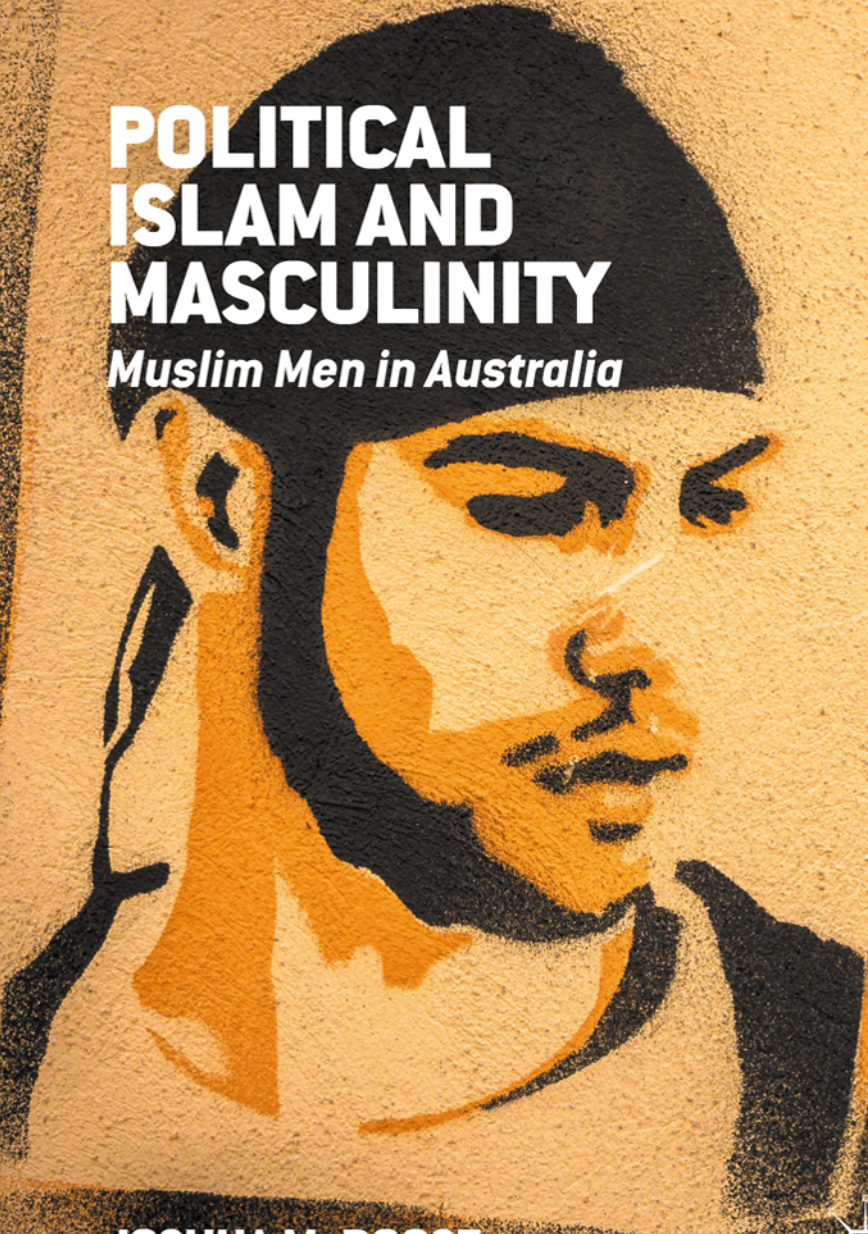


NEW DIRECTIONS  
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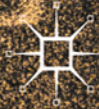


# POLITICAL ISLAM AND MASCULINITY

*Muslim Men in Australia*



**JOSHUA M. ROOSE**



# Political Islam and Masculinity

## **New Directions in Islam**

**Series Editors:** Joshua M. Roose and Bryan S. Turner

Islam is recognized as the world's fastest growing religion and is predicted to become the world's largest well before the end of this century. Key to the global growth of Islam has been its adaptation to local contexts; scholarship, however, has yet to catch up with these developments, especially outside the Middle East. The Palgrave *New Directions in Islam* series will promote creative ways of conceptualizing the practice of Islam in new, challenging contexts and will promote innovative and provocative interdisciplinary studies examining new intellectual, political, legal, economic, and demographic trajectories within Islam—very often based on these new local contexts.

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Political Islam and Masculinity: Muslim Men in Australia  
*Joshua M. Roose*

# Political Islam and Masculinity

Muslim Men in Australia

Joshua M. Roose

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Dedicated with all my love to  
Kristine Anne Desiree and our daughters Arielle Solange and Mietta  
Elizabeth Anne Roose



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## Preface: Muslim Masculinities

The transition from early adolescence to full maturity has been seen by sociologists and psychologists as a turbulent and challenging period in the life cycle. This period often involves tensions and strains between generations as youth attempts to mature and eventually replace older generations in the competition for status, wealth, and power. Some generations can be regarded retrospectively as lucky—such as the baby boomers—in being born into a world of expanding economic opportunities, social mobility, and relative peace. Other generations may be unlucky being born during periods of war, famine, and economic downturn. For example, *The Children of the Great Depression* (Elder, 1999) struggled through their entire lives to overcome the negative and unpromising decade in which they entered this world.

Regardless of time and context, this transition to maturity is often marked by episodes of deviance and antisocial behavior and occasionally by crime and violence. While this transition affects both boys and girls, there is general agreement that the maturation of men is deeply problematic. Young men are more likely to be involved in crime and acts of violence than young women, and they have higher rates of homicide and suicide. Young men, especially working-class men, are often defined collectively as a social problem. With the publication of F.M. Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927), there is a well-established sociological literature in which delinquent gangs were seen to be the outcome of urban disorganization of working-class communities whereby gangs offered young men excitement and security. Tattooing among young men was a sign of membership and masculinity.

In more recent times, the economic circumstances for employment and status have become far more difficult and uncertain as young men seek a position in society where many traditional occupations for the working class have disappeared with technological change and young women have become far more successful in the formal labor market as white-collar (or pink-collar) workers. In the majority of advanced societies, women are now better educated and, while there is a “glass ceiling” at the higher levels of employment,

women are replacing men in many key areas of the economy. In short, opportunities for successful transition to maturity for men have been curtailed. The dream of Australian society—home ownership, a steady job, a nice neighborhood, a wife and child—is fast disappearing and in this sense Australia at least for young men can no longer be called the “lucky society.” At the time of writing this *Preface* the Australian car industry is being wound down, the extraction industries are contracting, and economic growth is slowly stagnating. The social and economic challenge to working-class youth is seriously diminishing their life chances, making the transition out of the dependent status of youth increasingly difficult.

Of course this negative picture of youth is not the whole story. The transition to maturity is also a period of enhanced religious and spiritual activity. Youth (or people between 15 and 25 years) is also the period when individuals are most likely to convert, often rejecting the religious and social values of their parents for an episode of intense religious activity. William James in his famous *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) argued that conversion had the positive effect of resolving contradictions in the life experience of young people. He identified two versions of conversion. What he called “the once-born” experience of conversion led to a general sense of optimism and happiness, and especially in the United States religion was combined with happiness to produce a “system of mental hygiene.” In the chapter on “The Sick Soul” he described the opposite type often associated with Calvinistic Protestantism in which their pessimistic view of the world was reinforced by a sense of sin and religious despair. In conclusion the youthful experience of maturity can take a religious direction involving either confident happiness or uncertain anxiety.

We might say that in the West one image of youth has been dominant, namely the James Dean model of alternative values, but for some maturity can be framed by religious values. Against this legacy, the world after 9/11 has been offered a new type—the young man as a warrior in the service of a fanatical form of Islam. The West has been struggling to understand so-called religious radicalization that has taken youth—mainly young men—to fight in the cause of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. These recruits to extremism are often analyzed as marginalized and misguided youth, but in their own terms they present themselves as involved in a legitimate struggle (*Jihad*) against a western civilization that is corrupt and hypocritical. Of more concern to western observers are the young women who are recruited to struggle against western oppression despite newspaper reports of systematic rape and oppression of women by ISIS fighters.

As of now we do not have any adequate explanations for the contemporary phase of terrorism and little convincing understanding of

Islamic fundamentalism. Bland references to the pervasive influence of “Islamophobia” do not get to grips with the issues. Against this background, Joshua Roose’s study of Muslim masculinities is a welcome contribution to resolving the puzzles facing western democracies.

His ethnographic work, including numerous in-depth interviews, participant observation and community interviews, and broader access to sources including surveillance device transcripts and (now deleted) Internet blog entries, offers valuable access to the daily lives, challenges, and opportunities for young Muslim men in a western context. In particular his research reveals the emergence of a cohort of young middle-class Muslim men who are actively contributing to society. These young men draw upon their educational and professional capital to build upward projects aimed at shaping the wider society, thereby building social links between Muslims and non-Muslims. The ability to contribute to society and sustain a family life is an important aspect of Islamic masculinity.

Roose also explores the power of the Salafi Jihadist Narrative, particularly for young men who are in what might be considered a downward social trajectory of failure, despair, and very often grief, guilt, and mental illness. He draws an important distinction between the older generation of radicals in Australia and “9/11’s Children,” that is, young men born or raised in the post-9/11 social and political context. These young, often powerless and marginal, men, merely by subscribing to this narrative, become “warriors” and meaningful social actors just by embracing *jihadist* notions.

Two chapters illustrate the complexity of Muslim identities in modern Australia. The *Brothahood* are Australia’s premier Muslim hip-hop group. The group has achieved both national and international success, recording tracks with some of the world’s biggest names in Muslim hip-hop. Based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and engagement with their music, Roose shows that, while members of the group project an embodied working-class protest masculinity and project a tough, street-smart image, this *persona* belied the centrality of love, service, and respect that are central to their work. An eclectic blend of Sufi and traditional Islam constructs their ethos, informing their engagement within Muslim communities (including their *Salafi* critics) and the wider society. There are comparisons to be made with the United States where Muslim hip-hop and comedy shows illustrate the success of the Muslim presence in society (Bilici, 2012).

In yet another illustration Roose draws on the career of Waleed Aly who is Australia’s most prominent Muslim public intellectual and media personality. Aly has played a pivotal role in the development of mutual respect and recognition between Muslims and non-Muslims. Having won Australia’s top

media award for best columnist, Aly also hosts a prime-time television and radio program and in so doing has developed a cult following among the wider Australian community. In this chapter Roose delves into the key social influences shaping Aly's political action, finding that, while his family and early exposure to *Tasawwuf* and traditional Islam were vital, he has also been significantly influenced by a number of non-Muslim role models that have shaped his intellectual and professional development.

Of course despite Australia's record as a multicultural and prosperous society, young male Muslims often find themselves marginalized and excluded. In 2005 the *Benbrika Jama'ah* became the first Australian Muslim group to be subjected to Australia's new counter-terrorism laws. Group members were convicted of belonging to a *jihadist* terrorist organization seeking to carry out a violent terrorist attack against their fellow citizens. In presenting his argument Roose draws on over 4,000 pages of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) listening device and telephone intercept transcripts to examine the key social influences shaping these men. Roose argues that, despite their significant downward social trajectories, the *Salafi jihadist* narrative offered by group leader Abdul Nacer Benbrika allowed group members to develop a sense of importance and an upward spiritual trajectory through identification with real and imagined terrorist acts. The policy conclusions are that Muslim communities are as diverse as any other Australian community, that Muslim youth share an experience of transition to adulthood with other marginalized males, and that Islam in its many theological forms offers a hope and encouragement to its followers. Generations are often defined by reference to time (such as "the postwar generation"), but they can also be defined by traumatic events—Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy assassination, the fall of Singapore, or the bombing of Hiroshima (Edmunds and Turner, 2002). 9/11 will thus cast a long shadow over the lives of young Muslims living in the West. The rise of a Muslim middle class with full citizenship rights is the most promising prospect for Australia as a successful society, but the road to that destination will be long and hard.

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Finally, to my cousin Lucas James Hagenson (20/7/84–19/4/04). All young people deserve the right to make the most of their lives. You were robbed of this, yet you live on in my life's work and purpose.

# Introduction: The Question of Muslim Masculinities

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Muslims across Western nations had inhabited an often hostile social climate characterized by extensive levels of scrutiny, surveillance, and pressure. Muslims have been cast simultaneously as “at risk” of radicalization and as a threat to enlightenment values, freedom, and democracy. Young Muslim men in particular have been portrayed as potential “home-grown” terrorists, criminal thugs, and misogynistic oppressors and as a problem that must be solved. The “question of Muslim identity” and more specifically, Muslim masculinities, political loyalty and action has become the central pivot around which debate has focused for the place of Islam in the West and the adequacy of state policies on citizenship and multiculturalism. Despite the centrality of young, Western-born Muslim men to these questions they remain poorly understood. Even less understood is the relationship between social influences shaping Muslim men and the cultural, political, and intellectual trajectories of Islam in Western contexts. This book addresses the questions related to why young Muslim men often from very similar social backgrounds are pursuing such dramatically different political paths in the name of Islam. This is at the fore of international debates about citizenship and Muslim minorities and in the current international political context is a task that has more urgency than ever.

Australia is a seemingly unlikely, yet extremely pertinent focal point for examining these issues in greater depth. In contrast to the European experience, Australia is considered an exemplar of multiculturalism in practice, with the world’s strongest multicultural policies<sup>1</sup> and highest quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Yet more importantly, Australian Muslim men are very often at the forefront of contesting the cultural, political, and intellectual dimensions of Islam through their actions, very often with international implications.

At one end of the political spectrum, Australian Muslim men have become key players in the international jihadist movement. With up to 200 Australian

men having fought in Syria and Iraq, Australia, alongside Belgium, has the highest per capita foreign contribution to the violence.<sup>3</sup> At least two 18-year-old Australian men have become suicide bombers in the conflict, while others have been linked with atrocities and the execution of captured prisoners while fighting in Syria and Iraq. As of late 2014, at least 20 young Australian men had been killed in the fighting.<sup>4</sup> Other young men have been at the center of international incidents, such as when a group of at least 50 Lebanese Australian Muslim men attacked a group of Shi'ite Muslim Americans from Dearborn on the Hajj pilgrimage in 2013, threatening to rape females in the group and assaulting males.<sup>5</sup> Similar sectarian conflict has occurred within Australia with shops firebombed and houses sprayed with bullets in Sydney. In the past decade, over 30 Australian Muslim men have been arrested for plotting acts of terrorism within Australia, including plans to bomb crowded sports stadiums, nuclear facilities, and even storm Australian military bases with semi-automatic weapons. On September 23, 2014, Numan Haider, an 18-year-old man of Afghan background, though raised in Australia, apparently responded to a call from Islamic State Iraq and Sham (ISIS) movement leaders to carry out attacks in Western nations, attempting to murder two police officers with a knife in the Melbourne suburb of Endeavour Hills. A black ISIS flag was allegedly found on his person.<sup>6</sup>

By way of strong contrast, other young Australian Muslim men, many of whom grew up in the same suburbs, attended the same mosques and whose families have even associated, have sought political action, and to steer the intellectual and cultural development of Islam in *profoundly different directions*. These men have condemned violence and made active intellectual contributions through fusing Islamic and Western culture and practice. Media contributors have, through their presence in the media space, broken down barriers to the development of mutual understanding and respect between Muslims and non-Muslims. Other cultural actors such as Australian Muslim hip-hop groups, comedians, and artists have achieved international recognition, touring the world and playing to sold out audiences from Edinburgh to Dubai, from New York to Jakarta. Other young men are making vitally important economic contributions benefiting both Australian Muslims and the wider community.

Based on an unparalleled depth of engagement and quality of sources, the project examines exemplars of Muslim political activity from opposite ends of the political spectrum in the Australian context during and shortly after the 9/11 decade. The project draws these exemplars together for comparison, identifying key similarities and differences in the social influences shaping their political activity. The project considers the dimensions of the contestation for the meaning of Islam, the key forms of capital possessed by the

different political actors and how this shapes their “matrix of dispositions” to act in a particular way. In doing so, the project reveals unprecedented insights into how young observant Muslim men, often from the same suburbs, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, of the same proximate age whose families are often acquainted, choose such divergent political paths and impact their local, national, and the international environment.

### **Layout of the Book**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the key arguments about Muslim political action in Western contexts and focuses in particular, upon its limitations, including a failure to engage adequately with Muslim masculinities and a limited engagement with the concept of Political Islam. This chapter proposes an alternate theoretical and methodological approach based on the approach of Pierre Bourdieu in his “Theory of Practice” and Manuel Castells’ identity typologies in “The Power of Identity.” This approach both frames an important set of new questions that may be asked about Muslim men as political actors and the research approach to answer them.

Chapter 2 provides the necessary social, demographic, and political context for an examination of case studies, serving to broadly sketch the field of political power and the position of Australian-born Muslim men within the overlapping fields of Australian governmental power, Victorian (state) governmental power, and the field of Muslim institutional politics. This chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding Australian-born Muslim men in the context of significant power relationships and aids significantly in understanding the social location of exemplars.

Chapter 3 introduces the first in-depth case study; Muslim hip-hop group “The Brothahood.” Composed of five Australian-born Muslim men, the group displays a project identity, utilizing the inherently political medium of hip-hop to challenge negative representations of Australian Muslims and to simultaneously promote self-esteem and pride amongst Muslim listeners. This case study is a key example of young Australian Muslim men involved in constructing a positive space for Islam in an Australian multicultural context through political engagement.

Chapter 4 examines prominent Muslim public intellectual and academic Waleed Aly. Aly has emerged over the past decade as one of Australia’s most prominent (and youngest) intellectuals, with a vast body of work published across national and international media as well as legal and literary journals. Aly reveals a project identity in displaying what Barbara Misztal considers the core characteristics of a public intellectual: civic creativity and civil courage,<sup>7</sup> challenging negative representations, and the imposition of state power upon Australian Muslims. This exemplar is a valuable example

of an Australian-born Muslim man that has made a significant intellectual and political contribution to the development of Australian Islam and multiculturalism.

Chapter 5 provides an important contrast to other case studies. The third exemplar, the “Benbrika Jama’ah,”<sup>8</sup> focuses upon a group of seven young Muslim men born and raised in Australia displaying a neo-resistance identity and protest masculinity, participating in planning and preparation for a terrorist act in Melbourne. The group largely meets the criteria of radicalization in the “four prongs” approach proposed by Marc Sageman: believing in the existence of a war against Islam, exhibiting moral outrage, displaying a resonance of the Salafi jihadist narrative with their personal experiences and mobilization through the group to act.<sup>9</sup> Group members lacked in the key elements necessary to plan and carry out an attack and their actions served only to reinforce the power of those they sought to undermine.

