avoided wearing make-up in public, and one woman wore *nikab* and believed in segregation between the sexes. While for some wearing *hijab* was something that came naturally as this was what their mothers practiced, others felt they had made a conscious choice to cover, sometimes against their parents' recommendations.

It is important to keep in mind that not all Muslims in Australia are as practicing as the majority in this sample and that the Muslim identity may be secondary to the ethnic or Australian identity for those who have a more liberal view on religious practice. Among the informants in this study, there was a woman who first and foremost saw herself as an Australian but who also identified herself as a Muslim and acknowledged her Malaysian heritage.

### 4.1.3. Australian identity and belonging to Australia

There was a participant in the study who identified himself more in terms of his ethnic background rather than as an Australian. He felt a stronger sense of belonging to Indonesia than to Australia and he indicated that because he found it difficult to live as a Muslim in Australia he in the future would like to return to Indonesia, where he had recently spent a year.

However, all other participants identified themselves as Australians, or a mixture of Australian and ethnic identities. For them, Australian was a national identity associated with where they were born and brought up. In this context, the participants showed a clear sense of belonging to Australia, as this is where their

homes and families are, and none expressed any desire to live elsewhere. While many still felt a cultural attachment to the country where their parents came from and acknowledged that this was an important part of their identity, those who had a long history living in Australia admitted they no longer felt they had any roots in another country. They felt Australian, rather than ethnic Australian, and showed a clear nationalistic feeling towards Australia. Some pinpointed behaviours and values they identified with and thought of as typically Australian, such as taking life easy, having a strong sense of fairness and a concern for other people. Interestingly, the ones who mentioned such values had all spent long periods living in a Muslim dominated country, indicating that they did not realise how much they had internalised these values until they were confronted with different values. The impact of travel on the feelings of identity and belonging was found to be significant and is discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

> As an Australian Muslim, I think we are easy going… I've met so many Muslims from other ethnic backgrounds and it's interesting to note that we are generally easy going and a bit more open minded than other societies I think, generally speaking. Laid back attitudes and stuff.
> (Female a, 28)

> Well… um, we're Australians right, so we've embraced Australian culture to a large extent, it's just that instead of being Christian we happen to be Muslims, Muslim Australians. And I think that's all, by all other criteria we're Australians, except from the religion factor. And I believe that you can be a Muslim and be an Australian, you know, being an Australian is more than drinking beer and… you know? It's more the idea of giving everyone a fair go, and the idea of putting in a hard days work and you know… the idea of being there for people and helping people. They are the most important elements of the Australian culture I think, and that's something you'll see among Australian Muslims as well.
> (Male, 29)

> … in ways of thinking, and things like social norms and social standards or things like that, I'm probably more into the Aussie idea of fairness and all that kind of stuff, which is probably a bit strange for someone who's from Bangladesh…
> (Female b, 28)

Although many informants found that their Australian values were quite different from the traditional cultural values practiced in their ancestors' countries, they did not see them in contradiction with their Islamic beliefs. Instead, they seemed to have selectively adopted those Australian values that were consistent with the Islamic teachings and rejected those in direct conflict with their religious beliefs.

## 4.1.4. Ethnicity and cultural identity

Not surprisingly, for the three participants with two Australian born parents and little contact with their ancestors' countries, their ethnic heritage was felt to be of little or no relevance. As two of the informants explained:

> … When I tell you I'm a Muslim I tell you something about myself, but when I tell my great grand father was born in India…so what? It doesn't say anything about me, because I don't have anything Indian in me at all.
> (Male, 29)

> To be quite honest with you, I don't know any relatives over there, we have no contact with any relatives over there and I've never been to the country so… no I think the religion is more important I think, like I'm a Muslim - I don't say I'm Pakistani. I'm an Australian born Muslim.
> (Female, 29)

The rest of the participants perceived their ethnic heritage to be of moderate to high importance for their feelings of identity. Many described their ethnic backgrounds as something they appreciated from a cultural perspective; they enjoyed the language, the food and the clothing. They categorised themselves as Australians but felt that their heritage and the cultural awareness they have grown up with was something that set them apart from people who did not have the same knowledge.

> I'm just a typical Brisbane boy (chuckle). I like [being an Indian] from a cultural aspect, but I don't consider myself an Indian, I consider myself an Aussie.
> (Male, 33)

> Being an Indian, it's more like a preference, you know, it's something I am… I think if I didn't even have a culture I would be boring (smiles), so… you know, it's always good to have something that's you and that's different.
> (Female a, 19)

> I mean, my parents are from there and… so yeah, it is part of me, I have Fijian in me and you can't just take that away, you can't just ignore it.
> (Female, 21)

The feelings of cultural and Muslim identities in young age were clearly related to the age of the participants. Many of the older participants confessed that their parents had limited knowledge about Islam when they were children and that, rather than placing an emphasis on Islamic events, they participated in Christian traditions such as Christmas celebrations. As they grew older, however, the parents gradually became more aware of Islam and started being more aware of Islamic practices. As a contrast, many of the younger participants grew up in homes were religious

practices were always emphasised. Today, however, no differences in the level of religiosity due to such experiences could be identified.

In particular, two female participants indicated that they became more appreciative of their cultural backgrounds later in their lives, especially after being married to spouses of their own ethnic background. One affirmed that even though she, unlike many of her friends, was never ashamed of being a Bengali, she had tried to appear more Australian than Bengali when growing up. Another admitted that because her mother was an Australian convert and not accepted by the father's side of the family, she tried to suppress her Indian heritage when growing up.

> I realised as I got older, you know - I went through a period in high school when I was, like, trying to be as Aussie as I could. But now it is like, well, I acknowledge that I *like* a lot of things about [my background], I'm automatically attracted to things that has to do with my religion or my culture, more than I am towards the Australian side.
> (Female b, 28)

> I think with the growing up I didn't appreciate the Indian side, I didn't think the Indian relatives, or the *real* Indian relatives, were…we were different to them because my mother is Australian and to some of them, I don't feel they treated us as family. And I know for a fact that my mother had a hard time being accepted and we felt repercussions of that growing up, from a lot of my father's family. But it's not until recent years that I accept more and respect more and… like the Indian side. Because we weren't made to feel much like family I think we tried to reject it a bit more.
> (Female, 36)

Still, despite the frustration these women felt at times at being excluded from taking part in what their peers were doing, neither these nor any of the other participants reported they had ever seriously considered abandoning their Muslim identities.