Chapter 6 delves in-depth into the core social characteristics of those young men leaving Australia to fight, kill and often, die in foreign conflicts involving Muslims and who are attracted to the narrative of the Islamic State movement within Australia. These young men, aged just four years when 9/11 occurred and just eight when the Benbrika Jama’ah were arrested may constitute the beginning of a new generation of Salafi jihadists.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, commences with a discussion of the key findings of the research. These include:

- The centrality of an *upward social trajectory* to the development of *meaning* and *hope* amongst Muslim men and the development of **mutual recognition** and **respect** that underpin constructive political engagement in society.
- Enabling social influences and social interactions shaping **upward trajectories** include *Tasawwuf* and **traditional Islam**, high levels of education, professional employment, exposure and familiarity with Western cultures, and positive interactions with the multicultural dimension of the State.
- Men on an even or upward spiral find **masculine pride and a source of meaning** in providing for their families, increasing community and professional **recognition** as they progress in their work and a sense of belonging to community.
- Disabling influences shaping **downward social trajectories** include low levels of education, unemployment, welfare dependence, unskilled work, criminal activity, and negative engagements with the coercive arm of the State. These often manifest in what Connell terms “protest masculinities,” where subordinated young Muslim men distinguish

themselves by violence and hyper exaggerated physical characteristics. This is particularly the case where young men may feel disempowered and vulnerable and are not equipped with the necessary support or tools to deal with this.

- **Salafi, and even jihadist narratives do not contribute to a downward spiral**, but offer an **alternative source of meaning** by which the individual may find a sense of self-importance and **masculine pride** through **reframing** themselves as jihadi warriors. It is for this reason that even middle-class Muslims may find themselves attracted to more hard-line perspectives.
- **Women** especially play an important part in the lives of Muslim men as **spiritual role models and are respected** irrespective of the social location of the men concerned. This challenges the dominant portrayal of Muslim women as marginalized and disempowered.

The book makes the argument that multicultural Western nations need to recalibrate their engagement with and listen to Muslim communities, and in particular marginalized young men in downward social trajectories deprived of meaning, hope, and without recognition or a sense of respect. Men, and in Islam in particular, find deep pride in their education and/or employment and family and in particular the community respect and recognition that come with this. These foster the basis of *hope*, *belief*, and *investment* that underpin constructive social political engagement. It is only when one or more of these ingredients are lacking that the *Salafi* jihadist narrative might be inserted as providing an alternate source of meaning.

The study makes the case that a uniquely Australian Islam is emerging based on: practice of a multicultural Islam across ethnicities; a self-assured Muslim masculinity with positive influence by, respect for, and comfort with women as independent, educated wage earners, familiarity with and comfort fusing Australian and Western cultures, and Islamic practice in areas including music, literature, clothing and physical appearance, confidence, and assertiveness interacting with government as Muslims in a professional capacity; the promotion of pluralism and willingness to critique Muslims seeking to impose their perspectives on others; an entrepreneurial approach to locating space and opportunities for expression, displaying high levels of social resilience to take the risk of rejection in order to achieve goals; and a positive belief in and sense of service to Australian society. It is argued that Australia and other nations can benefit from the “Islamic capital” of their Muslim populations to engage with Muslim majority states in trade, cultural exchange and to develop trust in the international sphere.

Most importantly, the book reveals the centrality of *social trajectory*, *social recognition*, and *hope* as shapers of political action and casts a critical perspective on traditional conceptions of masculinity within Islam as patriarchal and one dimensional. It opens a number of questions for both scholars and practitioners about how they might better engage with the political dimensions of Islam and Muslim men into the future.

## CHAPTER 1

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# Political Islam and Masculinity: A New Approach

In the 9/11 decade (2001–2011) and beyond, questions about Muslim identity have come to the fore of social-scientific research, particularly in Western multicultural contexts. Indeed, as British Sociologist Naser Meer claims, “the emergence of *public* Muslim identities” has become “one of the most pressing sociological and political concerns of the day.”<sup>1</sup> In an era characterized by the “war on terror,” national government preoccupations with radicalization and “home-grown” terrorism and challenges to state policies of multiculturalism, a vast body of scholarly literature from a broad spectrum of disciplines has sought to increase understandings about how Western Muslims understand themselves and their place in the world. An increasing body of literature is examining young Muslims born and raised in Western contexts, their influences and how they choose to express themselves. Whilst these have made an important contribution to greater understanding, few studies delve into great depth, seeking to understand how these social influences interact and are internalized to influence political action. This chapter outlines the key approaches taken in contemporary literature and makes the case for a new approach, grounded in the theoretical paradigms developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Manuel Castells. This necessitates an innovative approach to the study of Muslim political action.

### **Identity, Power, Masculinities, and Political Islam**

The dominant scholarly paradigm for examining Muslims over the past decade has been the concept of “identity.” This book is located in the context of contemporary studies of Western and Australian Muslim identity and now seeks to identify the strengths and weaknesses of respective approaches to the topic.



The largest single influence pervading research literature is the effect of power and negative political discourse upon identity. Manuel Castells defines identity as “people’s source of meaning and experience.”<sup>2</sup> This endows the concept with active capacity that can shape how an individual perceives the world and, by extension, acts within it. Castells continues arguing that individuals may have a “plurality of identities.”<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall asserts that identity in the contemporary era can be “fragmented and fractured, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions.”<sup>4</sup> Identity within contemporary social scientific literature and particularly within the discipline of sociology is understood as actively constructed by the individual from a wide variety of potential influences. Castells argues from a sociological perspective that:

The construction of identities uses building blocks from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations.<sup>5</sup>

Literature examining Western Muslims places “power” as central to shaping the social space occupied and power is a central focus of theoretical approaches to understanding identity. Manuel Castells argued that the “social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships,”<sup>6</sup> whilst for Stuart Hall, identities are “constructed within, not outside discourse”<sup>7</sup> and “emerge within the play of specific modalities of power.”<sup>8</sup> Many studies of Muslim identities similarly note the significance of power.<sup>9</sup> Caroline Howarth claims that:

Identities are continually developed and contested through others’ representations of our claimed social groups . . . An account that does not incorporate representations into the account of identity construction, does not, therefore, deal with the complexities of real-life identities.<sup>10</sup>

The dominant representation of Muslims in Western multicultural societies has been widely viewed as negative. Some scholars state that Muslims have become the new “folk devil,”<sup>11</sup> whilst others emphasize the positioning of Muslims as the “enemy within”<sup>12</sup> cast in the role of the “other” to whom it is “acceptable to apply exceptional, and otherwise unacceptable or even illegal treatment.”<sup>13</sup> Despite the emergence of recent studies noting improvements,<sup>14</sup> many find that Muslims continue to perceive the media as a primary source of dissemination of anti-Muslim attitudes.<sup>15</sup> Government counter-terrorism laws enacted across Western nations were also perceived to be specifically targeted at Muslim communities.<sup>16</sup> At the international

level, foreign policy has also played a role in building the notion that Governments are hostile to Islam. Australia's willingness to contribute to the American "coalition of the willing" in the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, both Muslim majority nations, and the perception of previous Western indifference to the suffering of Muslims has been shown to be felt keenly by many Western Muslims.<sup>17</sup>

Given the extent of pressure upon Muslim communities it may be expected that many might withdraw from society and minimize the visible components of Muslim identity<sup>18</sup> and, indeed, Australian research has found that the impact of discrimination and vilification has resulted in emotions of fear, stress, and anger amongst young Muslims.<sup>19</sup> However, far from having the effect of forcing Muslims to withdraw from Islam to "fit in," it has been found that many Western Muslims have embraced and sought to learn more about their faith as a result of negative social pressure.<sup>20</sup> Jocelyn Cesari describes the process:

In the process of reactive identity formation . . . hostility towards Islam results in an intensification of one's personal attachment to Islam as the reference point of one's identity . . . This attachment is all the stronger when one has been personally a victim of discrimination, since s/he is not acting against merely an abstract hostility of government and media discourse.<sup>21</sup>

Mandaville similarly states that the belief that negative hegemonic discourse and discrimination leads to increased religiosity as a form of rebellion:

Rejected and unwanted they turn to that which sets them apart as a form of cultural self-assertion and a basis of identity. Islam . . . becomes a form of self-defence and a source of solidarity amongst a hostile and dominant culture.<sup>22</sup>

Ghassan Hage asserts that in multicultural Australia, young Muslims are simultaneously promised opportunities yet are denied this by institutionalized racism, leading to their systematic exclusion. Hage labels this social process as "misinterpellation," whereby a process of "shattering" occurs with the individual needing space to "pick up the pieces."<sup>23</sup> It is here that Islam, as the anti-racism ideology *par excellence*, plays a part in the lives of young Western Muslims that multiculturalism has not been able to, providing both a social space of belonging and "standing opposite multiculturalism as a competing governmentality rather than a culture that can be governed by it."<sup>24</sup>

Islam and related influences such as families,<sup>25</sup> Islamic teachers, and peers<sup>26</sup> emerge in literature as significant influences upon Western Muslims, as does the Internet.<sup>27</sup> Contemporary studies provide important insights into how

Western Muslims “shop” for Islamic knowledge from a variety of sources;<sup>28</sup> however, Islam as an intellectual influence shaping political action remains overlooked.

Ethnicity is found in contemporary literature to have a less significant influence on Western-born practicing Muslims as they move toward a more Islamic identity, distancing themselves from the localized and often rural “low Islam” and older male-dominated politics of their parents’ generation.<sup>29</sup> Modern urban public space and widespread contact amongst practicing Muslims from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds have seen second- and third-generation Western Muslims bridge ethnic divisions to embrace a more puritanical Islam that seeks to shed its “cultural baggage.”<sup>30</sup> Education and employment are found to be important influences upon Western Muslims due to their influence on upward social mobility, yet Muslims in Australia and Britain are shown to be struggling to convert educational capital into improved labor force outcomes.<sup>31</sup> Some preliminary research reveals that this is beginning to change.<sup>32</sup>

Relatively few studies examine the influence of Western cultural influences upon Muslim men. Those that do emphasize the importance of public space as a domain of interaction and exchange between Muslims and non-Muslims<sup>33</sup> and the manner in which Western cultural and political mediums such as hip-hop have been fused with Islamic practice and expression.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary studies have made important contributions to developing a more nuanced understanding of social influences upon Western Muslims and how they express themselves. These studies have provided an important array of potential influences ranging from interpretative frameworks of Islam and Islamic teachers to schools, employment experiences, music, and fashion. These serve as an important base for the formulation of a research design and hypothesis. However, numerous gaps in literature exist, including knowledge in relation to understanding young Australian-born Muslim men, particularly as political actors shaping Islam and the Australian multicultural context. This is supported by authors of two of the small number of contributions to the area. Samina Yasmeen states that “research on experiences and views of Muslim men needs to be conducted,”<sup>35</sup> and that “it is important to conduct more in-depth and comparative research which aims to understand the concerns of Muslim men but does not single them out as the ‘subjects of concern.’”<sup>36</sup> Ouzgane has claimed in specific relation to Muslim cultures that “studies of Islamic masculinities are surprisingly rare . . . there are very few studies that render Muslim men visible as gendered subjects . . .”<sup>37</sup> It is only in the past decade that substantive attempts have been made to engage with, and better understand Muslim masculinities and identities in the West.

## Contemporary Studies of Muslim Masculinity

Scholars examining Muslim men are almost universal in observing the negative representation of male Muslim identity.<sup>38</sup> This has been particularly noted in Australia.<sup>39</sup> Muslim men are viewed by political activists from both the Left and Right as the vanguard of patriarchal and homophobic repression and as representing “pre-modern” values in contrast to an “enlightened” West.<sup>40</sup> This state of affairs has led Hopkins to assert that geographies and identities of young Muslim men in general are ‘usually silenced, often unheard and frequently distorted.’<sup>41</sup> The concept of masculinity offers considerable promise to scholars with the question of how social influences shape political action by Muslim men, allowing us to move beyond stereotypes to understand the complex nature of practice. In outlining the fluid nature of masculinity, Connell notes:

There is abundant evidence that masculinities are multiple, with internal complexities and even contradictions; also that masculinities change in history, and that women have a considerable role in making them, in interaction with boys and men.<sup>42</sup>

Connell’s work *Masculinities* is a key text, expositing the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In a reevaluation of the text ten years after its publication, Connell and Messerschmitt explain the difference between Hegemonic and Subordinated Masculinities:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the concept requires development, for example engaging with the manner in which subordinated masculinities shape hegemonic masculinities, Connell’s work provides an important frame for engaging with how subordinated status shapes social behavior and indeed political action. In the Australian context, “hegemonic masculinity” is commonly regarded to be a white, Australian male. White has argued that in Australia, the manifestation of this is the Australian lifesaver, the “embodiment of a three-way relationship between masculinity, whiteness and the beach,”<sup>44</sup> though this may equally be applied to the boardrooms of Australia and political office, where white men continue to dominate. It is important to note that in the

Australian context, hegemonic masculinity has no place for vulnerability and weakness.

A subordinated masculinity, particularly among the most disempowered young Muslim men, is viewed as performative, emphasizing a “hyper”-masculinity<sup>45</sup> through displays of “physicality” and “toughness.”<sup>46</sup> Based on research with young Lebanese men in Sydney, Greg Noble considers that these displays are the result of a lack of “honorable recognition” and a lack of respect from wider society. Noble draws upon Connell’s notion of “protest masculinity” to describe the manner in which this emphasized masculinity captured “the ways their emphasized masculine style works as compensation for the hidden injuries of class and race, recuperating a sense of dignity.”<sup>47</sup> It is argued that this form of masculinity bound them together and defined them against those who withheld respect from them (and in so doing “injured” them). Noble counsels, however, against losing sight of a “more nuanced articulation of their lived experiences that engages with the complex *sociality* of their lives involving a more diverse array of facets of identification.”<sup>48</sup> Michael Humphrey takes incidents of injury as “moments of crisis which challenge self-identity and cultural life.”<sup>49</sup> The actual instant at which the injury is received may be considered a pivotal moment for identity construction, where “cultural meaning is up for grabs.”<sup>50</sup> Young Muslim men, due to the intensity of the focus upon their very existence, and consequent disempowerment and vulnerability, could be considered very likely to bear the emotional scars of a society that simultaneously demands their integration and conformity to dominant white Australian values, yet still discriminates on many levels.

Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera proposed four categories of Muslim masculinities particularly well suited for this study. *Religious masculinities* were found to be based predominantly in working class young men for whom Islam was a key identity marker and shaped their educational and career aspirations: “Their religious identity encouraged them to work hard and study in order to secure professional employment which could support a wife and family.”<sup>51</sup> *Middle-class masculinities* were shaped by their parents’ attitudes, particularly toward education. Education was viewed not simply as a means to employment, but as fulfilling a broader meaning of greater societal awareness, whilst the young men emphasized their own “outward looking, more liberal, less ethnically restricted outlook through an implicitly cerebral masculine identity.”<sup>52</sup> Young men displaying *rebellious masculinities* displayed a “hard, highly performative masculinity in ‘public’ spaces such as the streets, schools, and interactions with researchers and was ‘constructed and enacted in relation to male peers, both within the ethnic group and other young men, in relation to their parents as well as potential employers.’”<sup>53</sup> The final category,

*ambivalent masculinities*, categorizes those young men who whilst educational under-achievers were seeking to negotiate alternative pathways toward careers. These men were currently practicing Islam and defined success not by money or status, but through contributing to the community, helping others, or gaining respect.<sup>54</sup> These masculinities are likely to be embodied and visible, and hence influence social interactions with both other Muslims and non-Muslims.

The expression of different forms of Muslim masculinity may be understood as intimately tied to social context. Consequently, rather than being listed as an “influence,” the discussion of masculinities will pervade each chapter throughout. Those young men who experience racism and hostility and have few resources for dealing with it are more likely to display a hyper-masculinity and exaggerated toughness to overcome associated injuries, whilst those who experience less social injury and who are equipped with greater resources such as education and cultural capitals will likely express a more proactive, constructive political identity and are likely to be more capable of engaging with “hegemonic masculinities” on their own terms. Consequently, they are likely to be able to reflexively engage with any feeling of disempowerment and vulnerability far more effectively.

### **(Re)defining Political Islam**

For the purpose of this research, the concept of Political Islam must be extended to more adequately engage with new forms of political activity in the name of Islam that bear little resemblance to traditional Islamist movements. In engaging with Muslim men as political actors, it is important to engage simultaneously with the dimensions of political Islam in Western contexts, and in particular, to move beyond static conceptualizations. Political Islam has traditionally been considered as a “political ideology” readily interchangeable with “Islamism” and its practitioners, “Islamists.” Akbarzadeh defines Political Islam as “a modern phenomenon that seeks to use religion to shape the political system. Its origins lie in the perceived failure of the secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism to deliver on their promises of anti-imperialist prosperity.”<sup>55</sup> Akbarzadeh argues further that “Islamism imposes a normative framework on society in a blatant attempt to make society fit into its mold.”<sup>56</sup> This adequately describes movements in the Muslim world premised on returning to the Quran and Sunnah as their sole guides for political action and, indeed, explains the evolution and spread of conservative Islamic movements worldwide. Yet the relationship between politics and Islam is significantly deeper than relatively recent autocratic and fundamentalist movements. In a key contemporary work that captures this relationship

in great depth, Boubekeur and Roy have argued that while Islamism is indeed a “political ideology . . . and a stress on the need to control and build an ‘Islamic State,’ they consider that ‘Islam has always been political’ and that ‘reference to Islam in the political field is absolutely not a trademark of Islamism.’”<sup>57</sup> Thus we must engage with the logical question—are all Muslims acting to shape the world in accordance with their faith and Islamic principles necessarily Islamist and seeking the establishment of a caliphate? If not, then we must extend the bounds of “Political Islam” to accommodate for the vast spectrum of activity conducted by Muslims, particularly in Western contexts. Boubekeur and Roy note that:

As the initial energy and appeal of the oppositional and revolutionary Islamist project has faded, the new generation of Muslim activists is reinventing and experimenting with new forms of activism, mobilization and organizational structures . . . The challenge for current scholarship is thus to identify how today’s Muslims, Islamists included, are responding to these immense global changes using Islam to empower themselves in new ways, and according twenty-first century globalized and cosmopolitan politics with religious belief.<sup>58</sup>

Boubekeur considers that the “new mediums of political Islam” are shaped by competitiveness, culture, economics, and ethics.<sup>59</sup> The bounds of political Islam are dramatically extended, as an “ethical ideology that can be shared by anyone.”<sup>60</sup> Compellingly, Boubekeur argues:

Actors of these new forms of Islam, because they are at the centre of the modern world—but in an alternative way—have the opportunity “to change the world without taking the power”. Ethics are henceforth the social links that Islamism can no longer be.<sup>61</sup>

Political Islam then may be understood as fluid and dynamic, as seeking to influence and shape the world in line with Islamic principles, without necessarily seeking the replacement of systems of government and making others act in accordance with Islamic principles. One recent study has captured new forms of political Islam, as elucidated by Boubekeur and Roy through examining young Muslims and civic engagement in Western contexts. Harris and Roose assert the emergence of a “Do it yourself citizenship” amongst young Australian Muslims in Australia, finding that Islam was a “positive civic enabler . . . a spark for personal action and individual responsibility.”<sup>62</sup> They state further that the young Muslims in their study “self-consciously constructed an ethical self from self-sourced and often hotly contested religious guidelines.”<sup>63</sup>

To successfully engage with Muslim men in Western contexts as political actors, states must be open to the wide variety of potential political activities they may undertake in the name of their faith and to shape the world around them. Traditional conceptualizations of political Islam have been focused upon the seizure of state power and the imposition of Islamic principles and law. For some young Muslim men in the West this is undoubtedly an ideal and one they may seek to contribute to. For many others, Islam guides their daily lives and actions as they seek to shape the world around them in accordance with their guiding principles. Yet this stands well removed from seizing state power and, in fact, may result in substantive contributions to society.