### 4.1.5. Self-presentation

When the participants were asked how they identified themselves, many automatically referred to how they presented themselves to others. In their answers, many were keenly aware that their physical appearance was the first thing that caught people's eyes, and while some seemed to accept this and presented themselves in ethnic terms, one male participant felt quite resentful that he was pressured to present himself as someone he did not really identify with. The following responses clearly illustrate how the participants' personal identities and

the way they felt forced by others to identify themselves both in Australia or in their parents' place of origin, did not always correspond:

> I guess to everyone that sees me, because it's the way I look as well, I guess I'm Pakistani. But for me, all right – I do perceive myself as a Pakistani as well, but I'm also quite Australian.
> (Female a, 28)
>
> … I'd say I'm from Australia, because really, I am from Australia, I've lived here most of my life. But what they're really asking is "why are you brown and wearing the scarf sort of thing" so I'll go "my mum's Malaysian and I was born over there". But then, when I go over to Malaysia, I say I'm Australian because they want to know why I'm speaking funny and why I look slightly different.
> (Female, 20)
>
> It's funny, but you always get that when you say you're Australian "oh um, really, but where are your parents from?" "Australia" "… and where were your grand parents born?" "Australia". And then you have this humble, you know, "my great grand parents came from India" and then they are satisfied, you know, ok, now the world makes sense again. And yeah (laughter), I can't really wait until the day I don't get asked that question, because you know, the thing is that, what I dislike about it the most is that I don't have any Indian culture and so when I tell them I am from India I thus falsely represent myself.
> (Male, 29)

Given the situation, it was not surprising to find that some informants tended to internalise the identity other people assigned to them, as in the case of a female informant who confessed that she did not feel accepted as an Australian when she was younger, and consequently she did not feel like being an Australian. The ways in which assigned identities are internalised deserve much more attention than is given in this thesis, and is an area of possible future research.

### 4.1.6. Differentiating Islam and culture

Despite indicators of significant influences from family, friends and religious leaders in Australia, most of the participants felt that they were aware of the distinctions between religion and culture and that they practiced a 'pure' Islam free of cultural influences. They explained that they had to strike a balance by allowing cultural elements that were consistent with the teaching of Islam, while rejecting those cultural elements that go against the religion. As some of their responses indicate:

> …we find we can enjoy the culture but if we find that something is outside the boundaries of Islam, we forget about that part of culture.
> (Male, 33)

> I try to follow the Koran and the Sunna; I believe in that only, and yes, many people have put their own cultural views into it. But what I believe in is that we have to get rid of all that focus on 'what Islam did He leave us?', because the Islam he left us is the true Islam, the pure Islam, the only Islam, and that is the only Islam for me. And so, if the cultural is ok with the religion, then that's fine, but if it is something that is not, then sorry.
> (Female a, 28)

Some believed that they had a high awareness of the differences between religion and culture because they had grown up in a non-Muslim country. Although many had adopted the beliefs carried by their parents, some believed they had obtained a much clearer understanding of the lines between culture and religion. Interestingly, one male participant explained that inter-ethnic conflicts in Australia had made him determined to reject cultural influences to his religion.

> If you bring culture and religion together and talk of the two as one, you're basically not following the religion. You're bringing inadequate things into it, you're making it another thing altogether, you're making it a new thing by bringing in the things you want because it's your culture… My parents have always mixed it up and that's why I try and separate them. I guess living in Australia would have been a challenge finding out all of that and it really provoked me to do that.
> (Female a, 19)

> … that's the difference I think; I don't have those cultural aspects. I just have the kind of, what do you want to call it - pure…; whatever is the most correct source I take from, rather than doings something just because they do this in this country or this in that country. I feel that is the major difference to be, being a Muslim in Australia - because you have to go back to the sources and look at things, not just inheriting it from Palestine or wherever you're from, the cultural baggage as they often call it.
> (Female b, 19)

> [The conflict between different ethnic groups at the mosque] is another thing that probably has made me make up my mind that culture is human made and is wrong in some ways. Coming to a non-Muslim country - you have all these people coming here from other Muslim countries, thinking that they know everything about the religion, but what they do is to bring their culture mixed in with religion and then you bring in another country, and all countries have their different cultures and then you have clashes, like one person goes 'no no no, this is wrong and…'. The common ground is the Koran, it says in there what you're supposed to do, it's not complicated. But people want to be right, they're proud, stubborn and they say 'this is what we do in my country'.
> (Male, 24)

### 4.1.7. Sense of belonging to Australia after living in Muslim countries

One experience that clearly had significant impact on the participants' feelings of identity and belonging was their visits to Muslim countries. Half of the respondents had spent a significant period living in Muslim countries and only one considered it an exclusively rewarding experience. In this case, the participant particularly liked

the family-centred values and found it much easier to practice Islam in Indonesia than in Australia. Consequently, he decided he wanted to move back one day and not surprisingly, he was the only informant who clearly identified himself in ethnic terms.

Those who did not find living in a Muslim country exclusively positive were disappointed by the fact that their preconception that Muslims living in Muslim countries were very religious and compliant with religious practices, turned out to be false. Many were also surprised by the fact that un-Islamic behaviours in fact did occur in Muslim countries. This made some feel more appreciative of the Australian society, while others also realised that they had a stronger Australian identity than what they initially thought. The following admissions by different respondents, including a more lengthy description by a female informant, clearly illustrate such sentiments:

> I get depressed when I go there. Especially after grade 12 - I hadn't been there for six years. Going to a majority Muslim country I was expecting to see a lot of people who are close to Islam, practising Islam. And then I went there and I saw the opposite; women are afraid to wear *hijab*, men are afraid to grow a beard, most of them don't pray and I got depressed, I was thinking "this is crazy, this is a majority Muslim country and what's going on here". Even there they're afraid to be Muslims, even there they're afraid to practise Islam… [and] I thought "I'm glad I'm living in Australia!" (laughs).
> (Male, 19)

> I do perceive myself as a Pakistani as well but I'm also quite Australian. I realised that a lot when I went to Pakistan, I'm not like them, I'm different, I'm very, very different from the way Pakistanis *in* Pakistan are, I'm different…
> (Female a, 28)

> I have to say that the only time I've felt Australian was outside Australia (laughter). Well, before…people always judge people because of what you look, so straight away they think you're not Australian, you know, because you don't look it. But when I went to Saudi Arabia I went to a British school and all the teachers went "oh, look at the Aussie girl" right away, you know, because I speak with an Australian accent and that. And also I was just kind of, you know how you go shopping or something and you see anything that is made in Australia you go like "oh, I'll get that!" you know? It's weird, but there's a relationship with it that you don't consciously necessarily realise, and like um, during that period we did come back to Australia for holidays and…. I kind of didn't want to come back, but there was a weird feeling of something, like "this is a place I know". And then I kind of figured out that you can't help where you're from, you know, it's where you've been brought up, it just really affects you… very much… I felt a lot more alienated before, like I felt I wasn't an Australian, you know, because I didn't know how it was to live in a culture like the one I *thought* I was, you know what I mean? Sometimes you *think* you're from a place, but when you go there you find out that there are things that are different… that aren't exactly like you would expect.
> (Female b, 19)