### **A New Research Approach: Bourdieu and Castells**

Contemporary approaches to identity, particularly those examining Western and Australian Muslims have focused on identity as an active and strategic process mediated by cultural influences. Research approaches have consequently focused upon how traditional categories of analysis such as ethnicity and gender influence Muslim identity, yet almost universally fail to engage with the many uniquely Islamic influences shaping identity and action and the different forms of social power that may shape individual identity and practice. Research methods such as questionnaires, focus groups, and one-off semi-structured interviews assume reflexivity (self-awareness) and consciousness in research subjects and seek to cast outcomes as “authentic Muslim voices.” The application of the concept of identity in its contemporary form has certainly contributed to challenging the essentialization of Muslims in dominant discourse as passive receptacles. However, the research emphasis upon “perceptions” or “experiences” does not provide insights into how social influences and power relations have mediated these. Researchers very often take for granted the ability of subjects to display reflexivity and strategic decision making about identity without considering structural factors such as access to quality education that influence this.

Current studies of Muslim identity hence often reveal only cursory insights into how social influences interact to influence political activity and engagement. This results in only basic insights into the current and potential future developments for Islam in the context of Australian multiculturalism. To gain a comprehensive insight, it is important to take a more balanced approach to the study by emphasizing both individual and structural factors influencing political engagement and how they contribute to a sense of meaning, shaping forms of political action by the actor.

Whilst acknowledging the utility of the concept of identity, operationalizing the work of Pierre Bourdieu outlined in his *Theory of Practice* (and



subsequently developed by contemporary scholars) to the question of “how” different social influences interact to form identities significantly buttresses the theoretical and research approach to the topic. Bourdieu’s interrelated concepts of field, capital, and habitus, when applied methodically, make known the “how” of social identity, revealing the interaction between social structures and individual agency, between unconscious and conscious influences upon the individual “sense of meaning” and disposition to act. The approach provides a vocabulary for analysis and supports a dynamic research construct that will reveal new insights into the relationship between social influences. The subjects at the heart of this research are consciously projecting an Islamic political identity, yet are unlikely to be completely aware of the unique blend of social influences upon them and how these have mixed to influence their political participation.

In seeking to understand how social influences interact to shape different forms of political action, it is necessary to utilize a holistic theoretical frame that takes account of modalities of power in the social world and may be translated or “operationalized” into empirical application. The work of Bourdieu (1930–2002) provides such a frame. Terry Rey argues:

Taken as a whole, Bourdieu’s theoretical project is a critical scientific analysis and explanation of the social influences of what people do and why they do what they do, and of how what they do contributes to the reproduction of these very social influences.<sup>64</sup>

Bourdieu sought to create a critical sociology that exposed power relationships produced and reproduced through cultural resources, processes, and institutions.<sup>65</sup> David Swartz argues that for Bourdieu, power was not a separate domain, but stood at the heart of all social life. Similarly, culture is not seen as devoid of political content, but rather as an expression of it.<sup>66</sup> Bourdieu’s close collaborator Loïc Wacquant states: “Bourdieu conceives of sociology as an *eminently political science* in that it is crucially concerned with and enmeshed in, strategies and mechanisms of symbolic domination.”<sup>67</sup> For Bourdieu, sociology is capable of “producing awareness of those mechanisms that make life painful, even unliveable” and in “bringing contradictions to light.”<sup>68</sup> Whilst not able to neutralize the root causes of suffering, Bourdieu considered social science to have emancipatory potential, positively impacting upon those facing social pressure and disadvantage through “making generally known the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms, including the most intimate, the most secret.”<sup>69</sup> Bourdieu hence sought to contribute to unveiling symbolic violence, those dominant norms and values that favor dominant hegemonies

that had been “naturalized” as self-evident truths and internalized by those most disadvantaged within society. Understanding that power can be both overt and less visible in the social sphere and internalized by individuals to shape their perceptions and actions is important, as it shapes the research approach.

Literature reveals that negative political discourse, particularly through the media and enactment of government policies, has had a profound impact upon the lives of Muslims and is the largest single focus in examinations of young Western Muslims. Bourdieu’s theoretical approach is consciously geared toward understanding how power impacts in both subtle and less visible and observable ways to shape the lives of individuals and collectively, social groups. Bourdieu considered his “*Theory of Practice*” as:

A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic . . . must endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power), which amounts to the same thing, change into one another.<sup>70</sup>

Bourdieu sought to transcend the apparently irreconcilable difference between objectivism (structuralism) and subjectivism (individual agency). Bourdieu had termed this the “most fundamental ruinous divide in social science.”<sup>71</sup> He instead sought to fuse them into a coherent “dialectical relationship between structure and agency.”<sup>72</sup> Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice* construct exposes the multitude of different modalities of power as they are mediated through cultural mechanisms at the societal level and at the level of individual choice, impacting upon the disposition to act politically and adopt a political identity and how this may be expressed. This exposure is achieved through the provision of a vocabulary and economy of existence. To this effect, Ghassan Hage has labeled Bourdieu’s holistic theory an “economy of being” where individuals accumulate recognition and meaning.<sup>73</sup> The economic lexicon allows for a more objective consideration of influences. Economic metaphors are particularly apt for objectification of the religious sphere where passion and emotion are key characteristics that may color analysis. Nick Crossley aptly describes the *Theory of Practice* in the following way:

. . . practice is the result of various habitual schemes and dispositions (*habitus*), combined with resources (*capital*), being activated by certain structured social conditions (*field*) which they, in turn, belong to and variously reproduce and modify.<sup>74</sup>

In each chapter, the space in which social power is operational is conceptualized (fields) and the forms of exchange (capital) and their relative value in the field are identified. This capital may take many different forms, including that of an economic, cultural, and symbolic nature. The interplay of capital and fields and the dominant powers that shape their experience often have unconscious impacts, which the individual may not consciously identify with, yet that shape their perceptions and schematic for viewing the world (*habitus*) and consequently, practice.

The *habitus* may be considered the unconscious element of identity construction and expression that shapes practice or “action.” *Habitus* contributes to the disposition to adopt and “practice” a particular identity. Digging down to the roots of the *habitus* allows the researcher to gain a much broader picture of social influences upon individual expression than the concept of identity by itself. Identities, it may be considered, are formed in relation to these practices in fields of struggle. Bourdieu provides insights into not only how social influences contribute to political action, but also into the meaning of political action for young Muslim men.

### Operationalizing Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

This project utilizes the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu in both his *Theory of Practice* and wider work as an intellectual base for research design and analysis. However, as other great contributors to the social sciences throughout history have been constantly interpreted and relativized based on the contingent circumstance of the social context, so too has Bourdieu in his application to the English-speaking world. This has resulted in the adoption of a Bourdieusian approach to issues of cultural and symbolic stratification in the United States, with particular use of the concept of “cultural capital,” whilst in the United Kingdom educational scholars have also utilized the concept of cultural capital in studies of educational stratification.<sup>75</sup> Such applications of Bourdieu’s work have largely been fragmented and have failed to take into account the larger theoretical framework in which individual concepts are enmeshed. Wacquant notes:

Perhaps more than in any other country, the reception of Bourdieu’s work in America, and to a comparable degree in Great Britain has been characterized by fragmentation and piecemeal appropriations that have obfuscated the systematic nature and novelty of his enterprise.<sup>76</sup>

Bourdieu asserted that the core concepts of his work were to be “put together empirically and in a systematic fashion.”<sup>77</sup> Utilizing the theory to maximize its

potential contribution requires that individual components must be understood as interrelated and essential to the correct form and functioning of their counterparts.<sup>78</sup> Patricia Thompson argues:

... Bourdieu argued for a methodology that would bring together an inter-dependant and co-constructed trio—*field, capital and habitus*—with none of them primary, dominant or causal. Each was integral to understanding the social world, and the three were tangled in a Gordian knot that could only be understood through case by case deconstructions.<sup>79</sup>

Each concept with Bourdieu's frame must also be understood as "open," that is, thought must be put into their application and use for analysis. Rogers Brubaker argues "... the core concepts are not—and are not supposed to be—precise and unambiguous,"<sup>80</sup> and that Bourdieu did not define, but rather characterized concepts in a variety of ways to communicate a theoretical stance and inculcate a certain sociological disposition.<sup>81</sup> Wacquant similarly noted that Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* is a "temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work."<sup>82</sup> The researcher must utilize extensive knowledge of the area of study in order to tailor the theory to the context to which it will be applied. In the following exploration of concepts, each will be systematically examined in isolation, with greater understanding of their direct application and relationship with other concepts only able to be determined through the research analysis phase. Many of these definitions draw upon the work of an increasing body of scholars' seeking to interpret and build upon Bourdieu's work in English-speaking contexts, making his work more accessible to a wider audience.

## Field

The concept of a "field" (what Bourdieu terms as *champs*) may be basically understood as an autonomous social space within which individuals and groups compete or "struggle" for resources (capital) that allow them to better their respective positions. Bourdieu defines a field in analytic terms as:

...a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).<sup>83</sup>

Fields are, according to Bourdieu, a space of both potential and active forces and hence a space of struggles that seek to either maintain or change the location of these forces. Terry Rey states this in another way:

... any individual occupies a certain *position* in society's various fields, which is chiefly determined by how much capital, or power that he or she possesses. Social fields are therefore networks of relations between individuals and institutions competitively engaged in the dynamics of capital production, pursuit, consumption and/or accumulation. This engagement is invariably in one's *interest*, and thus each of us—by second nature because we have internalized this entire system—develops *strategies* to either maintain or improve our positions in this relational network of power that is the social world.<sup>84</sup>

All fields are located within the broader field of power.<sup>85</sup> This field functions as a “meta field,” operating as an “ongoing principle of differentiation and struggle throughout all fields” and allowing for the designation of the dominant class.<sup>86</sup> This means that any analysis of a field must take into account broader issues of social control of societal resources by the dominant players or “elites.” Australian-born Muslim men may be expected to participate in the same fields as other men of their age, including education and employment. Yet little is known about Australian-born Muslim men's participation in broader fields, the stakes they compete for, and the logic that dictates competition in these fields. Understanding the trajectory of an individual in a field is vital to understanding their social location. Two actors may appear to occupy similar socioeconomic locations in a field, yet be moving in different directions not indicated by a class-based analysis alone.<sup>87</sup> It is important to take this into account in the analysis of the position of the individual and group within a field.

## Capital

Capital may be considered to be the resources sought after and competed for within fields in an economic manner.<sup>88</sup> Possession of these resources endows the individual with greater power to negotiate the structures of the field and wider society as whole, playing a significant part in the dynamic of political action. Bourdieu asserts:

*A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field.* It confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in it.<sup>89</sup>

To maneuver within social structures and enhance their positions in a given field, Muslim men may draw upon a variety of cultural, social, and symbolic resources, with social class likely to play a significant role in their gaining access to these.<sup>90</sup> Bourdieu conceives of these resources as forms of “capital” when they function as a “social relation of power,”<sup>91</sup> that is, when they are used within a competitive social sphere to improve or act upon one’s respective position. Accordingly Bourdieu posits four specific forms of capital prevalent within contemporary society:

- **Economic capital**, constituting a material, quantifiable and measurable form of social exchange, is “immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights.”<sup>92</sup> Economic capital allows for purchase of material needs. It is also, however, the form of capital most transferable to other forms of cultural and symbolic capitals, purchasing, for example, greater access to educational qualifications (cultural capital) and the legitimacy (symbolic capital) that this bestows.
- **Cultural capital** is privileged knowledge within a particular field that provides a competitive advantage to the individual or group in a specific field. Bourdieu considers cultural capital to exist in three forms; the *embodied* state, *objectified* state, and *institutionalized* state. Cultural capital in its *embodied* form refers to “the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individual and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding.”<sup>93</sup> In its *objectified* state, cultural capital may be understood as ownership of cultural resources and importantly, the ability to utilize, appreciate, and take pleasure in the artefact. Cultural capital in its *institutionalized* state is manifested in formal (primarily academic) qualifications that bestow upon the individual who receives them as a “conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture” that may be exchanged through improved opportunity in the job market and consequent higher economic capital.
- **Social Capital** is defined by Bourdieu as the “sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network or more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.”<sup>94,95</sup>
- **Symbolic Capital** is understood as accumulated cultural capital in a field ultimately converted into symbolic capital, the “recognition and legitimacy” given to the individual or a group for the cultural capital they have accumulated.<sup>96</sup> Symbolic capital may hence be understood as the resources available to an individual or group when the capital they possess is recognized and accepted based upon the logic of the field

in which it is relevant. This “honorable” recognition is pivotal for an individual’s source of meaning and sense of self. By contrast, those that possess unrecognized capital (or very little at all) may face a level of existential angst.

### Habitus

The manner in which individuals perceive of and utilize their capital is generated by their habitus,<sup>97</sup> “part of their personhood that filters their perceptions, moulds their tastes and casts their inclinations and dispositions.”<sup>98</sup> Habitus may be understood as a “structuring structure,” the schematic through which an individual views the world and acts within it. Habitus hence shapes political action and enables the individual to act in a field. It places the social firmly at the center of human identity. Bourdieu states: “To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is a socialized subjectivity.”<sup>99</sup> Habitus is also described by Bourdieu as:

The strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations . . . a system of lasting and transposable dispositions, which integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks.<sup>100</sup>

Stephanie Lawler remarks that habitus has been described as a “second sense,” “practical sense,” or “second nature” that equips people with a practical “know-how.”<sup>101</sup> Karl Maton considers that the habitus is “structured by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is structuring in that one’s habitus helps to shape one’s present and future practices.”<sup>102</sup> According to this concept, individuals within a given field operate largely unconsciously based on their learned and inherited dispositions. These dispositions (habitus) are referred by Bourdieu as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history.”<sup>103</sup> Thus in our actions we are largely unaware of what is influencing our perception of the world and the way in which we act within it. As Adams aptly notes “the ticks and traits of our established habitus are the result of an experiential schooling stretching back to childhood.”<sup>104</sup> Sigrid Norris asserts that “social identity is embedded in cultural and social currents, constructed through social and societal histories, and internalized by the individual as a habitus.”<sup>105</sup>

Understanding the concept of habitus and its relationship with other core concepts of field and capital provides a powerful, theoretically dynamic, and flexible structure. Habitus shapes political action and invests it with meaning,

contributing to the development of identity. Key social influences may be understood as bestowing and enabling various forms and amounts of capital and attributes upon the young men at the center of the study to act within different fields. Gaining a greater insight into what these social influences are, when they occurred and how, reveals important insights into how they may have been internalized by the individual actors, shaping their disposition to act in a particular way.

### Habitus and Social identity

Bourdieu's concept of habitus may be considered a central component of his analysis of practice, emphasizing the manner in which the "social is incorporated into the self and also the manner in which the self itself is constitutive of social relations."<sup>106</sup> However, as Omar Lizardo has argued, the conceptual density of the "habitus" has resulted in few seeking to truly engage with the possibilities of the concept.<sup>107</sup> Bourdieu had to contend with numerous accusations of "structuralist determinacy"; that he failed to take account of individual agency (the potential of the individual to actively choose their habitus and identity). Bourdieu sought to ensure it was understood that he views social agents as actively fashioning their matrix of dispositions,<sup>108</sup> however, viewed this capability as based on the individual context and the level of social resources available to the individual. The scope of the individual's social and historical position and level of possession of different forms of capital play a direct role in influencing the level of agency an individual expresses:

*Social agents are not "particles" that are mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces. They are, rather, bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution.*<sup>109</sup>

Trajectory is a particularly important concept and must accompany any consideration of class.

Löic Wacquant similarly notes that "habitus is creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures, which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it."<sup>110</sup> Ghassan Hage considers habitus a "mechanism for the transformation of possibility into creative activity."<sup>111</sup> The potential for cleavage between the concepts of habitus as an "unconscious" influence and identity as a "conscious" shaper of action, particularly as utilized in contemporary sociological literature, requires greater exposition. To understand this in great depth it is important to consider that



Bourdieu argued habitus is a relational concept that makes sense only “in relation” to a specific field. Bourdieu asserts:

On one side it is a relation of *conditioning*: the field structures the habitus, which is a product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field (or a set of intersecting fields, the extent of their intersection or discrepancy being at the root of a divided or even torn habitus). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy.<sup>112</sup>

In this understanding, Bourdieu considers the habitus to endow a field with meaning. This has a strong correlation with Manuel Castells’ conception of “identity” as a “source of meaning.” Understanding the social influences upon the habitus enables an understanding of how the individual practices identity. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu outlined the relationship between identity and *habitus*, providing a valuable reference point for this research:

... social identity is defined and asserted through difference. This means that inevitably inscribed within the dispositions of the habitus is the whole structure of the system of conditions, as it presents itself in the experiences of a life-condition occupying a particular position within that structure. The most fundamental oppositions in the structure (high/low, rich/poor etc.) tend to establish themselves as the fundamental structuring principals of practices and the perception of practices.<sup>113</sup>

In this sense where one perceives oneself in the field can also impact upon the habitus. Within this conception, Bourdieu views identity as a relational concept, formed in relation to the “other” and that social oppositionalities based in identity can shape practice and, consequently, political action. This highlights the active dimension of the habitus in response to the social space in which the individual is situated. It is not a long leap to consider a potential divide between “Muslim” and “non-Muslim,” particularly for young Muslim men that have experienced misinterpellation and who are displaying a political identity anathematic to dominant political discourse. Understanding the manner (conscious or unconscious) in which individuals inculcate social influences into their daily existence and decision making is essential to the disposition to act politically in a particular manner. This has implications for research, as Karl Maton has stated:

The task for the researcher is to analyze practices so that the underlying structuring principles of the habitus are revealed. However, empirically, one does

not “see” a habitus but rather the *effects* of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise.<sup>114</sup>

Dispositions are manifested in both the body through individual mannerisms that may be common to a larger social group and through personal attitudes and tastes. Everything from the way one walks, his or her facial expressions, tones of voice, and style of speaking through to clothing preferences and political views and actions may be considered to constitute expressions of the habitus. Research on “perceptions” is hence only a part of the larger picture. The researcher must be aware of the manner in which small details may contribute to a larger picture and employ appropriate methods to gain a greater understanding of the habitus of an individual.