## 4.2. Life as part of a Muslim minority

### 4.2.1. Upholding faith and religious practice

Whereas the majority of the participants explained that neither their religious nor ethnic identities had ever caused any issues, some expressed that certain aspects of the Australian society made things challenging for practicing Muslims. These included a lack of appropriate venues for observing prayers, intolerance and a lack of understanding of their religious practices, and exposure to a lifestyle that condones clothing with minimal body covering, premarital sex, cigarette smoking, drinking alcohol and eating pork and other non-halal foods. Still, despite these issues, they appreciated living in Australia and only one participant could imagine living elsewhere. As some of their responses indicate:

> Growing up as a Muslim is… difficult in Australia, in a Western society, very difficult, you can say very difficult yes, in terms of praying on the streets, the food situation, the way people look at you. As an Indonesian… I don't know. I haven't come across anything…maybe, recently about the Bali and the bombings in Indonesia… I don't know. I haven't come across anything, like people looking at Indonesian people differently.
> (Male, 24)

> The big thing is there should be more prayer rooms everywhere (laughs)… I think it's what you make it, the life you live it's how you make it. You can make the best or worse out of any situation… but I really think Australia is a great place and it's easy, it's easy for a woman to live here.
> (Female, 36)

> To speak frankly, I don't like the way the women dress here, for according to Islamic values I'm not meant to look at such sights, when they're not covered appropriate and that, and that annoys me. As when I come to Uni, it annoys me when I see all this stuff; like I look everywhere and I get the same thing and I don't like it, and that's one thing I liked in Bangladesh, because even though they didn't cover their hair it was all modest. [But] I don't regret growing up here, I like living here, I prefer here much more than living in my parents' country.
> (Male, 19)

Some went further and considered these experiences as positive challenges, as they were required to be more knowledgeable about Islam. They stressed that you cannot simply follow what the majority does and still be a Muslim in Australia; you have to practice Islam consciously if you do not want to lose your religious identity. The challenges for Muslims living in a non-Muslim country, for some, were further seen as a test from God and for that, they felt they had to prove that they were strong enough to uphold their faith and resist temptations. The following responses from two of the study's informants clearly illustrate their position:

To be a Muslim here you have to actively be a Muslim. When you go to a non-Muslim country they are (laughs), I don't know whether I can say this – they're Muslims by default, like they've been brought up, it's just the way they're used to there, it's just automatically. But here you have to actively, consciously and individually be a Muslim and you have to practice it…
(Female a, 28)

… all these things out there, they're all to test Muslims, that's what I see them as, they're just to test how strong we are in our faith. Like, it just makes you more determined to be true to your faith... I mean, growing up and seeing things we're not meant to see and knowing that we're not meant to do things… and you know, having all these temptations and influence out there, it's just… made me more…determined you know, about my religion, to learn more about more Islam and be more committed to my religion.
(Female, 20)

Some participants with one or two Australian born parents had developed a clearly nationalistic view about Australia and persistently stressed how lucky they were to be able to live in that country. Some were even quite critical about the Muslims who complained about the Australian society and believed that it was easier to practice Islam in Australia than in many Muslim countries. As one of the participants remarked:

It's easy enough to live here… look, to be quite honest - I can't really speak of personal experience but from my discussions with other Muslims and from what I hear it is actually easier to practice Islam here than in some Muslim countries. The freedom of religion we have here, you know, it's really good. Um, you know, you have the opportunity to earn a very good livelihood, it's secure, it's peaceful, it's free of pollution, you have clean drinking water… we take that for granted but most countries in the world don't have clean drinking water! … And for those people who are unfortunate enough not to be able to find a job or whatever, we have institutions to help them find a job, I mean, they can get social security for the times they find it tough and… I mean it's great, you know, it's really, really great, so why should Muslims complain about anything, you know.
(Male, 29)

### 4.2.2. Role in educating people about Islam

Although many participants in this study were critical of the ways Islam and Muslims have been presented by the media, they also blamed Muslim extremists for the negative stereotypes many Australians hold about Islam and Muslims. All indicated that they were happy to answer questions about Islam so that they could contribute to a better understanding of Islam and correct some of the misconceptions people had of their religion and the people who practice it. Many, however, admitted that they knew Muslims who did not like to be confronted about their religious beliefs.

Given that the informants who agreed to be interviewed in this study were confident about their religious faith and identity, not surprisingly some considered themselves to have an important role in educating non-Muslims about Islam and in fact saw this as one of the most positive aspects of being part of a Muslim minority. In particular, two informants who had visited Muslim countries found themselves more enthused to assist in correcting people's misconceptions about Islam. Their feelings are best illustrated by their comments below; the first participant was happy to find that Australians had become more interested in Islam after September 11th, whereas the second referred to the large Muslim community in Lakemba in Sydney and concluded that he preferred to live in Brisbane.

> Because people are more interested you know, you have more of a role in educating people about Islam, you have more of a role in society and it feels good because people want to know. There's a positive attitude out there and that makes you feel proud of being a Muslim, more proud. I mean, although we're proud of being Muslims just that people want to know… it makes you feel more proud, like here people don't know about Islam so we have to show them what Islam really is and so…that makes us feel good.
> (Female, 21)
>
> I like that non-Muslims see me. Because I try my best to practise Islam and so I think me walking around looking like a Muslim practising Islam is good for the perceptions about my religion. Yes, [I think I have a role to play], to show them and at a later stage perhaps they'll be reflecting upon it and see something they think is good.
> (Male, 19)

While the participants were happy to explain to non-Muslims about their religion when asked, most were careful about forcing their religion upon people. Many recalled that when they were young, they avoided discussing religion with their classmates and friends, mainly because they did not think other children would understand. The participants who socialised with non-Muslims said they still avoided using their religion to explain their behaviours. Most participants felt their friends were considerate; only one male indicated that his friends made him uncomfortable by, for example, bringing him to eat out at Mc Donald's even though they knew it was against his religious practices.

## 4.3. Experiences of being different

The experiences of growing up in Australia as part of a Muslim and an Australian ethnic minority varied significantly among the informants. Although most had experienced religion to be an issue, in one way or another, only a few had negative experiences due to their skin colour or ethnic backgrounds. Still, while some explained that they did not feel any different to their non-Muslim classmates as they grew up, others were more conscious about the differences and in some cases considered it a very lonely experience.

As the experiences associated with growing up were holistic stories told in length by the informants, statements relating to specific topics cannot be separated without losing the context for understanding. This section is therefore kept more descriptive, with a few but lengthy extracts illustrating major findings.

### 4.3.1. Choices of lifestyle

All participants had experiences from studying at schools with few Muslims and a majority of students from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. It was clear that most felt more comfortable at schools with a higher proportion of Muslims, or at least, schools with a more multicultural setting. They believed the teachers and students at these schools had a better understanding of different religions and cultural backgrounds, and they felt they had more in common with children from other ethnic backgrounds. Some were aware of the ways in which they were different from their peers already in the early schooling years, due to the colour of their skin, their clothes and food restrictions, and their limited freedom to participate in many activities both during and after school hours. Some felt picked upon and left out by their classmates, and some experienced discrimination or intolerance from their teachers. The feeling of being different for most, however, became much more pressing when they reached their teens and started high school. Many of the participants felt the distance between themselves and their classmates grow as it became common to have boyfriends and girlfriends, smoke cigarettes, go to parties and drink alcohol. In addition, many of the participants became more religiously aware, and practices like praying and fasting, and for more of the female

participants, not participating in swimming and sports and wearing *hijab*, further set them apart.

While some never experienced their teens as difficult, others felt left out by their peers or set apart by religious restrictions and their parents' strict guidelines. Some further chose to leave themselves out as they rejected the lifestyle of the other students and found it better to be alone. It was clear that the participants sought out friends that they could identify with, and in most cases this meant classmates who were fairly conservative in their behaviours and like themselves perhaps stayed away from cigarettes, alcohol, parties and intimate relationships.

The participants' social networks were highly multicultural and consisted of very devout Christians and students from various cultural and religious backgrounds, including Hindus, Buddhists and Jews in addition to a few Muslims. More participants who only had non-Muslim friends explained that there were other Muslims at school but that they chose not to establish close friendships with these, as they were less practicing than they themselves were. While some participants, female as well as male, socialised with their non-Muslim friends outside school, these friendships were restricted to school for the majority of the sample. Some participants told that their parents wanted to protect them by not allowing them to visit non-Muslim friends during their spare time. After-school hours and weekends were normally spent with family, extended family and other families in the Muslim community, and by undertaking classes in Arabic and Koran studies.

### 4.3.2. Respect for parents

Whereas many of the informants admitted that they felt their parents were too strict and perhaps treated them unfairly when they were teenagers, they said they always had an enormous respect for their parents and avoided confrontations with them. Most participants wanted to emphasise that they agreed with their parents' decisions even though it felt difficult at times, and that in retrospect they were thankful for their restricted freedom in childhood and appreciated that their parents had protected them from straying off the path of Islam. Men and women, the youngest and the older participants alike, agreed on this point. Only the most liberal female in

the sample longed for more freedom to go out with her non-Muslim friends at night time.

The general impression was that by their teens, the participants were aware of what was right and wrong according to their religion and accepted the restrictions put upon them by Islam and by their parents. The levels of temptation and peer pressure seemed remarkably low. Some participants admitted that during their schooling years at times they felt uncomfortable because they faced a lack of understanding towards their religion, and perhaps felt tempted to indulge in behaviours they perceived as wrong in order to try and fit in with their peers. Despite such conflicts, none ever doubted that Islam was the right religion for them. Many explained that they never felt tempted to conform to the majority and that they always viewed their religion as a guide to right behaviour and as a source of strength. Naturally, the views on what was permitted and not permitted according to Islam varied amongst the participants, and whereas some, for example, believed it was allowed to go to mixed-sex parties as long as they themselves did not touch alcohol, others believed that this was against Islam.

### 4.3.3. Loneliness

Even though the issue of feeling different was common, for most participants there were no big issues associated with growing up as they had friends they could identify with at school. Three women, including the oldest and the youngest participants, nonetheless explained how they felt lonely and depressed during periods when they went to schools dominated by children from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and had no classmates they could closely identify with. Whereas one of these women felt left out as a result of a lack of understanding from her peers and by the restrictions placed upon her by her parents, the other women chose to actively withdraw as they rejected the lifestyle choices of their peers. Despite these differences, the result was for all a feeling of being lonely. The following extracts give an insight into the experiences of being different amongst these three women. The stories also shed light upon other topics mentioned above, such as how multicultural friendships were made and how Islam was perceived as a source of strength rather than conflict.

... as I got older, as I got to around 19 years, I really felt boxed in. I felt like it should be more to my life and I was lonely. I was very lonely. And as with the high school years - I didn't fit in. I had a terrible time. I think mainly because of my upbringing, which was different. We were discouraged from the girlfriend-boyfriend way of thinking - because of course in high school everyone has boyfriends and girlfriends (laughs). Um… you know, I wasn't allowed to go to parties and… because of all that I just didn't really click with any of my high school friends, and my primary school friends - we went down different paths because I went to a totally different high school to them… My brother never had any problems but, yeah, I just couldn't fit and I felt the teachers hated me… At school we were the only Muslims I think, Islam wasn't very well known back then I think and people didn't really understand and we even, sadly I think, we were self conscious and a little bit afraid of being so different. So it wasn't really talked about.
 (Female, 36)


Certain things, you know, changes [in high school] and I realised that there were certain things I couldn't do because I'm a Muslim, I can't. And then, also you know, in that teenage state they talked about certain things and I realised that I, I don't do these things, I don't *want* to do these things. Just like parties…and you know…boys and… smoking, drugs, these things, going to the city, you know, at night - things my parents would never allow us to do. So, just things like that you know, just because of that age, so well, then I realised that I was different, I am different. Whereas in primary school it wasn't like that. … I remember I had one friend generally, over the years, that I did remain in contact with even after a few years, and she was Australian, Anglo-Australian. She was a girl that didn't drink, she didn't smoke cigarettes, she didn't do a lot of the things the general population was doing, and so that way we could gel in a way and like, and she didn't go clubbing or she didn't go out late at night or anything and so she was a simple girl in that respect, and a nice person generally and so that's the way we had more things in common. I guess I became quite lonely during high school because of that, just because of the way things went. … [I never felt disillusioned about Islam], never ever. And I think that perhaps was what brought me through that period, that I knew, you know, what I am here for and, what can I say, being a Muslim is just so, how can I explain it…. fulfilling, because you know the reason why you're put on this earth and…  The things happening to you - is a test, it's God that is testing you and so just be strong, just try your best to go through it and you know, at the times things hurt or you go through painful situations, but that's just the way life is meant to be.
(Female a, 28)