Bourdieu introduced classificatory schemes of taste and social “distinction” based on habitus. His work is less useful for labeling patterns of practice and the broader narrative that underpins them. To this extent the concept of identity is discursively very strong and cannot be ignored; it is ingrained in the vast body of literature examining Western Muslims. It is important to utilize an analytical frame for understanding what different forms of political practice translate into once action is taken, how they may be categorized in relation to dominant power structures and their contribution toward either their reinforcement or challenging understood. It is here that the paradigm of “practicing identity” provides insights into the more active dimension of habitus that seeks to consciously project both the individual and group into the political field in relation to other actors and to gain a sense of honorable recognition and source of meaning as living an important life. This provides a greater depth in understanding both why and how people choose to act and allow these actions to be categorized for comparison. Manuel Castells’ identity typologies outlined in *The Power of Identity* offers such a categorizing scheme, whilst simultaneously offering further insights into the reproduction and challenging of structural domination within society.

### Castells Identity Typologies

Manuel Castells’ theoretical approach to categorizing political identities (legitimizing, project, and resistance) and their core characteristics is particularly applicable to this research.<sup>115</sup> On the surface, the work of Manuel Castells is clearly post-structuralist, emphasizing the fluid, fragmented nature of contemporary identities. This appears to contrast somewhat with Bourdieu’s approach, which seeks greater balance, yet has also been accused of excessive structural determinism, providing some tension. Yet it is precisely these tensions that, balanced properly, allow for an insight into how key

social influences interact to shape the disposition to act politically and for the expression on political identities to be categorized. Political actors, by definition, consciously seek to create an impact in the field of power and may be expected to possess, or be contesting, greater resources (capital) to both seek to participate and to achieve this impact. Manuel Castells' identity typologies allow for the categorization of different forms of political activity in the field of power, locating actors relationally for analysis.

Castells proposed three main forms of identity that are useful here; legitimizing, resistance, and project identity. Merged with Bourdieu's approach, these offer a dynamic hybrid approach to understanding young Muslim men acting politically.

*Legitimizing identities* are introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination *vis-a-vis* social actors.<sup>116</sup> Castells considers that this generates a civil society, a set of organizations and institutions as well as structured social actors that reproduce and rationalize sources of structural domination.<sup>117</sup> These are what Bourdieu might term "consecrated" identities, contributing to the ongoing socialization of social norms that ensures continued symbolic violence and the internalization of these within the habitus.

*Resistance identities* are generated by those subordinated to dominant hegemonic discourses who build "trenches of resistance and survival" based on different principles.<sup>118</sup> Castells argued that this may be the most important form of identity building in society, constructing collective resistance against "otherwise unbearable" oppression, usually upon the basis of identities defined by history, geography, and/or biology making it easier to clearly define the boundaries of resistance.<sup>119</sup> These actors are likely to have a habitus that is consciously located in opposition to the dominant power; however, they lack the required resources to challenge consecrated social norms according to the dominant logic of the field. The concept of resistance identities bears strong resemblance to Connell's notion of "protest masculinities" or Dwyer et al.'s "rebellious masculinities," with the emphasis upon challenging a more powerful "other" from a subordinated position in field.

*Project identities* are considered to be displayed by social actors building new identities based on available cultural resources that redefine their position in society and seek the transformation of the overall social structure.<sup>120</sup> These actors, seeking to change consecrated social norms, must possess considerable levels of capital (with the type dependent upon social context) if they are to succeed in doing so. These actors are at the most politically conscious, reflexive end of the spectrum, and have consciously steered their political actions toward tactics and strategies aimed at exposing symbolic violence and gaining key stakes.

## The Hybridized Theoretical Approach and Research Questions

The approach utilized typifies what Michael Adams considers a “hybridized” model, “moving beyond the conceptual stalemate of two distinct approaches to identity.”<sup>121</sup> The utilization of Bourdieu’s contribution draws upon contemporary scholars that have contextualized his work to English-speaking contexts and seeks to operationalize his concepts for application to this study. This frame reveals how key social influences interact and the ways in which they bestow young men in this study with various levels of capital that may be utilized to improve their positions in given fields through political action. Importantly, Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice* also considers the human dimension of political action; why young Muslim men choose to participate in a field, why it gives them meaning (an identity) and a sense of purpose and how it offers them a viable and meaningful life. The contribution of Castells allows for the categorization of active displays of political identity and comparison between research subjects. Tensions between the approaches clearly exist. Bourdieu’s work may be argued to lean toward structural, unconscious influences shaping practice, whilst Castells has a stronger view of the reflexive individual acting with agency to shape their social world. The tensions between structure and agency are in fact a key strength of the theoretical approach. Both approaches place power as central to understanding individual practice and action, ensuring a common ground whilst the differing emphasis on structure and agency ensures both are taken into account in the construction of research design and analysis.

This hybrid approach allows direct comparisons between the different forms of identity displayed by subjects and contributes, with Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice*, to the formation of important interrelated questions for the research:

- *How do social influences interact to contribute to different forms of political action by Australian-born Muslim men in Melbourne, Australia?*
- *What are the key fields occupied by young Australian-born Muslim men engaging in political activity and what are the stakes and logics of these fields?*
- *What forms of capital are central for young Muslim men participating in political action and how are they accumulated and utilized to improve their position in their fields?*
- *What role does social trajectory play in the disposition to actively assert a legitimizing, project or resistance identity?*

An additional implication focused question is addressed in the discussion:

- *How does understanding the key research question contribute to understanding the development of Political Islam in Australian and wider Western multicultural contexts?*

Understanding these important questions allows the key research question and hypothesis to be comprehensively addressed with empirical evidence collected and the theoretical approach, contributing to the core aim of the research.

### Research Method

This book takes an active interdisciplinary approach to the study of young Muslim men in Western contexts who are in many ways at the forefront of the development of Islam as a religion. This project engages with Islamic concepts and considers their application in the contemporary Western context whilst the emphasis on understanding the influence of hegemonic discourse and “power” developed in the literature review and methodological approach outlined above highlights the relevance of the political sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. At times philosophical considerations are also relevant, particularly in dealing with the metaphysical considerations of Islam as a determinant upon political action and considering questions of recognition and meaning. The research design reflects a political scientific structure and approach though will draw upon ethnographic methods to gain in-depth insights into the Australian-born Muslim men being examined. This interdisciplinary approach significantly strengthens the research through allowing the question to be approached from a variety of angles.

These studies rely upon multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion to provide a holistic insight into the subject. This research design utilizes an array of methods to enable in-depth analysis of each study. The following research methods are applied:

- Semi-Structured In-depth Interviews (and one focus group);
- Participant Observation;
- Content Analysis of Political Acts/Cultural Contributions, and;
- Interviews with a Panel of Advisors.

With respect to interview conduct, Bourdieu advocates engaging the participant in conversation rather than answering questions.<sup>122</sup> This has the effect of eliciting much greater depth of unconscious thoughts and provides much

greater potential insights into the nature of the habitus than scripted and considered answers to set questions. This approach was at the core of the semi-structured interviews utilized. It often had the effect of allowing participants to talk at length about a topic raised. Most importantly, by allowing participants to talk through the conversational approach, links between different factors influencing political action became much clearer than possible through a static approach as the participant would commence by talking about the specific topic raised then steer the interview toward other topics as they deemed relevant.

### The Significance of Reflexivity

The application of Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* to understanding the research question is clearly an act of objectification and construction on the part of the researcher. The researcher is not a participant in the "field" nor does the field exist as a concrete entity. Those participating in fields invest them with meaning and emotional energy and are unlikely to see themselves as participating in the manner outlined in the theoretical approach. It is possible in this objectification to lose the voice of research subjects and to project personal biases onto the analysis.<sup>123</sup> As Bourdieu asserts, "one of the chief sources of error in the social sciences resides in an uncontrolled relation to the object which results in the projection of this relation onto the object."<sup>124</sup> This has the net result of not only undermining scientific objectivity, but actually reproducing through research outcomes, the current system of power relations as they exist.

This research seeks to capture the voice of subjects (and passion and emotion that underpin it) through as accurate and faithful a representation as possible. Awareness of the need for reflexivity and constant vigilance throughout the analytical process guided this project. Approaches utilized include semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a content analysis of the political acts and cultural contributions of the men at the center of each chapter. This supplemented the interviews whilst often providing insights through mediums used. In the case of cultural sources emanating directly from research participants such as musical lyrics, television program content, and academic works these constitute a public statement of political expression that offers potentially rich insights into both current views and the motivators that contributed to them. Culture is viewed throughout this research as an inherently political act of production, as Chris Weedon and Glen Jordan assert:

Power is at the centre of cultural politics. It is integral to culture. *All signifying practices—that is, all practices that have meaning—involve relations of*

*power* . . . We are either active subjects who take up positions from which we can exercise power within a particular social practice, or we are subjected to the definitions of others.<sup>125</sup>

A variety of documentary and previously untapped sources are utilized within the research. These include works produced by research subjects in the public domain, media sources, Web sites, government and representative organization sources and with respect to the final study, court transcripts and listening and surveillance device transcripts and Internet blogs. Each documentary source ultimately required a tailored and nuanced analysis weighing up its authenticity, potential biases, and actual content in relation to the research questions. There are clearly limitations in what sources could be accessed, particularly for those men engaged in illegal activity and this prohibits a direct comparison of sources. However, a careful analysis tailored to the individual sources and with the theoretical frame firmly at the fore enables a comparison of their core driving themes.

### The Research Hypothesis

The book explores the hypothesis that young men displaying project identities and engaging in constructive political action through acts of cultural production are likely to possess significantly higher levels of capital (including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals) that bestow them with greater levels of confidence and empowerment, enabling them to act within their fields and society than young Muslim men who display resistance identities that engage in acts of destructive political violence (terrorism). Greater levels of capital possession are likely to assist Australian-born Muslim men to exercise reflexivity and critical choice to interpret and negotiate difficult social situations, including conflicting textual interpretations and power imbalances, whilst bestowing them with an entrepreneurial perspective, enabling them to instinctively identify and creatively act upon opportunities for empowerment.

The likely key social factors influencing the accumulation of this capital based upon the literature review and theoretical framework offered by *Theory of Practice* may include religion, family, education and employment experiences, Western cultural influences including popular culture and hegemonic notions of masculinity, experiences with governmental and community institutions, and the media. It is also hypothesized that Australian and Western cultural influences interact with Islamic influences to produce new manifestations of religious practice and political action.

This hypothesis stands in strong contrast to essentialist depictions of Muslims as a monolithic block whose every action is informed solely by their religion. This book builds on contemporary studies of Western Muslim identity, moving beyond examining “perceptions” and “experiences” to provide deeper insights into how social influences interact to contribute to political action.



## CHAPTER 2

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# Muslims in Australia

This chapter seeks to locate the Australian-born Muslim men at the center of this research in their wider sociopolitical context. The chapter commences with a broad overview of the social context of the study and demographic overview of Australian Muslims revealing the extensive challenges facing Australian Muslims at a variety of levels. This is supplemented by an analysis of the wider historical and contemporary political social space shaping the experiences of Australian Muslims. This chapter utilizes the Bourdieusian concept of the field of power to locate Australian-born Muslim men in relation to the dominant political and cultural hegemonies in Australia. This occurs through an examination of three core fields in the period 2001–2011 (the 9/11 decade): the field of Australian governmental power, field of Victorian state governmental power, and field of Australian Muslim institutional politics. All social experiences faced by the young men in these studies are in some way mediated and impacted upon by their passage through these fields and contribute to shaping a different sense of what is possible for young Muslim men and consequently, the forms of political action they undertake.

### **Overview: Australia, Melbourne, and Islam**

The history of the continent of Australia extends far beyond European settlement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations are considered to have the oldest living cultural histories in the world, extending back up to 71,000 years.<sup>1</sup> The first European settlement and development of Australia occurred over 225 years ago in 1788, whilst Federation (the birth of Australian nationhood) occurred in 1901. This established a bicameral parliamentary system as the base of Australian liberal democracy. At this time Australia had a total population of approximately 3.9 million.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the 2011 census

Australia had a population of 21.5 million people<sup>3</sup> from over 270 ancestries and speaking over 400 languages.<sup>4</sup> Australia on average currently enjoys one of the highest living standards in the world, ranking second in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Report with a score of 0.933 (out of a possible 1.0) for quality of life.<sup>5</sup> Capital cities in four out of six Australian states were considered in the world's top ten livable cities by *The Economist Intelligence Unit's* 2014 Report. Australia has clearly accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time. However, certain groups in society continue to face a very high level socioeconomic hardship. Australia's indigenous population faced an unemployment rate of 17 per cent in 2013 compared to 5.5 per cent for the wider population,<sup>6</sup> whilst a demographic analysis will reveal a similar level of unemployment facing Australian Muslims. As a historical overview reveals, race and culture continue to occupy a contentious position in the Australian political landscape that continues to shape the experience of Australian-born Muslim men.

### ***The Social Setting for the Study: Melbourne, Victoria***

The state of Victoria is located in Australia's south east. The capital city of Melbourne covers the entire metropolitan area of Melbourne and encompasses the extensive urban residential sprawl (over 80 kilometers from east to west) with a population of four million people in 2011.<sup>7</sup> Melbourne is highly multicultural with over 31 per cent of the Melbourne population-born overseas.<sup>8</sup> The standard of living in Melbourne is regarded as amongst the world's best. Melbourne has been rated number one in *The Economist* magazine's international ranking of "Most liveable cities" for four years in a row from 2011 to 2014.<sup>9</sup> Despite this "livability," Melbourne is an increasingly expensive place to live, with house prices in Melbourne having grown exponentially; in January 2010, the median house price was \$540,500 AUD.<sup>10</sup> This had risen to over \$600,000 AUD in 2014.<sup>11</sup> This makes Melbourne the seventh least affordable city in the world with mortgage repayments costing more than 50 per cent of gross income.<sup>12</sup>

Melbourne is growing rapidly in both population and economic wealth. Whilst provision of government services such as healthcare, welfare, and education is universally accessible, significant income and quality of life differentials exist. In education, critical for the development of institutional and embodied cultural capital, Bowden and Doughney note that an "aspirations gap" between goals and achievable reality in higher education and the opportunities it affords is largest for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in Melbourne, particularly the Western suburbs.<sup>13</sup> Whilst Melbourne may be a wealthy city on average, a sizeable proportion of the following demographic

review reveals that many Muslims do not share equally in this prosperity and are at increasing risk of being left behind with this growth.

### **Demographics of Islam in Australia and Melbourne**

Australia is located in the most populous area of Muslim settlement in the world, with the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia the nation's largest regional neighbor.<sup>14</sup> The 2011 Australian census identified 476,292 Australian Muslims, making Islam (2.2 per cent of the population) the third largest religion in Australia behind Buddhism (2.5 per cent) and Christianity (61 per cent).<sup>15</sup> Islam in Australia may be considered exceptionally diverse and has established itself as a "multicultural religion,"<sup>16</sup> with Muslims claiming heritage from over 70 nations. Considering that there are up to 56 Muslim majority states in the world,<sup>17</sup> this figure reveals that many Muslims are from nations where Islam constitutes a minority religion. Abdullah Saeed has noted:

They come from practically every corner of the world: from the Middle East, Russia, Europe, the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, South East Asia and even China. They speak languages ranging from English, Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Bosnian to Chinese, Tamil, Italian, German, French, Greek, Croatian, Thai, Vietnamese, Serbian, Spanish, Russian, Maltese and Hungarian.<sup>18</sup>

The majority of Australian Muslims identified in the 2011 census were born overseas (64 per cent); however, the single largest group are Australian-born (36 per cent) followed by Lebanon (10 per cent), Turkey (8 per cent), and Afghanistan (4 per cent).<sup>19</sup> The majority of Muslims within Australia reside in the capital cities of Sydney (208,149 or 44 per cent of Muslims nationally)<sup>20</sup> or Melbourne (143,639 or 30 per cent).<sup>21</sup> Australian Muslims are on average younger than non-Muslims, with 37 per cent of the Muslim population aged 15–34 compared to 28 per cent for non-Muslim Australians.<sup>22</sup> In Melbourne, Muslims constitute 3.75 per cent of the population and Muslim men aged 15–34 constitute 5.08 per cent of the total age group.<sup>23</sup> The Melbourne Muslim population is heavily concentrated in the city's northern, western, and outer south eastern suburbs.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Education***

Educationally, Australian Muslims are higher achievers than the wider community. Figures from the 2011 census reveal that a higher proportion of Muslims have obtained a university bachelors, graduate, or postgraduate

degree than non-Muslims, yet by contrast, 53 per cent of Muslims have no postsecondary education at all, compared to 46 per cent of the wider population. Figures from the 2006 census revealed that Muslim men had higher levels of tertiary qualifications (21 per cent) than non-Muslim men (15 per cent) with women having the same percentage (16 per cent) as non-Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Research conducted by Peucker, Roose, and Akbarzadeh based on a comparison between the 2001, 2006, and 2011 census reveals an emerging gap between Australian-born and overseas-born Muslims, with overseas-born Muslims more likely to possess a university qualification.<sup>26</sup> No information is available on the type of degree or the institution in which it was gained; however, if education is understood as institutionalized cultural capital that leads to upward social mobility it may be expected that this would translate into professional employment and higher levels of income. An examination of employment status reveals that while this may be the case for a minority, it does not for many others, as an examination of employment status reveals.

### *Employment*

Muslims face disproportionately high levels of unemployment in the Australian labor market. In 2011 the nationwide unemployment rate for Muslims was 12.6 per cent—more than double than that of the wider community at 5.6 per cent. There have, however, been significant improvements over the decade 2001–2011, with Muslim unemployment dropping by 33.8 per cent, compared to 23.9 per cent for the wider community.<sup>27</sup> Research by Peucker et al. found further that:

Australian Muslims continue to work often in low-skilled occupations and have jobs typically characterized by physically hard labor, unfavorable working hours and/or low wages. Muslims are overrepresented among machinery operators, drivers and labourers and underrepresented in managerial positions and among professionals . . . Importantly, foreign-born Muslims are more likely to work in professional occupations than their Australian-born counterparts, perhaps due to strict rules on skilled migration as a prerequisite to settlement.<sup>28</sup>

At all age groups Australians Muslims are underrepresented in full time employment and over represented in unemployment figures at double the rate of unemployment compared to non-Muslims.<sup>29</sup> The 2006 Census revealed that in the 20–29 age range central to this study, unemployment amongst young Muslim men stands at 10.3 per cent compared to 5.8 per cent for non-Muslims.<sup>30</sup> As a percentage of the male Muslim labor force (actively employed or seeking work) aged 20–29, this rose to 14 per cent compared to 7.2 per cent for non-Muslims.<sup>31</sup>

### *Household Income*

The underrepresentation of Australian Muslims in the professional class and the higher levels of unemployment is reflected in household income. Muslim household income is significantly lower on average than in non-Muslim households and reflected in significantly higher levels of poverty. The 2010 the Australian Council of Social Service defined poverty as 50 per cent of the median disposable income for all Australian households,<sup>32</sup> or \$752 per week for a couple with two children. For a single adult it stood at \$358. Vitally, 15 per cent of all Australian Muslims (16.1 per cent for Australian-born Muslims) reported nil income, compared to 7.6 per cent for the wider population. 47.1 per cent of Australian Muslims earned under \$600 a week, while for the wider population the figure stood at 39.3 per cent.<sup>33</sup> Muslims are also less likely to earn above \$1,250 a week (9.8 per cent) compared to the wider community (18.2 per cent).<sup>34</sup> Among the first to draw attention to this, Riaz Hassan claimed in 2009 that twice as many (40 per cent) Australian Muslim children lived in poverty compared to non-Muslim households.<sup>35</sup>

### **Analysis of Demographic Background**

It is clear that despite possessing higher levels, on average, of educational capital, Australian Muslims still face significant barriers converting this into employment opportunities, increased income, and upward social mobility. It is important to consider why Australian Muslims face difficulties converting their institutional cultural capital (education) into economic capital.

In the Australian context, it likely that a lack of recognition of qualifications gained overseas has contributed to difficulty converting these into economic capital by the majority of Muslims who are born overseas<sup>36</sup> and that Australian-born Muslims from lower socioeconomic areas attending state-funded schools are less likely to be able to compete with private school students for entry to more prestigious universities. However, it is also important to consider contemporary literature revealing that Australian Muslims express optimism about the possibilities for upward mobility and the research by Christine Inglis reporting a rising increase for young Australians of Lebanese and Turkish background into the professions.<sup>37</sup> This literature suggests that Australian-born Muslims may possess greater cultural capital and belief in their ability to negotiate the labor market despite the continued disadvantage.

There may be a potential divide emerging in Australian Muslim communities between young men from areas of high Muslim concentration and

lower socioeconomic background and young Muslims from areas of lower Muslim concentration and higher socioeconomic background with different social trajectories.<sup>38</sup> This divide may mediate how young Muslims experience and interpret different forms of social exclusion.

### An Overview of the History of Islam in Australia

The history of Muslims in Australia from the peaceful interactions of the Maccassan Muslim fishermen with indigenous Australians prior to white settlement has been well documented in the past two decades by Australian Muslim historians.<sup>39</sup> It has been widely noted that for the vast majority of Australia's history, notions of white superiority, and a "paranoid nationalism"<sup>40</sup> have been dominant factors shaping the national culture. Anne Aly and David Walker assert that:

Australia's history is marked by expressions of anxiety about invasion and the destruction of Australian culture. This culture is grounded in the tension between Australia's history as a European settler society and its geo-political position on the south-eastern fringe of Asia . . . From the 1880's "peril" has been a recurrent theme in Australia's history.<sup>41</sup>

From the "intense alienation and prejudice"<sup>42</sup> experienced by the Afghan Cameleers (1850–1900) that were crucial to opening up Australian inland trade routes to the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (White Australia Policy) and internment of Turkish Muslims during the First World War, Australian Muslims faced a largely marginalized existence. Numbers of Muslims in Australia were just 4,000 in 1911 and only 2,700 by the end of the Second World War,<sup>43</sup> with many of these likely to have "shed their cultural baggage" and anglicized their names and cultural practices.<sup>44</sup>

By the end of the war in 1945 the strict enforcement of "White Australia" was proving a hindrance to economic growth and was increasingly unsustainable. Turkish Cypriot Muslims and other "White" Muslim refugees from Europe were accorded entry and started, as the literature review reveals, the institution building associated with first generation migrants. The Islamic Society of Victoria was established in 1957 and other states instituted similar organizations. A 1958 revision to the Migration Act meant that despite an official "White Australia" policy, in 1971<sup>45</sup> over 22,000 Muslims (0.17 per cent of national population), largely of Lebanese and Turkish origin lived in Australia with almost 9,000 in Victoria.<sup>46</sup> The 1972 election of the Whitlam Labor Government after decades of conservative rule and the subsequent renouncement of White Australia in favor of Multiculturalism would be the

single greatest contributor to an increased and permanent Muslim presence in Australia.

The adoption of multiculturalism as official Federal Government policy signaled the biggest single shift in Australia's migration policy in the history since European colonization with an influx of migrants from many non-English-speaking regions around the world. Multiculturalism as official policy accepted difference and promoted cultural and racial diversity within the bounds of existing Australian law. This period was one of immense growth in the various Muslim Australian communities as representative bodies were consolidated at a national and state level as well as along ethnic lines. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC)<sup>47</sup> was formed in 1976 with funding from Saudi Arabia and grew its wealth from its authority to certify *Halal* meat exports.

Historian Robert Manne argues that two “peaceful revolutions” profoundly reshaped the long established Australian way of life in the period 1973–1996.<sup>48</sup> The first of these was a “cultural revolution” brought about by the adoption of multiculturalism in 1973 and increased recognition of indigenous land rights through recognition of native title in common law from 1992. The second revolution Manne considers as economic, involving the replacement of Keynesian and Deakinite principles with neo-liberal free market ideology. This resulted in extensive decentralization and deregulation, taking Australia from one of the most to one of the least protected economies in the Western world.<sup>49</sup> The impact of this combination was powerful:

Taken together, these revolutions threatened to wash away a great deal of what many Australians had unselfconsciously come to regard as an almost natural and even permanent way of life.<sup>50</sup>

Australia, from 1972, had gone from an insular, largely monocultural and protected nation almost overnight to one open to the world and the circumstances that prevailed within it. The “field of power” dominated by White Australian cultural and political hegemony was in flux. The misalignment between the national habitus and the new state of the Australian cultural field would be termed by Bourdieu as the *hysteresis* effect,<sup>51</sup> whereby a gap emerges between the new opportunities that emerge as a result of the field changing and the attributes and practices needed to grasp these new field positions.<sup>52</sup>

In 1996, John Howard, a politician deeply influenced by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher,<sup>53</sup> was able to exploit the “growing pains” of Australian cultural politics and lead the Liberal-National coalition to victory. This development signaled a new era of “cultural racism” in which the centrality of white culture to the nation was asserted. Greg Noble asserts that

over several decades in Australia, “new racism” focusing upon cultural rather than physical differences emerged, with “young men of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ being the main targets.”<sup>54</sup> Howard promised a cessation of many culturally oriented policies portrayed as those of “elites” at the expense of the (very broadly defined) “Aussie battler.” By late 2001 Prime Minister Howard and his cabinet had proved themselves skilled polemicists dedicated to asserting the primacy and hegemony of white Australian culture earning Howard the label of a “cultural warrior.”<sup>55</sup> Understanding the extent to which the preservation of the dominant white Australian culture was integral to Howard is an important basis for understanding the manner in which the events of late 2001 would shape policy and decision-making in the “9/11 decade.”

### **The Field of Australian Governmental Power 2001–2011**

The period dating from 2001 to 2011 was a key decade for Australian Muslims. The men at the core of Chapters 3 to 5 were all teenagers or young adults in this period, while the men examined in Chapter 6 were children in their formative years. These ages are widely understood as a pivotal time in the social development of young people and a time where a lack of respect and racism are arguably most likely to result in “injury.” The following analysis considers Federal Government approaches in-depth (particularly the approach to multiculturalism and engagement with Australian Muslims) in the era of the “War on Terror.” These considerations define the boundaries, key players, and stakes in the field of Australian governmental power as it relates to Australian Muslims.

#### ***Federal Government 2001–2007***

The “9/11” terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, reverberated around the Western world. The attacks upon the World Trade Centre and Pentagon evoked a swift response, with President George Bush on September 20, 2001, declaring a global “War on Terror.” At the time of these attacks, Prime Minister John Howard was in Washington and witnessed the fallout of the attacks at firsthand. Australia was just two months from a federal election (due in November 2001) and so Howard returned to Australia on the back of media hysteria and a dramatic spike in support for the government, pledging immediately to support the United States and winning the 2001 election more comfortably than expected.

Australia was amongst the first nations to commit soldiers to the US invasion of the Muslim majority nations of Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003 causing considerable consternation amongst many



Australians, including Australian Muslims. Up to 150,000 people participated in a March 2003 protest march in Melbourne alone.<sup>56</sup> It was on the “home-front,” however, that domestic political maneuvering would cause the most significant impact. The political act of naming an armed action a “war” allows a government to take many actions deemed unacceptable in peacetime, including suspension of civil liberties and identification of an “enemy.” Whilst in previous wars “enemy aliens” had been interred physically, the “War on Terror” had no clearly definable enemy “other” apart from loosely defined “terrorists.” Religion replaced nationality as a defining basis of an individual becoming a potential threat. Whilst the Bali Bombing terrorist attack on October 12, 2002 (killing 202 people of whom 88 were Australians) arguably contributed to multiply this emphasis on Muslims as a potential threat, the emphasis upon Islam as a key contributor to terrorism reached its peak in the aftermath of the July 2005 “7/7” bombings in London, when British-born suicide bombers raised the issue of the loyalty of British (and more broadly, “Western”) Muslims. In an interview a week after the 7/7 attacks Prime Minister Howard noted, “We shouldn’t complacently imagine that there aren’t potentially suicide bombers in this country.”<sup>57</sup> The 2005 Anti-Terrorism Act was immediately rushed through federal parliament with content that many Australian Muslims felt was aimed directly at them.

In the wake of the London bombings the Government formed the “Prime Minister’s Muslim Community Reference Group” (MCRG). This group involved handpicked representatives and was explicitly formulated to ensure “harmony” between “Australians” and “Muslims.” The group was immediately plagued by allegations of being highly unrepresentative (for example through its exclusion of Turkish Muslims, the third largest demographic group of Muslims in Australia) and extensive infighting. A notable example was the publically stated approval of counter-terrorism laws by Chairman Ameer Ali who was promptly rebuked by other members and Muslim organizations.<sup>58</sup> The group was disbanded at the conclusion of its one-year term of reference, never having met the Prime Minister.

The Cronulla Riots on December 11, 2005, in Sydney revealed the extent to which the terms “Middle Eastern” and “Muslim” had become conflated in Australian discourse and the cumulative impact of sustained Government and media attacks upon Australian Muslim populations. The approximately five thousand rioters comprised mainly local white youths draped in Australian flags and with many wearing t-shirts emblazoned with slogans such as “no lebs.”<sup>59</sup> They were seeking to “reclaim the beach” after the bashing of lifeguards the week before by Lebanese youths. The conflation of “Muslim” with “Middle Eastern” was made succinctly clear by other individuals wearing homemade t-shirts with slogans such as “Fuck Allah Save Nullah”<sup>60</sup> and

“Mohamed [sic] was a camel raping faggot.”<sup>61</sup> During the riots individuals of non-white appearance were targeted, including two Bangladeshi students and two Australian youths of “Middle Eastern” appearance.<sup>62</sup>

The experiences of Cronulla have indisputably had a “deep and lasting sociopolitical and emotional ramifications on the Australian national conscience.”<sup>63</sup> The images of mobs of white youths bashing brown skinned young men at Cronulla could be argued to serve as a continued reminder of the threat to Australian Muslims should they upset the white majority.

The Australian National Council of Imams (ANIC) was established in mid-September 2006 and signaled a shift toward the promotion of spiritual, rather than political leadership. It must be noted that recommendations made by these organizations and other bodies such as the “National Youth Summit” were substantively ignored by the Howard government.<sup>64</sup> The government’s interactions with Australian Muslims during this period may be understood as a form of pseudo/autocratic engagement, whereby the government imposed its agenda regardless of consultative processes and recommendations.

### ***Federal Government 2007–2011***

The 24 November 2007 election of the Rudd Labor government after 11 years of conservative rule signaled a significant shift in the cultural interventions of the federal government (particularly evident in the apology to the Stolen Generations<sup>65</sup>) that would shape both Australian Muslims and multiculturalism. However, these changes may be regarded as inconsistent.

In March 2008 the Rudd Government announced plans to reformulate a national Muslim advisory body, and the Council for Multicultural Australia; both had been disbanded by the Howard Government. The Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Labor MP Laurie Ferguson signaled the new approach, stating the Government’s desire to overcome stereotyping of Muslim communities and move away from spiritual leaders in order to gain representation from a broader base of successful Muslims in the Australian community:

We can’t prescribe how the Islamic community is to organise itself, but we certainly must make sure that the fact there are international tensions and terrorist issues doesn’t kind of stereotype the whole community in Australia . . . Australia has produced (Muslim) academics, business types, sporting types and it’s often not celebrated enough . . .<sup>66</sup>

This approach was reiterated in 2008 with the inclusion of many high-profile Australian Muslims, including Waleed Aly, Samina Yasmeen, and

Mohammad Abdalla to the “2020 Summit,” cast by the Rudd Government as a meeting of Australia’s “Best and Brightest’ minds.” Speaking in September 2008, Mufti of Australia Fethmi el Imam declared the Rudd Government more inclusive than the Howard administration.<sup>67</sup> However, the Prime Minister also revealed his willingness to utilize Australian Muslims for political gain. In the midst of political scrutiny of the government over a failed national roofing insulation scheme, the Prime Minister personally spoke at the release of the 2010 Counter-Terrorism White Paper, stoking fears of Muslim terrorism and claiming “the threat of home-grown terrorism is now increasing.”<sup>68</sup>

Julia Gillard, a publically stated atheist, replaced Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister in June 2010 and made several comments with regards to Australian Muslims. In May 2010 when Gillard supported the then Prime Minister Rudd in stating that the burqa would not be banned, however, agreed with opposition leader Tony Abbott that some Australians find it “confronting.”<sup>69</sup> This debate evolved from comments by a right wing neo-conservative member of the federal Liberal Party, Cory Bernadi, calling for the burqa to be banned in April 2010.<sup>70</sup> In February 2011 the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen declared the “genius of Australian Multiculturalism,”<sup>71</sup> contrasting the Australian experiences with European approaches.

Despite a softening in political rhetoric directed toward Australian Muslims and efforts at building improved relationships and increasing social inclusion through a multicultural approach, Muslim communities during this period remained a convenient political category. The arguably cynical attempts to regain symbolic and political capitals by both Rudd and Gillard when under political pressure through public statements about Muslims, combined with the failure of the Government to formally institute the proposed advisory board two years after it was announced, reveals both inconsistencies in the Labor government approach and a continued willingness to let political contingency dictate action toward Australian Muslims.

### **The Field of Victorian Political Power 2001–2011**

The field of Victorian political power in which this study is located is overlapped by the field of national political power and similarly constituted, with a very similar parliamentary structure and key appointments. The field is heavily influenced by federal government legislation and cultural interventions yet also enjoys an autonomy embedded in the Australian constitution through the protection of state rights and the Victorian multicultural institutional framework. The Victorian Labor government that governed from 1999

to 2010 under Steve Bracks (1999–2007) and John Brumby (2007–2010) consistently held very different positions to the federal Howard government on issues concerning Australian Muslims and multicultural policy during this time. Whilst many state governments promote multiculturalism through subsidiary bodies, it may be considered that Victoria has the most dynamic legislative and holistic government approach, due in large part to the leadership of Steve Bracks, of Lebanese heritage, who alongside his role as Premier maintained the role of Minister for Multicultural Affairs. In 2001 the Bracks Labor government passed the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* prohibiting racial and religious vilification. In December 2004 the Victorian Parliament passed the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004* that in principle committed the Government to addressing Victorian's entitlement to mutual respect and understanding:

...irrespective of their cultural, religious, racial or linguistic backgrounds within the context of shared laws, rules, aspirations and responsibilities; and to participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the State.<sup>72</sup>

The Act required government departments to report annually on use of language sources and their initiatives toward the promotion of multiculturalism in addition to consolidating legislation governing the *Victorian Multicultural Commission* (VMC)—this stood in stark contrast to the systematic dismantling of multiculturalism by the Howard government at the exact same time. This commitment and support for multiculturalism was explicitly stated by the Labor government labeling Victoria as a “multicultural success story” and stating a commitment to maintaining and supporting a “highly diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage” and “emphasizing to all Victorians the importance of shared rights and responsibilities.”<sup>73</sup> A key component of the platform was the VMC operating under the 2004 Act (though originally established in 1983) which runs a very large range of community programs including consultations, conferences, youth participation meetings, festivals, and grants designed to promote access to Government and other bodies by different communities and promote the goals of multiculturalism. In 2004 the Victoria Police introduced an official hijab for its first observant Muslim woman member.<sup>74</sup> In 2006 the *Victorian Human Rights Charter* was legislated, protecting amongst other rights, recognition and equality before the law, freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, taking part in public life and cultural rights.<sup>75</sup> In 2008 the *Multicultural Victoria Act* was amended to enhance the functions of the VMC. This approach from the state government can be argued to have significantly insulated Victoria from wider

federal government attacks and to have promoted a positive social and political environment that has contributed to Victoria being a base for positive and constructive engagement by members of the Muslim communities.

### **The Field of National Muslim Institutional Politics 2001–2011**

It is important to develop an understanding of the representatives acting as the interface between the national and state governments and Muslim communities, including who they are and how they acted in the fields of national and state political power.

The urgency with which the Howard Government sought out “moderate” voices, particularly after the London bombings had the effect of opening the political space up to Australian Muslims at an unprecedented level. However, a void existed, with few voices from individuals possessing adequate cultural and symbolic capitals to adequately articulate Muslim perceptions. With a public platform and subsequent funding resulting in political and symbolic capitals as the key stakes, the field of Muslim institutional politics, long associated with ethnically based in-fighting became a battleground of groups and individuals seeking legitimacy both within this field and the larger political field.