I suppose, by grade seven there were a few things… like we didn't go dancing, we didn't go swimming and stuff like that. By the end of grade seven I think the teacher was a bit kind of sick of it… a bit…it was just the feeling I got and I was quite annoyed and rather than being happy that I finished – I was happy that I finished but I was quite annoyed by the end of it I must say. It was a difficult time for me.  I don't know, I felt quite alienated from society, I didn't feel like I had a similar life to everyone else, like while they were having a boyfriend and was swearing and… it was just the norm to be cool and stuff like that – I rejected it, I just, it was not my way, it wasn't you know. I just kind of felt sorry for them, I kind of thought, you know, 'this is wrong, why are they...' – I couldn't understand why they were doing it! This whole notion of being cool and - you do things not because you're *happy* doing it, you're just doing it for someone else – and I just couldn't understand why, why everyone was doing it. So I was kind of…- actually by the grade 6 and 7 I kind of had left my Australian friends then, because I felt they were going down that road and um, I was pretty much on my own really… I distanced myself from both my Australian friends and the Muslims who were already with the others. Yeah, it was quite difficult, I mean, I did try different people and that but I just kind of decided that society... this is how the Australian society is, this is not… not my way. Then I went to high school in grade 8 and that was a different school and there were people from different countries so that was a lot – I felt a lot better in high school.
(Female b, 19)

It is interesting to note that all three participants to relate strong feelings of being different from their peers in young age were women. Although the sample was all too small to make any generalisations, this finding may indicate that females perhaps face larger difficulties in socialising with non-Muslims in a young age than their male counterparts. Further research would be valuable to identify such gender specific differences.

### 4.3.4. Being different to the Muslim minority

Most of the participants had attended university, or were still studying at the time of the interviews. Many found starting university as a positive experience as they could be part of a Muslim community through the Muslim student associations and because they felt that people in general were more mature and had a better understanding of their religion than in high school. However, two young women, who had only non-Muslim friends until they started university, had mixed feelings about the presence of many Muslims. One female explained that she missed friends with whom she could share her religion during high school. Even so, when she started university and made Muslim friends, she discovered that in many ways she identified more closely with her non-Muslim girlfriends than with her new Muslim acquaintances. Another female, who considered herself a very liberal Muslim, still only socialised with non-Muslims and found it a bit awkward when people expected her to know the other Muslim students at the university she was attending.

> It was really different [starting university], because I wasn't used to have Muslim friends, and all my high school buddies weren't there. I just had my Muslim friends and um, I felt very different at the start because – even though we were in the same religion they were all humble and less loud… they were just very nice and I thought I was the mean one, like I've never thought I was mean but I was always louder and I talked a lot, and I think they just sometimes got fed up with me (laughter)… And I went like uh, I miss all that, I miss my friends…
> (Female a, 19)

> I've pretty much been around and socialised with Australians all my life so I have to admit it's a little bit difficult for me sometimes. Because at Uni you see all the Malaysian and Indonesian students and the Muslim students and people go "do you know this person?" and I go "well, I actually don't know the Malaysian students or the Muslim students that well" - because I'm still with the Australians quite a lot. I go to the prayer room when I need to pray and maybe one or two start up conversations and I talk with them, but I actually don't know their names. That's ok enough, I'm friendly with them and I have nothing against them, it's just that I prefer my Aussie friends (laughs) I have to admit.
> (Female, 20)

The last of these women had recently moved to Brisbane from a smaller town in the greater Brisbane area with a small and very liberal Muslim community, and she felt that she had to pay respect to the Muslim community in general and the other Muslims at university in particular by restricting her behaviour. She was concerned about her reputation and did not want her parents to hear other Muslims talk about her in a negative way. She therefore started dressing more modestly and she never went to the student bar anymore, even though she personally believed it was acceptable to go there as long as she did not touch alcohol. Two years ago she began wearing *hijab*, and her changes in behaviour seemed to be a combination of an increased religious awareness and a pressure to conform to what was considered appropriate by the dominant part of the Muslim community in Brisbane.

> Mainly because now we've moved in to Brisbane and there are a lot more Muslims around and everything, and catching me in like a mini skirt and a top and then seeing me at the mosque, completely covered, it's slightly hypocritical… Well ok, for myself I don't really care, but because of my mum and also because of my father it's best not to start anything, and a lot of these people like to talk, and so they will not say it to your face, they'll talk about you behind your back and you'll get a reputation kind of thing. And I *would* like to make a good marriage sort of thing in the future, I don't want to burn *all* my bridges and so I thought you know, instead of tempting all this sort of fate and everything, I'll dress modestly.
> (Female, 20)

Although she believed her Muslim friends from university would like her to become more conservative she related that she did not feel trapped between her non-Muslim friends and the Muslim community. Rather, she was confident that she was accepted in both camps.

## 4.4. Experiences of cultural and religious intolerance

### 4.4.1. Before September 11th

In general, the participants said that they had experienced very little cultural and religious intolerance during the years. The majority of participants faced comments regarding their skin colour and cultural practices when they were younger, but explained that these comments were merely innocent jokes from other children. Many felt that their classmates lacked understanding of their religion and although some perhaps felt uncomfortable due to this, few would go so far as to call it harassment.

As shown through the excerpts in section 4.3.3, some participants had experiences with teachers who were discriminatory and felt this affected their schooling years in a negative way. Only two female participants told about extensive cultural and religious intolerance from other students during school, and both found their *hijab* to be one of the main reasons for the teasing. One of these women explained that she did not really start enjoying school before she became school captain late in high school and thus gained respect from the other students. The other woman was alone in telling of significant experiences of intolerance from people she knew personally also after her high school years. She faced intolerance from teachers and students alike during her university studies, and later decided not to wear her *hijab* at work as she found it had too negative an impact upon her employment. She further explained that she had noticed negative reactions from her colleagues since recently starting to wear *hijab* again.

Only one other girl wore *hijab* in high school, she did not, however, find it to be an issue. None of the other participants, male or female, said that they had experienced any harassment due to their religion before September 11th.

### 4.4.2. After September 11th

The participants' experiences of intolerance varied as much after September 11th as they did before. Three women and one man, including those who told of negative experiences before this incident, had personally felt a significant and negative change after 2001. One woman did not experience any intolerance before she started wearing *hijab* in 2003, but chose to take it off after many months of harassment. The rest of the participants had generally noticed a degree of change in people's perceptions, but had not been affected personally. Even so, four of these in the latter group, one man and three women, each told of a significant one-off incident involving oral harassment by strangers.