The aforementioned MCRG was highly unsuccessful, whilst the AFIC throughout the period 2001–2011 was in a similar state of difficulty, undermining its role as the formal institutional representative body of Australia’s Muslim communities. A public battle for control of the organization that governed Muslim organizations across the Australian states and territories ensued. Islamic councils and the multimillion dollar *halal* cattle certification business received extensive coverage in national newspaper, *The Australian*, particularly by journalist Richard Kerbaj. In April 2006 Kerbaj noted very similarly to literature on the topic that:

The younger generation is struggling to wrest power from the old guard. But there is too much prestige and too many dollars in running community organizations for them to step away without a fight.<sup>76</sup>

Paralleling the AFIC saga was the relatively more successful approach of Australian raised Sheikh Fehmi Naji el Imam, declared the Mufti of Australia in 2007 by ANIC. In the aftermath of the 2008 trial and conviction of members of the Benbrika Jama’ah, the Mufti would express empathy for their families whilst simultaneously expressing confidence that the accused were given the chance to present their innocence.<sup>77</sup> Days later Sheikh Fehmi granted a rare interview to the media highlighting the cultural links between

Australian Muslims and the wider community and praising the freedoms that exist within Australian society stating: “Australia has always been a bastion of hope, a society where people are able to practice their beliefs freely and live harmoniously together with people from all over the world.”<sup>78</sup>

The decade of Muslim institutional politics in Australia between 2001 and 2011 clearly reflects the dominance of institutions by overseas-born middle-aged men. The political space opened by the “War on Terror” for Australian Muslims and the considerable associated economic and political stakes have played a key role in this battle for control of Muslim representative organizations. This has caused considerable frustration amongst Australian-born Muslims that have had little chance of gaining political control of these organizations. These organizations are not viable avenues for finding self-meaning and expression. They have been forced to consider alternative modes of political expression.

### ***Victorian Muslim Institutional Politics 2001–2011***

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) emerged as arguably the preeminent moderate representative Muslim organization in the country in the period 2001–2011, working within the strong Victorian legislative and cultural structures supporting multiculturalism to constructively engage in society and importantly, fostering a generation of young political and cultural leaders who have broken new ground for Islam in Australia.

The ICV has been proactive in defending the rights of Victoria’s Muslim communities, becoming the first body to utilize the *Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act* (2001) when it filed a complaint against evangelical Christian group *Catch the Fire Ministries* in 2002 for their alleged vilification of Muslims, persevering with the case until an out of court settlement in 2007. The ICV was also amongst the most prominent voices in criticizing the anti-terror laws introduced by the Howard Government, releasing numerous press statements and making extensive public comment about the impact of the laws upon Muslim communities. ICV spokesperson at the time, Waleed Aly, asserted that Muslims would feel targeted, civil liberties would be eroded and that the new laws would not work.<sup>79</sup>

The ICV was focused on engaging young Australian Muslims, with officer bearer positions often filled by Australian-born young men and women.<sup>80</sup> ICV President Ramzi Elsayed stated in an interview that the ICV strongly supports multiculturalism and wants the Muslim community to play its part, asserting that symbolically and practically, Muslims have to be part of the solution to providing order and safety in the Victorian community.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Elsayed worked to establish links with other religious representative

organizations that may aid in ensuring the safety of Australian Muslims in the event that a terrorist action triggers a negative reaction against Australian Muslims. It is perceived that these figures would publically support the Muslim community and speak out against violence. The President of ICV was very aware of accusations that the organization was “too moderate” and has worked actively with more conservative Muslim organizations to include them in decision making processes and community engagement.<sup>82</sup> Importantly, on the position of loyalty, so often challenged by conservative tabloid media commentators and politicians, Elsayed asserted strongly that where any leadership or authority that provides for religious rights to worship there is “nothing for you to do but to give loyalty . . . we have an obligation to reciprocate that.”<sup>83</sup>

### Implications of the Sociopolitical Context

The young men of this study “came of age” in the decade 2001–2011 that not only continued a pattern of discrimination and marginalization of Australian Muslims but actively multiplied it in the context of the War on Terror. In the period 2001–2007 the Howard-led federal government sought to reinvigorate the centrality of Anglo-Australian cultural norms and actively targeted Australian Muslims, perceiving Islam to constitute a challenge to these values. Political power in this period was exercised overtly in the national public space by right wing conservative politicians demanding loyalty to Australian values and implementing antiterrorism laws aimed largely at Australian Muslims. This governmental approach combined with tabloid media saturation coverage of the Muslim “threat” sought to shape the public space significantly and to naturalize the centrality of white cultural hegemony.

The events of Cronulla in December 2005 may be considered to have a particular significance in revealing the potential for violence directed against Australian Muslims should they “step out of line.” The Rudd and Gillard governments may be argued to have promoted greater social inclusion for Australian Muslims, though have still shown a tendency to utilize Muslims for political gain when it is expedient to do so. As the literature review reveals, the cumulative impact of the wielding of political power directed against Australian Muslims has been harmful and injurious and contributed to a sense of social exclusion and marginalization.

In the period 2001–2011 Australian Muslims could not turn to their community representatives who were very often utilized by the Howard government to provide a cloak of legitimacy for government actions and who appeared more preoccupied with battling each other for political power. The direct interventions of the federal government in the period 2001–2007

(in particular in the period 2005–2007) strongly distorted and polarized the dynamics of the field, producing results antithetical to multiculturalism and social inclusion. The Howard approach produced a set of key actors; Muslim “representatives” and bestowed them with symbolic and political capitals in the governmental arena out of all proportion to their symbolic capital within their communities. Consequently, the domination of the MCRG, AFIC, and ANIC by older overseas-born Muslim men closely parallels the literature discussing their domination of the field of Muslim institutional politics.

It may be argued that the often farcical political in-fighting produced a crisis of legitimacy in Muslim communities. As these men scrambled for positions of power, largely with little popular support, particularly amongst Australian-born Muslims, they were open to being accused of being moderates acting at the behest of the government. This arguably created a space for the greater prominence of Islamist voices in the national debate such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. These Islamists claimed a religious symbolic capital as the self-proclaimed arbiters of Islamic “truth” and whilst claiming Islamic and political legitimacy asserted a very different logic; that seeking non-Muslim political approval amounted to actively undermining Islam. Whilst gaining similarly low levels of community support, these Islamist groups were seized upon by the government and media as indicative of the “threat” of Australian Muslims. This generated a cycle of media and government surveillance that continues to the present day.

At the Victorian state level, a field of power subordinate to the national level, yet with a high degree of autonomy to institute legislation governing relations amongst its citizens, the impact of the national political tendency to utilize Muslims to gain political capital has been significantly buffered in the period 2001–2011. Victorian Government legislation may be considered amongst the most effective and wide-ranging enactments of multiculturalism anywhere in the world. Importantly, the laws defend against new forms of cultural racism that have emerged over the past three decades, simultaneously opening the space for Muslim organizations (rather than just ethnic based groups) to make representations to the government and providing them with the opportunity to act against discrimination and vilification. The peak representative body in Victoria, the ICV proved itself to be a highly multicultural and inclusive body and facilitated the development of a small number of young Australian-born Muslims possessing sufficient cultural capital moving into leadership positions. Avenues of upward social mobility such as professional level employment are still proportionately low and home ownership costs and living expenses appear to be making this increasingly difficult. Even in Melbourne, Australian-born Muslims face a very difficult sociopolitical



landscape that is likely to shape their “matrix of dispositions,” worldview and actions in wider society.

### **Conclusion**

Australian-born Muslims in the period 2001–2011 lived in an often hostile and highly challenging sociopolitical environment. Yet young Muslims seeking to express their political views have had little option to do so through formal institutional means. The field of politics continues to be dominated by white Australian political and cultural interests whilst the field of Muslim institutional politics continued to be largely dominated by a generation of foreign-born, middle-aged men often more concerned with gaining political power than advocating for their communities. Despite the increased opportunities in the Victorian multicultural context, these remain limited to those with the cultural capital to seek them out and successfully participate.

Australian-born Muslim men in Melbourne seeking to express their political perspectives gain recognition for these views and achieve societal change and were likely to find that they had significantly more opportunity to do so in the societal and cultural spaces outside formal institutional politics.

## CHAPTER 3

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# The Brothahood: “Australia’s Mine Too”

### Introduction

Previous chapters reveal the extensive challenges that have faced Australian-born Muslims, including widespread exclusion from the governmental and Muslim institutional political fields. Some young Muslim men have sought alternative avenues of self-expression and fields through which they could have a larger political impact. This first exemplar focuses on one such group of men and aims to reveal the manner in which social influences interact to shape their political action. The Brothahood are a group of young Australian Muslim men from a wide variety of backgrounds who have formed a common bond through hip-hop, an inherently political style of music that through its very form encourages a vocalization of identity and views. The group has become a pioneer of Muslim hip-hop in Australia and played around the country whilst developing a following in Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim nation and other Muslim majority nations in Asia. The Brothahood’s music fuses Muslim perspectives and experiences with a Western cultural form to challenge negative representations of Islam in Australia and simultaneously promote self-esteem and pride amongst Muslim listeners. This chapter aims to understand the type of identity displayed by the group and through the application of Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice*, how social influences have interacted to shape the group’s political action.

### Group Background

The Brothahood consist of brothers Jihad and Moustafa Debab, Hesham Habibullah, Timur Bakan and until 2010, Ahmed Ahmed (Figure 3.1). Jihad (25 at the time of interview) and Moustafa (28) grew up in the suburb of



**Figure 3.1** The Brothahood

The Brothahood in a Melbourne Laneway 2012 (from Left to Right: Jihad Debab, Hesham Habibullah, Timur Bakan and Moustafa Debab). Photo credit to RawBerry.

Doncaster, in Melbourne's east and are of Lebanese background. Hesham (26) grew up in the Dandenong and Springvale areas in Melbourne's south east and is of Burmese background. Timur (25) grew up in the suburb of Coburg in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs and is of Turkish heritage whilst Ahmed (25) is from the outer southern eastern suburb of Narre Warren and is of Egyptian background.

The geographic spread and multicultural nature of the group reveal the importance of religion over ethnicity as an identity marker amongst observant Western Muslims. The origins of the group may be traced to 1999, when Jihad, Hesham, and Ahmed, all then aged in their mid-teens, met at a Young Muslims of Australia (YMA) residential camp.<sup>1</sup> The group first performed at the camp talent show in front of several dozen of their peers. From these

humble beginnings the Brothahood would become the first and most successful Muslim hip-hop group in Australia. The group's list of accomplishments has continued to grow to the time of writing. These include topping the *Triple J* FM radio station "unearthed" hip-hop charts in 2007, the release of a 2008 album titled *Lyrics of Mass Construction*<sup>2</sup> that sold out its first run of two thousand copies, placing second at the *Al Mahabba* awards in an international competition held in the United Arab Emirates to "promote and reward artistic expressions of love for the Prophet Muhammad"<sup>3</sup> and playing to large audiences nationally and in Indonesia, where in October 2010 they were covered on the front page of the country's largest English language newspaper *The Jakarta Post*.<sup>4</sup> Other highlights include collaboration with international Muslim hip-hop artists including *Mecca to Medina* (United Kingdom), *Young Noble* from the *Outlawz* (USA), *MC Akil* from *Jurassic 5* (USA) and *Flesh n Bone* from the Grammy Award winning group *Bones Thugs n Harmony* (USA). To understand the group and what they are seeking to achieve, it is important to first gain an understanding of hip-hop as a mechanism for political action, its internationality and potential tensions in its adoption by the group.

### Hip-Hop as Political Expression

The evolution and success of the Brothahood is intimately tied with their utilization of the politically powerful medium of hip-hop. As a musical style, hip-hop originated amongst African American communities in New York in the mid to late 1970s<sup>5</sup> and at its base level required no costly instruments or equipment, only the human voice, allowing anyone to participate and compose their own rhymes. In the context of an era characterized by economic and social exclusion for inner city black American youth, hip-hop "enabled youth to create their own cultural space within the city that countered the poverty and alienation that surrounded them on a day-to-day basis."<sup>6</sup> For Africa Bambaataa, one of the early and central figures in the rise of hip-hop, the forms true power and significance resided in its capacity to empower young people to want to change their lives,<sup>7</sup> whilst for Toby Jenkins, hip-hop is a "cultural space where individuals who have been kicked out of schools, locked out of opportunity, and imprisoned in oppression have created a space where they can shine, excel, and be great."<sup>8</sup> Whilst political in these respects, hip-hop's greatest political potential may be considered its vocalization and projection of the viewpoints and perspectives of those experiencing social oppression and exclusion. Hip-hop serves as an active enabler, the voice and body as capital in the field of power for young men and women who may possess intelligence and various levels of cultural capital, yet have

been excluded from formal political fields as a result of their social location.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, hip-hop offers the chance of recognition and a source of meaning.

Hip-hop as a mechanism of expression and political action is not limited to the United States. Tony Mitchell claims that youths from around the world are utilizing rap music and hip-hop culture as a vehicle for various forms of youth protest<sup>10</sup> and that a common feature of hip-hop groups across Europe, Canada, Asia, and Australasia is their “multiethnic, multicultural nature as vernacular expressions of migrant diasporic cultures.”<sup>11</sup> This has extended to Islamic hip-hop.

### The Brothahood and Hip-Hop

Islamic hip-hop has emerged as an important sub-genre within the field of hip-hop, giving voice to the experiences of young Muslims around the world who have experienced social exclusion, injustice, and oppression. This is what led Sady Alim to label Islam “hip-hop’s official religion.”<sup>12</sup> Moustafa Debab aligned The Brothahood with the historical African American roots of hip-hop, stating:

Hip Hop originated for black men to talk about their environment, about the struggles they live through . . . Muslims in general feel a bit more singled out just like black people were in the 80s . . .<sup>13</sup>

Jehad similarly stated, “We all grew up in ethnic communities; hip-hop sort of attracts wogs . . . so yeah, I think hip-hop kinda chose us in a way.”<sup>14</sup> Hesham immediately concurred: “Yeah, hip-hop chose me.”<sup>15</sup> Group members decided to utilize hip-hop as a mechanism for promoting an awareness of Islam in the wider Australian community. Jehad claims: “We wanted to do it for the sake of Allah and we wanted to do it for our religion and we wanted to give *dawah*.”<sup>16</sup> Literally applied, *dawah* is the “call to Islam” offered by Muslims to non-Muslims, in much the same manner as Christians may proselytize. However, in this context the concept is less about seeking new followers than breaking down misconceptions about Islam and Muslims and creating a less hostile social space.

As the group evolved (particularly in the aftermath of September 11),<sup>17</sup> members of the Brothahood realized the valuable role that their music could play in wider public discourse and debate about the place of Islam in Australia and to “promote a good image of Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims.”<sup>18</sup> Moustafa argued that The Brothahood were one of few groups actively speaking on behalf of Australian-born young Muslims:

I think we're the only ones really standing up and talking for the youth at the moment in regards to the Muslim community and for the Muslim community, for the kids, to the Australians, like the Aussie sort of thing.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than seeking to withdraw from or actively resist any form of social interaction with wider society, group members have displayed a tendency identified in the literature review amongst many observant Muslims in the West to strengthen and consolidate the religious aspect of their identity and to actively assert this in the public sphere. The Brothahood have consciously fashioned themselves as social change agents, seeking to raise awareness amongst non-Muslims and Muslims alike of the damaging effects of racism and the positive contribution that Islam and Muslims can make to Australia. To develop an understanding of the political action undertaken by the group and the form of identity that this reflects it is necessary to delve into greater detail through an analysis of The Brothahood's lyrics.

### ***Lyrics of Mass Construction***

*Lyrics of Mass Construction* was released in 2008 with a limited run of two thousand copies. The album cover art is basic, yet pays homage to the groups religiosity with faint Quranic script etched across the background behind a microphone. The back cover of the album features a saying of the Prophet Muhammad:

There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, and for a non-Arab over an Arab, Nor for white over black nor for the black over white, except in piety. Verily the most noble among you is he who is the most pious.

The album features 17 tracks written by all group members, though particularly Jihad Debab and Hesham Habibullah. The album also includes collaboration with London-based Muslim hip-hop group *Mecca 2 Media* and guest appearances by comedian Nazeem Hussain from award winning comedy act *Fear of a Brown Planet*. The album utilizes an array of hip-hop styles from beatboxing (providing background music using only the voice) and singing to rapping. Some songs are performed in what may be considered a relaxed manner such as *Takbir* or an emotive manner such as *Light upon Light* whilst other songs are accompanied by laughing and joking in the background such as the song *Why*. These set the tone and platform for the message being projected. Musical accompaniment ranges from electronic dubs to acoustic guitar riffs and also contributes to the tone. Importantly, the group performs in a variety of accents ranging from openly Australian, to American and when utilizing Islamic terms, Arabic.<sup>20</sup>

The album's songs may be readily divided into three core aims and themes: songs challenging racism and intolerance in the field of power, songs aimed at building a sense of community belonging, and self-esteem amongst young Muslims and songs encouraging young Muslims to resist temptations and social pressures upon their Islamic faith and practice. Whilst the first theme is aimed specifically at the wider Australian community, the second and third themes are aimed at other Australian Muslims. These songs can be argued to constitute a substantive effort to making an impact in the field of power through challenging white Australian cultural hegemony and racism. The songs similarly seek to impact the field of Muslim cultural politics where young people are excluded and pressured from a variety of positions about their practice.

### Challenging Racism and Stereotypes

The three songs from the album that directly critique and challenge racism and stereotyping in Australia adopt a variety of tones, from the hard hitting “The Silent Truth” and “Needless to Say” to the more subtle and inquiring “Why”, a track that simultaneously critiques racist stereotypes in the Australian community and perceived judgmental approaches from Salafi Muslims through simply asking “why?” over 100 times in the song:

*Jehad*: Why must I explain myself?  
 If something bad happens should I blame myself?  
 Why why why why why why why why? [x 3]  
 These are the questions that always fill my mind . . .<sup>21</sup>

“Needless to Say” adopts a more powerful assertion of the right to exist as Australian Muslims:

*Jehad*: J to the E to the H A D  
 It's only my name, not war on your country  
 Get your facts right before you start spreading  
 Jihad is a struggle in the direction I'm heading . . .<sup>22</sup>

The most successful political intervention achieved by the group, however, was the track “The Silent Truth,” which topped the Triple J unearthed radio charts for unsigned artists in 2007. This track is accompanied by a video clip that aired on SBS television's *Halal Mate* series of documentaries on Islam in Australia. If the sociopolitical context chapter reveals a stark array of challenges facing young Muslim Australians and young Muslim men, the track

titled "The Silent Truth" may be considered amongst the most substantive public responses from those facing this state of affairs on a daily basis. Jihad states:

Silent Truth is the best track because it encapsulates what we're about and you can relate it to everyone, even those coming from Muslim viewpoint or an Arab viewpoint, and the struggles that we face, anyone can sort of listen to that track and say oh yeah, I face that kind of trouble.<sup>23</sup>

"The Silent Truth" is the only track on the album accompanied by a film clip. The clip starts at a tram stop where group member Moustafa arrives and experiences hostile stares from two young white Australian men. He immediately confronts the racism and hostility experienced by young Muslim Australians speaking directly to the racist:

I can feel ya eyes on me but I ain't in the wrong,  
Keepin to yourself scared my beard hides a bomb.<sup>24</sup>

As the song evolves the symbology employed in the video clip changes from street scenes and the roof of a mosque utilized to establish the authenticity of the group to Melbourne's Botanic Gardens, grounding the place of these young men in Australia. All group members are dressed in American streetwear with several of the group members simultaneously wearing prayer caps, portraying the ease of the relationship between Islam and Western street culture. Various scenes utilize young Australians and young Muslim Australians listening to the group's music through headphones and moving to the music thus highlighting the cross-cultural appeal of the message.