All informants were convinced that negative reactions were triggered by an obvious Muslim appearance. All the women wore *hijab* and the male participant who had negative experiences found that people reacted as he prayed in public or walked towards the mosque wearing Islamic clothes. He found that people were laughing

and making jokes at him before September 11<sup>th</sup>, but that they later seemed to be afraid of him and avoided looking in his direction.

The young woman who started wearing *hijab* as she commenced her university degree in 2003 found the reactions very challenging. She explained that she regularly faced smart remarks and verbal attacks from strangers on the street, felt treated as a non-English speaking foreigner by administrative staff at university, and overheard many negatively loaded comments from students. She said that the harassment shattered her confidence and that she lost some of her faith in people. She started fearing for her safety and therefore decided not to wear *hijab* until she feels that she is ready to cope with it:

> I *do* want to wear it in the future, but right now I just feel it's like… it's a really hard time… because of what I've been through and because… like I'm still studying and I'm still always travelling by myself and I mean… It's really unsafe for me right now and I still have late classes and, I just thought about all the precautions and I thought I will just have to wait…I will just have to wait. It's supposed to protect you and instead it just attracts attention in a very negative way… I'm just so young and I didn't believe that people would do that to a younger persons, but now I do, now I think that some people *are* mean, you know.
> (Female a, 19)

Two women, one who had no previous experiences of intolerance and one who had, told that they had experienced many episodes where people stared, gave negative remarks or verbally threatened them in public. Even so, both of these women had experienced some people behaving particularly nice to them; smiling at them, saying hello or apologising for the situation:

> After September 11<sup>th,</sup> that's brought a big awareness about Islam, good and bad. It doesn't happen every week, it's only happened a couple of times, but yeah, occasionally you feel that someone's looking at you and you look and see someone's just smiling and they make sure to catch your eye, and it does happen and it just makes you feel so good!
> (Female, 36)

> I mean it is racism out there, but not so much. At one stage it was, but not anymore. It's calmed down a bit [after September 11<sup>th</sup>] with a lot of people, but I mean, I don't get it much anymore, before I used to - you know, get racist remarks and that, but now I don't get it. People talk to you nicely and things like that. I think it's the attitudes of people that have changed, some have become more tolerant towards other religions and that, and some wants to know more about what this religion Islam is and so the general atmosphere I feel, it is tolerance towards Islam.
> (Female, 21)

One of the women who told she had no negative experiences due to her religious identity, neither before not after September 11<sup>th</sup>, had similarly observed that some people made an effort to be particularly nice towards her. One female and two male participants believed that it had calmed down after a difficult period following September 11<sup>th</sup>, and that people in recent years had become more interested in learning about Islam. Another woman however believed that the negative image of Muslims was still escalating:

> It didn't continue [after the Gulf War], it did almost go down a little bit because it was such a big difference in time between the Gulf War and September 11<sup>th,</sup> but from September 11<sup>th</sup> to this Iraq war it hasn't gone down. It's actually been like this ongoing, continuous thing, if anything it's been escalating and, you know, getting higher.
> (Female b, 28)

While the participants explained that they felt sad or angry when people judged them by their looks, none felt that their feelings of identity or belonging had changed because of their experiences. As indicated by the two statements below, some of the participants showed a strong feeling of belonging to Australia and a confidence in their right to practice Islam:

> It's pretty hard sometimes, I mean this is supposed to be a multicultural society and people are meant to respect all kinds of religions and cultures and race and all, you know, everything, and we're all meant to be able to live peacefully and, you know – coexist with each other. But sometimes that makes me mad, because I mean, I'm an Australian, right, despite of my religion I was *born* in this country and I have the *right* to be here!
> (Female, 20)

> People cannot say I don't belong, I've contributed to this country; the whole history of my family has contributed. We're part of Australia.
> (Male 33)

While it was obvious to the participants that any positive or negative reactions towards them had been triggered by their Muslim appearance, it is difficult to explain why some of the women wearing *hijab* and *abayah* and even *nikab* had never experienced anything but one-off incidences. It is reasonable to believe that it comes down to how confident people are about themselves and in their rights to practice their religion as Australians, reflecting how exposed they are to other peoples' opinions. It is also reasonable to believe that some of the women perhaps had an interest in opposing the negative stereotypes circulated about them and thus

perhaps avoided relaying negative experiences. That individual attitudes may influence the way people interpret experiences can be illustrated by following statements:

> Probably they do [look at me strangely and stuff], but I'm not the person who looks around to see how people react to me, I don't have that type of attitude, and if you look around you'll find it, but I really don't care. That's their problem, if they have a problem it's their problem, not mine.
> (Female a, 28)

> I do find that people have negative experiences and I've found… that they actually look for negative experiences!
> (Male, 33)

Similarly, the woman who faced significant harassment after she started wearing a *hijab* partly blames herself for being too concerned about what other people might think of her:

> … other girls that wear the scarf from they're younger I feel are more confident, because they're raised to wear it and it's become a part of them, whereas I had to accept myself wearing it first, and people had to accept me…and now I look at it and I think like, you know, why did I want people to accept me, I should just have accepted myself, as long as I accept myself it shouldn't matter what other people think, but um…
> (Female a, 19)

# Chapter 5

# Discussion

## 5.1. Integrated and hybrid identities

Despite recent claims that young Muslim Australians face conflicting loyalties (Akbarzadeh 2001; Das 3003; Deen 2003; Inglis, Elley and Manderson 1992), the participants in this study displayed few such sentiments. Rather, they had successfully integrated their religious, national and cultural identities in a clearly hierarchical fashion.

The general impression made by the participants was that they were proud and devout Muslims who identified themselves as Australians belonging in Australia, and who to a varying extent appreciated their cultural backgrounds. For all but one, their Islamic identity was clearly of overlaying importance. Although the participants had a strong sense of Muslim, Australian as well as ethnic identities, they did not necessarily closely identify with the majority of people representing these identities. Instead, they seemed to have developed unique identities as Muslim Australians with diverse cultural backgrounds. Further, rather than viewing their religious, national and cultural identities as conflicting with each other, the participants seemed to have selectively adopted their parents' cultural traditions and those Australian values that were consistent with the Islamic teachings, and rejected those in direct conflict with their religious beliefs. Consistent with Saeed and Akbarzadeh's (2001) argument, their identities were in this sense clearly hybrid.

## 5.2. A gradual decline in the importance of ethnic backgrounds

Saeed and Akbarzadeh's (2001) claim that second and third generation Muslims' bonds to Australia do not typically lead to a decline in the importance of their Islamic and ethnic heritage has, through this study, been substantiated in regard to religion but not in regard to ethnicity.

Whereas the Islamic identity for all participants was important, the relationship between their Australian and ethnic identities varied significantly. Some rated these identities as equally important, while others identified themselves as Muslim

Australians and merely appreciated their ethnic heritages from a cultural perspective. None of the participants with two Australian born parents felt their ethnic heritage had any significant relevance to their feelings of identity and belonging. It is, however, not unlikely that there might be a resurgence in the emphasis on cultural backgrounds amongst Australian born Muslims in the future.

Considering the assumption that identities are shaped by the amount of time a person spends in a certain community (Bouma 1996; Inglis, Elley and Manderson 1992), it is, however, reasonable to believe that the salient features of Australian born Muslims' ethnic backgrounds might be stronger for many people who have grown up as part of a more close-knit ethnic community. Regardless, Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) found that the practicing participants in their study, who predominately socialised with their own ethnic group, also felt that their Muslim identities were more important than their ethnic identities. It thus appears that while the importance of Muslim Australians' ethnic backgrounds perhaps tends to decrease over time, the religious identities for many remain strong.

The strong religious commitment shown by the majority of participants in this study is not representative of all Australian born Muslims. It is reasonable to believe that, for people who are more liberal in their religious practices, the Islamic identity might be less dominant. For example, Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) found that the more liberal participants in their study perceived their Turkish identities to be of higher importance than their Muslim identities. Inglis, Elley and Manderson seemed to focus upon ethnic and religious identities rather than the Australian identity. This study, however, indicates that an Australian identity, which dominates both the ethnic and religious identities, might be more representative of less devout Muslims with less reliance upon their ethnic groups.

## 5.3. A Muslim identity overriding ethnic lines

The belief that the strong devoutness held by many Muslim immigrants' tends to be reflected in their children (Bouma, Daw and Munawar 2001; Deen 2003) may be substantiated by this study. The participants had an enormous respect for their parents and seemed to have internalised the religious beliefs and practices held by them, indeed, some of the participants seemed to place more emphasis on religious

practices than their parents. In particular, in accordance with Asmar (2001) and Mubarak's (1996) studies, many felt that they had obtained a higher awareness of the distinctions between religious and cultural traditions than their parents had. Interestingly, many of the participants were not aware of their distinct Australian and Islamic identities before they were confronted with opposing values on overseas travels. Many of the participants admitted that they were disappointed to realise that people in Muslim dominated countries were, in general, less devout than they initially believed. They repeated the view held by Bouma (1994) and Saeed (2003), upholding that Muslims living in non-Muslim countries often place a greater emphasis on religious practice and in general are more aware of the lines between religion and culture than many people in Muslim dominated countries.

In line with the view shared by Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) and Bouma (1996), that identities are reinforced through close interaction with a community, it seemed clear that the participants' experiences of living in Australia, and more specifically in Brisbane, had influenced their feelings of identity and belonging. It was apparent that, perhaps due to the small Muslim community in Brisbane, the participants all had highly multicultural social networks consisting of Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds and non-Muslims of various denominations as they grew up. The clearly secondary role of the participants' ethnic identities seemed to be related to these cross-cultural relationships, and subsequently the limited time spent within their own ethnic group.

The overriding importance of the Muslim identity, the strong emphasis on the differences between culture and religion, and the participants' multicultural Muslim networks, strengthens the hypothesis that young Muslim Australians' identities transcend ethnic lines. The hypothesis of an emerging Muslim Australian identity uniting Muslims in Australia cannot however be supported by the findings in this study, as the participants clearly did not identify with all Muslim Australians or even with many Australian born Muslims in their own city. In this study, the lack of identification did not seem to be related to ethnic backgrounds, as argued to be one of the main barriers by Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001), but to different levels of religious practice. It has, for example, been shown that many of the very devout participants during their schooling years deliberately distanced themselves from

other Muslim students perceived to be too liberal in their behaviours. Instead, they chose to establish close relationships with students from different denominations, e.g. Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, who like themselves were more conservative in their behaviours. Also, it has been shown how two of the more liberal female participants identified themselves more closely with their non-Muslim friends than with their Muslim acquaintances.

Due to the implications on feelings of identity and belonging, the role of the social environment in shaping identities deserves further research. In particular, it would be interesting to investigate what similarities and differences there are between Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds and between Muslims growing up in various areas of Australia. In addition, it would be valuable to obtain an understanding of the differences and similarities in the feelings of identity and belonging amongst young Australians of various cultural and religious backgrounds.

## 5.4. Islam as a source of strength and not conflict

According to earlier studies of immigrant children in Australia and overseas, a significant presence of conflicting loyalties, especially during teenage years, between the participants' own aspirations, their parents' expectations, and the expectations of their friends and mainstream society might have been expected. Instead, the participants painted a much more harmonious picture in which their loyalties were always towards their parents and Islam. They all had a high level of respect for their parents, and although some explained that they sometimes felt their parents were too strict they accepted their decisions and in retrospect thanked the parents for protecting them from straying off the right path. Although there were cases of temptations to conform in order to feel less different, as documented by Deen (2003), Inglis, Elley and Manderson (1992) and Akbarzadeh (2001), the participants accepted that certain behaviours were against their religion and in most cases they abstained. Rather than viewing their religion as a barrier they viewed it as a source of strength and none seriously admitted ever to have considered turning their back on Islam.

## 5.5. Feelings of being 'different' in young age

While some of the participants never experienced the situation of growing up as Muslims in Australia as difficult, a consequence for many was a feeling of being different to their peers. This finding is consistent with the desire to feel 'normal', as earlier observed by several researchers (Deen 2003; see also Asmar 2001; Inglis, Elley and Manderson 1992; Mubarak 1996). Some participants further felt lonely, depressed and even alienated from Australian society as they did not feel they could identify with any of the other students. The experience of feeling different during childhood seemed particularly pressing for those who had experienced cultural and religious intolerance. Although the female-dominated sample limits gender-comparisons, the findings suggest that issues associated with the feeling of being different may be more prominent for females than for males. This may be a result of the stronger restrictions often placed upon young Muslim females regarding dress and the ability to socialise in public compared with their male counterparts.

Currently, the issue of feeing different may constitute a larger issue for Australian Muslims, particularly children, than for Australians of other denominations because of the extensive and negative publicity recently given Islam and the people who practice it. It has been widely argued that Islam may suffer from a worse reputation than any other religion (see eg Kabir and Moore 2003). In addition, Islam is a public religion and practicing Muslims may therefore be highly visible in society compared with people of more secular denominations. It is, however, reasonable to believe that the issue of feeling different is common for many Australians of various cultural and religious backgrounds, and the topic deserves increased attention as the children's wellbeing during childhood may be negatively affected, as shown in this thesis.