The tone of the song at times exhibits a hyper-masculine assertion of identity in the face of racism. Hesh at one point shapes up to the camera and asserts "Australia is mine too, so I'm gonna put up a fight."<sup>25</sup> Yet far from isolating themselves through the song, the group adopts a conciliatory tone toward wider Australia. Moustafa raps as he sits down in between the two initially hostile young white men as they move to make room for him:

I'm a peaceful kinda guy come sit with us  
Hating on me coz television got ya brainwashed  
Pick up a book and educate your mind  
And next time you see me we'll greet with Salaams . . .<sup>26</sup>

This track is a substantive and meaningful expression of Muslim Australian identity that utilizes a powerful medium of expression that allows a three-dimensional space—lyrics, physical actions, and music—to communicate a



message of frustration with racism, stereotyping, and scrutiny and the desire to move beyond such bigotry to a more peaceful future.

### **Building Community Belonging and Self-Esteem amongst Young Muslims**

Those song tracks that seek to increase a sense of belonging and self-esteem amongst young Muslims are as politically significant as those challenging racism and stereotyping. As the literature review reveals, far from backing away from their religious identity, young Muslims are embracing Islam and seeking to discover more about themselves. The Brotherhood have been active in their facilitation of this in the Australian context. The track “Once upon a Year” encapsulates the core messages of this theme well, offering encouragement to those young Australian Muslims celebrating the holy month of Ramadan that may feel isolated or pressured in some way from other Muslims in their practice. Jihad raps:

Maryam, she's only 14 years old  
 Lord bless her soul because it's made out of gold  
 She's had it hard in her years  
 With a life full of tears  
 She wants to fast in Ramadan but she's got some fears  
 Her mother and father have problems with identity  
 She wants to live Islam but they won't let her see  
 She's all on her own, fasting all alone  
 Sister, stay strong because we're with you all along...<sup>27</sup>

In the same track, Hesham criticizes Salafi Muslims who condemn young Muslims following a less textualist form of Islamic practice:

Another day, another fast, another job well done  
 He wants the praise but doesn't care about the one  
 Beard to the floor but not worried about his state  
 He thinks he's going straight up to heaven's gate  
 He's got a virus in his heart, phased none the less  
 He thinks he's the best, but this is his test  
 Stabbing people in the back, no-one sees he's got a mask  
 Hypocritical, what's happened to his fast?<sup>28</sup>

This second verse in particular reveals the competition of the group in the field of Muslim cultural politics outside the realms of institutional politics, directly singling out the group's competitors in the field and challenging the

sanctity of their religious capital. This is an important strategy in the group's survival and indeed upward trajectory within the field, as they define the boundaries of Islam in Australia. The voice of a group of young Muslim men speaking directly to the experiences of Australian-born young Muslims could be considered to have a profoundly positive impact on Muslim identity, encouraging them to stay engaged with their faith and to critically challenge more hardline messages emanating from textualists. The group's work to promote self-esteem and belonging amongst young Australian-born Muslims cannot be readily quantified. However, the emphasis upon community in the face of social pressure and oppression is a profoundly political message that seeks to strengthen Muslim communities.

### **Resisting Temptations and Social Pressures on Islamic Practice**

A more religious dimension of the group's music seeks to offer encouragement to young observant Muslims to resist temptations to their faith. The track "Friend or Foe" offers an excellent example of this theme. The song tells the story of an individual whose best friend consistently led him away from Islam toward temptation. In this case the best friend was the "monster within"; his ego.

He was very well known by the people in the streets  
 So popular the people made a nickname, called him "beast"  
 He loved all the praise, the fame, the attention  
 Getting so excited when he hears his own name mentioned  
 Me and him, you can't separate apart  
 But I feel like he's clenching and squeezing on my heart<sup>29</sup>

In the final verse the individual triumphs over his ego:

I finally found some time to reflect upon myself  
 I looked deep into my soul and found my lower self  
 My Nafs, ego, so called friend who drags me back  
 There's only five minutes left of Magribh Salat [evening prayer]  
 Control and combat, that enemy inside  
 Pretends to be your friend with Shaitaan [Satan] on his side  
 He's with me and you every place that we may go  
 That's why it's important to look into your soul . . .<sup>30</sup>

This song offers a powerful insight into Australian-born Muslim men seeking to reconcile their Islamic identity and practice with the freedoms and temptations available in Australian society. Importantly this song yields insights into

how this group sought to do so. Songs within this category could be considered to build the group's symbolic capital, positioning them within the field as pious and "good" Muslims.

### A Contested Project

The Brothahood's lyrics and delivery offer a powerful insight into the social condition of observant young Muslim men in Melbourne and place them clearly within the field of Muslim cultural politics. The group's album *Lyrics of Mass Construction* is arguably one of the most important cultural contributions by young Muslim men in Australia to date. Intelligently utilizing an inherently political mechanism for identity expression, the group displays a legitimizing identity through their Islamic practice, encouraging young Australian Muslims to be proud of and practice their faith whilst asserting a highly political project identity in the field of power, challenging racism and stereotypes to assert a place for Australian Muslims.

However, critics of the group originating from textualist hardline positions question the Islamic sanctity and authenticity of the group, asserting that music is *bidah* (innovation) and hence *haram* (Islamically impermissible) and that rather than serving Islam, that The Brothahood are only legitimizing Western culture.<sup>31</sup> Critics could indeed point to the use of American accents or the Australian embassy in Indonesia's sponsorship of The Brothahood's tour in 2010 as an example of this legitimization. In addressing these criticisms, Jihad went into depth, discussing misconceptions about hip-hop music that he believed drove much of this criticism:

I think positive music is a good thing and it's part of our culture and part of our upbringing. . . I'm not trying to change myself to please the media or to please the government. That's who I am. And our critics will never understand that because the majority of the time they're from the old country's thinking, the old country's ideology. . .<sup>32</sup>

Moustafa stated the group's reliance on scholars and advice to continue their work: "In the end we do what we believe is right and what our scholars and our teachers tell us it's fine to do. They can say what they want and it doesn't bother us because we've been given that approval."<sup>33</sup>

The group simultaneously challenges textualists that seek to impose their views on young Muslims and an older generation that may not understand the pressures placed upon Australian-born Muslims seeking to practice their faith. Importantly, interviews revealed the willingness of group members, particularly the Debab brothers and Timur, to grow the group and expand their

influence. This fits firmly with what Castells understands as a project identity, "building a new identity that redefines their position in society and in doing so seeking the transformation of the overall social structure."<sup>34</sup> The group is clearly seeking to contribute to substantive political and cultural change both within Muslim communities and in the wider field of power. It is to an examination and analysis of how key social influences interacted to shape this project identity that the book now turns.

### Key Social Influences: Islam

Islam emerged as the most significant social influence upon group members with aspects of their Islamic teaching and socialization including teachers, the mosque, classes, and youth camps. This is a significant finding. Literature does not sufficiently delve into the extent of Islam as a social influence shaping young Western Muslims' sense of meaning, behavior, and political action. Hesham provides an insight into the broad pattern exhibited across the group:

Religion is probably the most important thing in my life . . . everything in my life has been moulded towards religion, the friends I choose, the things I do in life, my mentalities, ideologies, everything comes down to religion. That's first and foremost important thing in my life.<sup>35</sup>

To understand how Islam has influenced group members and where specific gaps in literature may be addressed it is important to examine core sub-themes in greater depth.

### Islamic Teachers

Islamic teachers (Sheikh's, or "*Ustadh*") were consistently stated to be a major influence. One particular "individual with influence" emerges as pivotal in the development of the group. Turkish-born *Ustadh* Mahmud Kürkçü is of the Sunni Hanafi *madhhab*<sup>36</sup> (a liberal form of Islam dominant in Turkey with a strong emphasis on reason)<sup>37</sup> and teaches a highly spiritual (and nonpolitical) form of Islam known as *Tasawwuf*, adopting a narrative and contextual approach to understanding the *Hadith* and the character of the Prophet rather than strict literalist interpretations.<sup>38</sup> Jehad noted that one of the primary appeals of this teacher for him was his lack of politicization:

. . . he'd never talk about you know, "death to America" and things like that. I've been to some of those lectures before and they're just really off-putting, they're really hardline and it doesn't really appeal. Everyone in there is really sort of hot tempered . . .<sup>39</sup>

To understand the nature of *Ustadh* Kürkçü's teachings it is necessary to develop an understanding of the form of Islam taught. *Tasawwuf* is a branch of Islamic knowledge focusing upon spiritual development. Early scholars in this tradition focused upon abandonment of material "worldly" objects in an effort to become closer to God. Abdullah Saeed describes the origins of the approach as focused upon questions "regarding the knowledge of God or human existence and its relation to the divine."<sup>40</sup> Sufis believe that the true meaning of the Quran is spiritual and "impossible to understand through 'superficial' arguments over points of law or theology."<sup>41</sup> The key to *Tasawwuf* is hence the effort to "purify the heart," focusing upon development of the self,<sup>42</sup> overcoming one's *nafs* (emotions, worldly desires, ego).<sup>43</sup> Hesham explained:

... it suppresses the ego whilst building up your awareness of yourself and your self-awareness in God. And I think it's done a lot for us as people ... it's sort of embedded in our mentality, in our ideals ...<sup>44</sup>

*Tasawwuf* Islam focuses upon the spiritual traditions of the Prophet as a basis for self-improvement and stands in stark contrast to hardline interpretations of Islam such as Salafism with their textualist political praxes. As Jihad states:

I like the fact that it focuses on spirituality, it focuses on self-development, not just on the outer things. I find that a lot of the other interpretations of Islam are pretty dry. They're just way too literal and they say you gotta do it this way, if you don't then you're going to hell ...<sup>45</sup>

Contemporary literature is of very little help in understanding how different forms of Islam (apart from Salafism) may influence social action by Western Muslims. Indeed, whilst the group has a multiethnic base, a pattern reflected in literature about observant Muslims, their close affiliation with a foreign-born teacher of an older generation stands in contrast to literature suggesting the rejection of older Imams. Importantly, as a contributor to political action, *Tasawwuf* appears to foster individual introspection rather than encouraging any form of activism, yet again, The Brotherhood clearly stand apart from this. In this case, *Tasawwuf* Islam required an active facilitator to transform teaching into political practice.

### Young Muslims Australia

YMA was formed in Melbourne in early 1988, by a group of second-generation Australian-born or raised Muslims to offer young Muslims a more

considered approach to living as a Muslim in Australia than that offered by the Mosques. One cofounder, Ramzi Elsayed, had heard *Ustadh* Kürkçü speak and invited his participation. The group was "not formally structured," nor was it an "incorporated body," but rather a "movement."<sup>46</sup> Embodying civic values of service to the wider community, the organization sought to build character, identity, and connection through service and in so doing, to grow spiritually. Elsayed claimed that for the founders, "a strong spiritual grounding was the best legacy you can give" and that everything was (and is) about a connection to God and with a focus on pleasing God:

YMA treats the spirit, it is the merciful Islam. Islam is not aggressive and something others should fear; a believer is one that when others look at him should be reminded of God.<sup>47</sup>

The YMA mission statement states, "We aim to be people of benefit, not only towards ourselves, but to all of creation."<sup>48</sup> Service to others as a core theme combined with a sense of belonging offered by the group, contributing to the development of an extended support network.<sup>49</sup> Hesham claims:

I suppose for the young guys, you look at the girls with the scarves and stuff and you know, get married, you start seeing how life would be if you were hanging around with a bunch of Muslims, and spiritually it uplifts you, so that was a good thing . . .<sup>50</sup>

To Moustafa Debab, it was the ability of the group's leaders to relate to other Australian Muslims that made the YMA successful;

The thing is, YMA were never really old Arabs come from another country, they were young Aussie Muslims . . . and they used that, and they used that knowledge . . .<sup>51</sup>

Whilst observing normative standards of gender segregation and privacy, one of the important features of these camps was the space opened for interaction between young Muslim men and women, enabling attendees to develop cross-gender friendships that often evolved further. Both Jihad and Timur established relationships with their wives-to-be through YMA activities, leading Hesh to label YMA the "Young Marriage Agency."<sup>52</sup>

The style and teaching of YMA camps were unanimously related by all members of The Brothahood as relaxed and interactive, which may be considered in stark contrast to what Jihad called the "*haram, haram, haram, haram, halal, halal, halal*" approach of other organizations.<sup>53</sup> Jihad stated, "I think what YMA does very well, and what it did for me, was give you a really

good introduction to what Islam is, what it is all about. It gives you good grounding.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly to his fellow group member Ahmed claimed:

I think it’s the nurturing that the YMA gave us as young people and it takes us back to that spiritual development again. When you actually teach someone and help you practice, you plant a seed in fertile soil alright, no matter what you do, it wasn’t forced upon, you come back.<sup>55</sup>

The strong commitment to civic values, community service, and spiritual base of the YMA, with its *Tasawwuf* emphasis on overcoming the *nafs* may be considered the base of the organization’s success in fostering the development of social resilience and creativity in the face of an often hostile social environment. Young participants, at a vital stage in their development, may be considered to have internalized these values, equipping them to navigate complex social terrain.

### Female Muslim Role Models

A significant emergent finding from this research (and a point until now overlooked in research on young Muslim men) was the important role that Muslim women played in the development of their faith. This is particularly the case in research examining Muslim masculinities in Western contexts where attitudes toward women may be analyzed, yet the influence of women is not examined at all. Brothers Jihad and Moustafa both cite their mother as a powerful influence upon the development of the spiritual aspect of the religious component of their identity: “I don’t think if my mum wasn’t there teaching us just that love, coz that’s what it was, love, we . . . I don’t think we would have carried it across at all or found the same in our own way.”<sup>56</sup>

Further to this, Jihad spoke with great affection for an Australian-born Muslim woman that taught him at Saturday school:

She was able to put religion a way that didn’t seem like rules . . . she treated me like an adult, as a person not a kid . . . She wears a hijab in a very elegant, funky kinda way, not sort of just put on any old way and pinned up like a little old lady . . . she carried it very nicely. And that of course appealed to me . . . if you’re surrounded by these younger people and they’re educated and they’re religious at the same time, it has a real impact on you.<sup>57</sup>

Hesham looked up to his sister for her ability to fuse Islam and Australian culture and to set an example of piety:

She is someone who knows how to balance religion and her practicality in life. One of the main reasons why I don't do a lot of stupid things is because I aspire to her so much.<sup>58</sup>

Ahmed stated that his mother, sister, and aunt (now passed away) were very spiritual and very good role models who "have a very strong influence on me in terms of Islamic knowledge and reasoning and just being able to give me that guidance when I need it."<sup>59</sup> When asked why women had such an influence on the member of the group Jihad suggested simply, "The women seem to be more into it . . . the guys wanna be that active but they just can't keep up."<sup>60</sup>

Group members were also heavily influenced by their wives. Three of the five group members were married, considering their wives as an extremely important influence. Jihad's wife was a particular influence in his drive for education,<sup>61</sup> whilst for Moustafa, marriage and having a young son has made him want to be a better Muslim and in this sense positively influenced the religious component of his identity.<sup>62</sup> Jihad believes he has a "democratic relationship" with his wife,<sup>63</sup> whilst Timur enthusiastically supports his wife working and states "An independent woman is really good."<sup>64</sup>

Literature suggests that "middle-class" Muslim men are more likely to desire a working wife,<sup>65</sup> yet just one member of The Brothahood (as will be shortly discussed) is tertiary educated and works in the white-collar professions that have traditionally defined membership of this group in Australia.<sup>66</sup> Social class does not appear to be a factor contributing to group member's attitudes toward women working. In this group of young Australian-born Muslim men, Islam is the source of their respect for independent women. The role of Muslim women as cultural interlocutors has been noted in studies that examined interfaith activity involvement in Australia,<sup>67</sup> whilst Yasmeen has noted that Muslim women have become increasingly involved in activism in the state sphere.<sup>68</sup> However, across literature there exists an important absence of studies into the influence that Muslim women may have upon the civic and political engagement of Australian and Western Muslim men.

### Muslim Peers

Muslim friendships were considered extremely important across the group, demonstrating the significance of peer networks in shaping the self-concept and actions of young Muslim men. The significance of the group clearly relates to the social support it offers. For Moustafa, The Brothahood was important to keeping him true to his faith: ". . . if I ever do go astray, I've got



my brothers there, who are my close friends, my allies, to basically pull me up, wake me up to myself . . .”<sup>69</sup> Timur concurs:

Without The Brothahood I wouldn't be the person I am. It's because of the friendships and the way we've bonded with one another. All these guys have gone through their own hardships and all of us tend to support each other. If I've got a problem I can call Moustafa or Jihad or Hesh or Ahmed anytime.<sup>70</sup>

The dynamic of friendships amongst young Muslim men and their influence upon political action are not explored outside radicalization literature examining “terror networks,” yet these have proved vital in providing support to Brothahood members, potentially aiding them in a difficult social climate and buffering the extent of social injury felt by individual members. The extent of this friendship was readily observable throughout the research process. Group members went from being quietly spoken individuals to outgoing and outwardly happy when in a group situation. Humor was a key ingredient of the group's dynamic, with the group interview characterized mainly by laughter and good natured deprecation of other group members when they spoke too long or too passionately about a topic. The group clearly provides a sense of belonging to its members and provides a sense of empowerment, increasing individual confidence and thus strengthening the group's potential to withstand social pressure and to act politically.

### Family Influences

The literature review reveals that the family is a core component of the Islamic faith and central to the transmission of values. Importantly, mothers were considered to have an extremely high level of influence by the three group members that mentioned them. Asked to elaborate why this was the case, Hesham and Moustafa elaborate:

*Hesham:* There's a saying of our Prophet that says heaven lies under the mothers feet, not the fathers, the mothers . . . It's a metaphor saying the woman, the mother is important to the child, she's the backbone of the family . . .

*Moustafa:* If our mother is disappointed with us in any way or form . . .