All the participants related that they felt comfortable with their identities as adults, and it is uncertain what impacts negative experiences related to religious and cultural intolerance in earlier years may have had upon feelings of identity and belonging. It is, however, reasonable to believe that some of the negative experiences some people would carry with them for life, and it is therefore important to uncover how such experiences may be prevented.

## 5.6. Alienation due to intolerance and lack of acceptance

Whereas the feeling of being 'different' for some participants resulted in a feeling of isolation and loneliness, experiences of intolerance and lack of acceptance for some resulted in a feeling of alienation and lack of belonging to Australia. Whereas the experiences of religious and cultural intolerance may have proved to be less significant than expected in this study, the subsequent feelings of alienation are consistent with the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's (2004) study. Not surprisingly, the participants' resistance towards intolerance seemed to increase later in life.

All but one participant showed a strong sense of belonging to Australia. This participant was alone in relating negative feelings associated with life in Australia as a Muslim; both in regard to intolerance and obstacles practicing Islam. In addition, this participant may have enjoyed a less harmonious relationship with his extended family in Australia than many of the others. Contrary to the participants who had mixed experiences visiting their ancestors' countries, he viewed the experience of living in his father's homeland as solely positive and, in particular, he valued the strong emphasis placed upon family. Although the knowledge about this person's situation is far from sufficient to draw any conclusions, his negative experiences may represent part of the reason why he felt a stronger belonging to his father's homeland than to Australia.

Lack of acceptance may come from the ethnic community as well as from the overall Australian society; it nonetheless may result in a feeling of alienation. Whereas one female participant related that she was not made to feel Australian during childhood and subsequently felt a stronger attachment to her parents' country, another participant explained that she rejected her Indian heritage because she did not feel accepted as an Indian by her extended family. It has also been shown how some of the participants adopted the presentation of their identities to fit the expectations held by others, further suggesting that identities assigned by others due to a lack of acceptance may be internalised and lead to alienation.

## 5.7. Individual experiences of intolerance

While only a few of the participants felt significant racial and religious intolerance from teachers or students during their schooling years, for them, it had a negative impact upon the pleasure of going to school. Many felt their peers lacked understanding of their religious practices, and for some this created a feeling of discomfort. Jokes were also common, but explained as innocent and not worth mentioning. Surprisingly, considering the vast documentation on increased levels of intolerance and harassment towards Muslims after the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 and other national and international incidents involving Muslims the same year, many of the participants claimed that they had not personally experienced any negative episodes, neither before nor after this date. All of the participants, however, believed that the perception of Muslims worsened after September 11th. The two women and one man who had experienced religious intolerance prior to September 11th all felt increased levels of religious intolerance after this date. Worth noting is that these two women were the only ones who related significant levels of cultural intolerance during childhood. None of the other participants had ever felt any significant levels of either cultural or religious intolerance prior to September 11th, and only two women amongst these had felt harassed because of their Islamic dress since this date. These varying findings are consistent with the recent and extensive study undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2004).

As the appearance and movements of the participants in this study cannot explain their diverse experiences, their stories can be seen to reflect individual ways of interpreting situations and coping with the negative reputation of Islam and Muslims. Three women had indeed experienced negative episodes, but brushed them away as 'one-off' incidents. Some further explained that they avoided looking for negative reactions but believed that if they did look, they would probably find them.

Many of the participants who had experiences with religious intolerance had never felt any harassment or discrimination due to their ethnic background or skin colour, and they all believed that religious harassment was triggered by an obvious Muslim

appearance. This supports Kabir's (2003) argument that intolerance towards Muslims today is based upon religion rather than ethnicity.

The participants were confident in their rights to practice their religion, and while they explained that they felt sad and angry when people judged them because of their religious practices, they did not let it affect their feelings of identity and belonging. Unlike the feelings of fear, isolation and alienation related by many of the informants in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's study, the participants felt merely upset, sad and angry as a result of the increased hostility towards Muslims. Nonetheless, many of the participants explained that they knew other Muslims who were afraid of going outside their homes. It should be stressed that the great confidence radiated by these Australian born Muslims perhaps makes them more resistant to intolerance than less confident Muslims, many of whom might be found amongst the first generation immigrants.

Some of the participants felt that the general perception of Muslims again had improved and that Australians had become more interested in learning about Islam. This supports the more positive picture painted by Cleland (2004) and Saeed (2003), arguing that in the aftermath of September 11th there has been an increasing interest in Islam and an awareness of the necessity to defend the values of multicultural Australia. The participants explained that they were happy to answer questions about Islam so that they can contribute to the correction of the negative stereotypes held by many Australians, and thus showed that they deserve recognition for contributing to Australian multicultural society.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

Since the Second World War, Australia has moved from being a white, Anglo-Saxon oriented nation to a society celebrating cultural and religious diversity. Islam is a small but rapidly growing religion in Australia, and despite vast differences, Muslims from all corners of the world are living side by side in relative harmony. Seemingly mainstreaming trends within the Muslim community has made some scholars question whether a common Australian Muslim identity, unifying all the nation's Muslims, may be developing.

Based upon interviews with Australian Muslims grown up in Brisbane, this thesis is a contribution to the knowledge of how feelings of identity and belonging are developed amongst this group. It shows how the participants have successfully integrated their religious, national and ethnic identities and perceive no contradiction between being Australians and Muslims. While their Muslim identities remain strong, their ethnic backgrounds seem gradually to lose relevance. It has been argued that the participants' focus upon their Muslim and Australian identities rather than their ethnic backgrounds have been influenced by their minority situation, in which friendships have been based upon common beliefs regarding behaviour instead of ethnicity.

Despite earlier findings of conflicting loyalties amongst young Muslim Australians, the incidence of conflict seemed remarkably low during the participants' schooling years, as their loyalties were always towards their parents and Islam. The feeling of being different to their peers was however common, and this issue deserves further attention as in some cases it led to depression, loneliness and lack of belonging to the Australian society.

Although the Muslim identities amongst the participants in this study were found to transcend ethnic lines, the hypothesis of an emerging identity uniting all Australian Muslims cannot be supported by this study. In this research, more than any other

factor, varying levels of religious practice proved to be a barrier for identification between the Australian Muslims.

Despite vast documentation of increased antagonism towards Muslims since the 1990s, and particularly since September 11$^{th}$ 2001, the participants' experiences were highly diverse, and many participants had not personally experienced any negative reactions towards their religion, neither before nor after this date. Even though it was confirmed that people's perceptions about Islam and Muslims worsened with September 11$^{th}$ and the subsequent 'War on Terror', some of the participants believed that the hostility towards Islam has settled and that people have become increasingly tolerant and interested in learning about their religion in recent years.

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