*Hesham:* We're screwed!<sup>71</sup>

All members of the group identified their fathers as the symbolic head of the house in which they grew up and all come from homes where their parents

remain together after decades of marriage and have other siblings. All members of the group who are married have left the family home. One of the key findings to emerge from the research on this area was the manner in which members of the group were exposed to Islam through their parents and raised. Members of the group perceived their parents to be more culturally aligned with religious practice and observances than highly dedicated. Timur noted, "my family's not a very practising family but they still fast in the month of Ramadan. They give their *zakat* which is their charity money."<sup>72</sup> Hesham noted that his parents only became actively religious later in life,<sup>73</sup> whilst Moustafa and Jihad both asserted that their mother was the main religious influence in their household; however, both noted that beyond the basics of the faith, the household was not overtly religious.<sup>74</sup> Religion was not forced onto any members of the group, as Jihad elaborates:

She didn't really tell us to pray, she told us what she knew, like she knew to fast, so we fasted . . . And she really installed that sort of love for us and, but without authoritatively putting it on us, she didn't hit us or anything like that so it was appealing.<sup>75</sup>

Hesham similarly noted, "I've never had my parents force me into anything, tell me off about what I'm doing, because they understand that I'm still young."<sup>76</sup> An examination of the parental relationship could be considered to reveal a relatively spacious environment allowing individual group members to explore their religiosity and wider social place. Importantly all members of the group were granted the freedom to go out and participate in normative social activities such as nightclubbing and socializing that their wider Australian peer group would participate in.

### Education

Formal education<sup>77</sup> may be a structural influence upon the individual's habitus and identity that continuously shapes the manner in which individuals interact and engage with their social world. All members of The Brothahood completed their schooling and the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) at state run schools in Victoria's northern, eastern, and southern suburbs, gaining an average tertiary entrance rank of around 50 (from a possible 99.95). Overall education was considered an extremely important influence upon the group, though this was heavily skewed toward Jihad, while Timur did not consider it an influence at all.

Interviews revealed that group members largely came from families where educational capital, that is, a high emphasis upon education and knowledge

about how to achieve educational success was relatively low. No parents of any group member possessed a formal tertiary qualification. Jihad and Moustafa's father worked as a business broker whilst their mother stayed at home. Timur's father was a bus driver whilst his mother also stayed at home. Hesham's parents both worked as Burmese language interpreters for the court system and state government. Within Hesham's family, Islamic knowledge was considered more important:

My parents have always been that Islamic knowledge is the most important. You have to gain knowledge. They've never thought that university or high school is real knowledge.<sup>78</sup>

Hesham expressed skepticism toward university that appeared to have been ingrained with his upbringing:

... as far as studies and uni is concerned, a lot of people do have the mentality that uni is what's gonna make you something, and to an extent it, the only thing it gives you is a piece of paper.<sup>79</sup>

Education was not of central importance in the Debab household either. Moustafa states:

There wasn't really a biggish focus on education in my household so you know if I did get a good mark I'd go home and I'd show my parents I got a really good mark and it was like 'Oh that's good' but it wasn't a really big emphasis and I thought that was normal.<sup>80</sup>

Timur's family emphasis appears to have been on joining the workforce and fulfilling responsibilities such as paying bills, marriage, and independence: "my parents were kinda like get a full time job."<sup>81</sup> Timur continued through to year 12; however, he worked part time at the Queen Victoria markets, didn't sit his exams, and didn't take study seriously:

I was like a, I'd say social butterfly maybe, just going to class, have a laugh and just do what's required. I wouldn't put in any extra. I regret it now definitely.<sup>82</sup>

The absence of a familial culture of educational attainment and possession of significant educational cultural capital have undoubtedly influenced the educational trajectories of members of the group. Education appears to have been considered an individual undertaking for members of the group who received little support from their parents.

## Experiences of Schooling

Moustafa reported being subjected to extreme bullying as the only young Muslim amongst children of predominantly European background at primary school, something which would have severe consequences for his education:<sup>83</sup>

I went to a really dodgy primary school... That primary school basically I missed out on grade one, two and three because of it. I was alone at the school; I was picked on at the school. The grade sixes would grab me and the preps would bash me... I had no friends, no nothing. No matter what I did I couldn't, and even the teachers were really bad then, like the teachers would call me camel...<sup>84</sup>

Hesham was the target of bullying during high school. He stated that after leaving an Islamic School to attend a state high school in year eight, "Everyone started calling me gay coz I never used to touch women and stuff coz of the religion stuff. So I hated that school so I left."<sup>85</sup> Bullying is, by definition, disrespectful and injurious and as Michael Humphrey has noted, the actual instant at which the injury is received may be considered a pivotal moment for identity construction, where "cultural meaning is up for grabs."<sup>86</sup> Literature suggests that as young men, Moustafa and Hesham would utilize a hyper-performative masculinity as a defensive mechanism against further injury and to some extent this may be observed in their dispositions and mannerisms. Hesham, for example, claimed, "If I was to meet those people again they would think twice about trying to look me in the wrong way."<sup>87</sup> Moustafa also projected himself as prepared to stand up for others and to fight bullies throughout his youth: "Out of everyone in the group I was always the only one who had someone's back..."<sup>88</sup> Yet neither of the two rejected society and adopted resistance identities, drawing upon their wider social resources to increase their personal resilience. Reflecting on the impact of these experiences, Moustafa stated: "I think I got my strength for injustice there because I know what it's like to be picked on..."<sup>89</sup> Hesham claimed "I don't give two shits about what anyone thinks about me anymore. I've been taught to do that sort of thing."<sup>90</sup> This experience and the sense of vulnerability it invoked has been reframed by the two as a positive experience, as something they have learnt from and that benefits them in the present.

## Higher Education

Contrasting with statistics revealing a higher average level of tertiary education amongst Australian Muslims, Jihad is the one member of the group

who pursued this avenue, a decision he attributes to his wife, who is from a Palestinian family with a strong emphasis on education.<sup>91</sup> Jihad initially attended a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course to study video production and television broadcasting before commencing a combined degree of Commerce/Arts. These courses could be considered to foster the development of creativity and analytical skills as well as practical technical skills that have a direct employment outcome. Importantly Jihad also in this period participated in a “Train the Trainer” course for Islam offered through the Islamic Council of Victoria, providing him with a more nuanced understanding of textual analysis central to informed understandings of Islamic practice, as well as working as a producer on the Channel 31 version of well-known Muslim television show *Salam Café*. All of these activities contributed to Jihad’s listing in the 2009 list of the world’s 500 most influential Muslims (Arts and Culture section).<sup>92</sup> Asked to consider how his education had influenced his trajectory, Jihad states:

... when you study you just get into a habit of professionalism and you realise that you need to get things in order ... So it’s a mix of things; uni, TAFE, my wife’s family, all sort of encouraged professionalism and education so that’s where I really get my influence from.<sup>93</sup>

This broad skill set and ethic of professionalism may be argued to equip both Jihad and The Brothahood well for engagement in the field of cultural politics, providing a level of cultural capital about both what it takes to be successful and an understanding of the steps necessary to make it, including attributes of cooperation, discipline, and the ability to sell The Brothahood’s vision. Jihad’s stewardship of the group, propelled by his education and “know-how” has undoubtedly been the dominant influence on the group’s success to date.<sup>94</sup> No other member of the group apart from Ahmed (not interviewed individually) has obtained or sought a higher level of education.

### Employment

A relatively clear line was evident between the educational background and career trajectory of group members. Jihad had gained a graduate position at a major telecommunications company in the central business district of Melbourne and at the time of writing was working in an internal media role on staff communications. Moustafa had trialed working for his father’s business, broking business, yet found that he objected on ethical grounds to the up-selling of sometimes struggling businesses, and had moved to a frontline sales position at a mobile phone store in outer suburban Melbourne. Timur

was working as a contract painter on building sites around the city whilst Hesham was working a variety of odd jobs including retail in a furniture shop in Melbourne's inner north and as a chauffeur on a cash-in-hand basis. These jobs clearly reflect the literature demonstrating an under-representation of Muslim men in the professions and over-representation in unskilled work.

On the question of whether members of the group had been discriminated against at work, the majority (with the exception of Timur) stated that they had experienced at least a moderate level, ranging from co-workers deliberately offering them food during *Ramadan* (a time of fasting) to hate calls Moustafa had to listen to when working at a Muslim community group.<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, members of the group displayed high levels of resilience in facing this discrimination and bullying behavior. Group members unanimously displayed a level of ambivalence about the behavior of others and dealt with situations calmly. Whilst all expressed anger at this treatment, none had been goaded into a reaction that could have undermined their positions or futures nor did they erect the boundaries to their identity that this behavior might encourage.

Whilst Jihad expressed happiness in his work, enjoying the challenges it brought and an interest in staying with the same organization, other members of the group sought new challenges and to increase their social trajectory. Moustafa expressed a strong interest in becoming a fire fighter in order to "help the community" in a way that he did not have to return to school.<sup>96</sup> Timur, who had initially tried to start his own painting business, though found it "not worth the headache,"<sup>97</sup> had tried out for the police force and though not getting through the exam once, due to grading requirements, continued to express a strong desire to become a police officer:

I wanna be a cop because I wanna help not just Muslim youth but youth in general . . . because a lot of kids they don't like police officers and imagine if I was a cop and I was also in the hip hop group they'd look at me and go "man he's a rapper, and he's a police officer. He's cool" . . . It might motivate other kids to think differently and say man, I wanna be a cop and we need more ethnic cops in Australia . . .<sup>98</sup>

Hesh has experienced similar problems to Timur, having difficulties with the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) though continued to desire to study and gain employment as a youth or social worker: "My social youth work is another big influence in my life. I've always liked talking to people; I've always liked trying to help people out with their problems . . ."<sup>99</sup>

That these jobs have been chosen by these young Muslim men despite their lack of institutional cultural capital required to move into them signals

a plethora of structural influences upon these men that they have not consciously identified. It is evident that these are ideal jobs that generally entail a service to the community and that attract a level of community respect and recognition. This reveals the influence of the YMA with its emphasis upon service and community values, and the education system. It also implies a subscription to the identities that these jobs generally invoke (particularly in the case of emergency services) being that of authority, respect, and a valorized conception of masculinity.

Whilst most members of the group have experienced a period of unemployment, members have generally displayed resilience based on an ingrained work ethic or have internalized these periods within their moral and philosophical perspectives. Moustafa worked for free for numerous electricians in an attempt to obtain an apprenticeship with no success:

I was six months to a year working for free trying to get a job as a sparky . . . I was going through the yellow pages and I was going “need an apprentice?”, “Nah, sorry mate we got one”. “Hey listen, I’ll work for free for a week” just trying to get on board, you know what I mean? Coz I can’t sit at home and do nothing.<sup>100</sup>

Moustafa experienced considerable emotional and financial hardship in this period of unemployment, stating “it sorta hurts me that I couldn’t get a job.”<sup>101</sup> This was compounded by his interactions with Centrelink, the Australian Government welfare agency:

Oh welfare pissed me off. Only coz you pay your taxes for years and the one time you need them they tell you to go jump, and that annoyed me . . . I just got redundant, I needed cash coz I had no income for three months and they pretty much tell me because I had cash and I knew how to save, go jump . . . That’s the only time I’ve ever, ever looked at the Government and said “well that’s fucked up”. Ever.<sup>102</sup>

Hesham, the other group member to experience a slightly higher level of unstable employment or unemployment provided a strong contrast to Moustafa’s work ethic, displaying a greater level of comfort with occasional periods of unemployment stating: “work is not my life, I work to sustain myself, to survive.”<sup>103</sup> Here differences in the source of meaning between group members are clear. Hesham clearly has a different perspective as to what constitutes a viable life compared to other group members, with his Islamic faith being at the forefront of his decision making processes and utilized to justify his position.

Despite the immense challenges of unemployment and Moustafa’s negative experiences with both inability to find employment and in gaining

Government support, neither man sought to blame a more powerful "other" for their situation. Instead they asserted a level of self-empowerment and control over their situations, displaying a level of social resilience and entrepreneurialism passed from their parents (particularly their working fathers) and role models.

### Western Popular Culture

Literature reveals "the street" as a critically important site of self-definition for young Muslims and a variety of Western cultural influences that are influencing young Western Muslims. Research with the group revealed the significance of Western cultural space. Hip-hop rated as a very important influence upon the identity construction of The Brothahood. When asked about their favorite artists, a plethora of American hip-hop artists with a variety of themes and styles emerged, ranging from Warren G, Ice Cube, and Pete Rock to Albino Muslim rapper Brother Ali. However, both Timur and Hesham listed a wider range of groups, including Metallica and AC/DC. Timur additionally listed Blondie and the Eagles. Whilst members of the group universally distanced their music from the materialism that characterizes modern outgrowths of hip-hop such as "Gangsta" rap, their favorite artists reveal an affiliation with young, largely masculinity-emphasizing artists that could be argued to define a space for young men based on the grounds of a primal assertion of masculinity and street authenticity. The blending of Islam with the hip-hop cultural influence in this context is all the more remarkable and significant.

A variety of other influences upon identity were considered of very high influence by members of the group, including sports. For Hesham, this influence revolved around his bodybuilding, a largely individual pursuit that he undertook in order to lose excessive weight and through which he now structures his daily meal intake and routine. For Timur, boxing was similarly important, with the discipline involved in training translating to the rest of his life, particularly his wish to join the police force.<sup>104</sup> The influence of sports upon Hesham and Timur was clearly about the importance of discipline. This is arguably no coincidence given the social location of group members and their simultaneous attraction to hip-hop. The disciplining of the body through rigorous exercise and dieting provides, as Wacquant has noted with his celebrated fieldwork on the habitus of boxers, a way of constructing a "publically recognized self."<sup>105</sup> Much as with boxing, hip-hop is a:

... vehicle for a project of *ontological transcendence* whereby those who embrace it seek literally to fashion themselves into a new being so as to escape the



common determinations that bear upon them and the social insignificance to which these determinations condemn them.<sup>106</sup>

Many consciously located themselves in opposition to those Muslims with “beards down to their knees” whom they viewed largely as dogmatic and judgmental; however, three members of the group had carefully cultured beards. Asked to explain why they had beards, all three members who had one referred to a religious motivation. For Jihad, the decision stemmed from his entry into the corporate world (and highlighted his cultural capital):

... I knew I wanted to grow a beard but I thought going to the corporate culture and everything it's gonna be a bit weird if I wanna grow a beard half way through, I should try and grow my beard from the start so when I get in there, they see me with a beard they get used to it, you know ...<sup>107</sup>

Hesh claimed that it is a “recommended thing” to have a beard in Islam,<sup>108</sup> though clearly articulated a Western influence on his style of beard, referring to it as a “Craig David”<sup>109</sup> style of look. It became clear that Western influences at the cultural level, particularly in clothing and presentation, were far more significant than were consciously articulated by members of the group. These cultural influences may be considered part of a wider Western culture disseminated through the mass media and embedded in dominant culture. These may be considered to shape the identities of members of the group and young Australian Muslim men more generally to an extent beyond which they consciously identify.

### **Australia: Interactions with the State**

Literature examining the experiences of Muslims in Australia has emphasized the many challenges facing Muslims, including racism, governmental and media pressure, and discrimination. It may be expected that interactions with the government and state agencies, including law enforcement, may be characterized by a level of mistrust. Members of the group had difficulty naming any of the government institutions that shape their lives on a daily basis outside of law enforcement. Group members did note some though, with Hesh did make positive reference to Government generally:

Australia seems to really help out. All in all, the whole Centrelink system, the whole medical system, all these type of systems is actually really good. People like to take it for granted.<sup>110</sup>

Hesham then derided Muslims utilizing Centrelink whilst criticizing the Government.<sup>111</sup> Moustafa was similarly positive: "Medicare's good. I think we've got one of the best health care systems in the world, to be honest."<sup>112</sup> Moustafa, however, was also, as noted, critical of Centrelink.

In explaining the research project to group members at an individual level it became immediately clear that Australian government security agencies such as the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) were clearly at the forefront of individuals minds when approaching the project. Several members relayed stories, without being asked, of being "interviewed" by individuals they believed had links to ASIO, whilst Ahmed, the one member of the group to reject individual participation in interviews openly asked, "are you from ASIO?" in the group interview.<sup>113</sup> Yet despite this pressure, group members displayed resilience and agency:

They've got the power to just come up to you and say, mate, tell us who you are, what you are so I don't think there's any point of hiding anything coz I, if anyone came to me and said I'm from ASIO I wanna interview you, alright cool, interview me. I'll answer what I can answer, other than that I can't give you anything else . . .<sup>114</sup>

Police forces may be considered the key visible identifier of State power and it could be expected that given the dominant negative mass media coverage and government emphasis upon terrorism over the past decade that young Muslim men would identify themselves in opposition to police. Importantly, however, in a State that has placed considerable emphasis on multicultural policing strategies, no members of the group identified any hostility or "othering" toward police. Moustafa stated:

I've never had a bad experience with the government, anything, to be honest . . . I've never had a bad experience with cops. If you put yourself in a situation, then you're gonna have a bad experience with cops . . .<sup>115</sup>

Moustafa then cited one example where he believed he was unfairly targeted by a policeman however dismissed this as "the person not the government."<sup>116</sup> Hesh similarly claimed:

I've had good experiences. I've noticed with cops if you talk nicely to them and you just talk to them like they're you know, individuals, and they actually turn out to be quite alright . . .<sup>117</sup>

Notably, when referring to government institutions, including law enforcement, members of the Brothahood were largely positive and where the system

had worked against them, they were largely willing to blame individuals rather than the system as a whole. This reveals important insights into the habitus of group members who are prepared to work comfortably within a system of defined laws and regulations to achieve social change. This suggests the internalization of societal values and their tacit acceptance.

### Australia: Social Space

In contrast to the extreme level of Islamic influence upon the group, just three group members referred to “Australia” and rated it as of high importance. Asked to elaborate on their perceptions of how Australia had influenced them, Timur stated:

... having Australia and knowing what other people have said about Australia, it makes you think how lucky we are to live in a country like this, having the freedom of speech, doing anything you want and for example, if you don't work, Centrelink looks after you...<sup>118</sup>

Moustafa mentioned Australia because:

I'm free to choose my religion, practice my religion, even though the underlying thing is that not everybody likes that, but I think that makes me the person I am as well...<sup>119</sup>

Hesham stated that whilst he considered himself Australian, he was not always treated as such due to his Burmese (non-white) appearance:

I consider myself an Australian more than anything, else but what pisses me off is when an Anglo Saxon comes up to me and says “what nationality are you?” coz as far as I'm concerned I'm Australian. I got the accent; it says it on my passport. My mentality and thought process are that of an Australian Muslim, so for example, I love the footy but yet I won't drink a beer with the footy. I'd have a meat pie with the footy but I won't drink a beer. So it is very Australian...<sup>120</sup>

Here it is pertinent to recall elements of Greg Noble's work on recognition and Ghassan Hage's work on misinterpellation. The very act of asking what nationality Hesham is regardless of how long he may have lived here or the contributions he has made to society by definition denies him honorable recognition of his belonging in Australia. This racism is not explicit, but rather an example of symbolic violence, of the “naturalization” of discourse that an individual must be white to be Australian. As revealed, this is

intensely frustrating for a young man who considers himself Australian first and foremost. Amongst many young men, such experiences may contribute to the process of misinterpellation, where no matter how much they feel they belong and have succeeded they are denied full membership of society on the basis of race and religion.

Members of the group were unanimous that Melbourne was a very good place to live as a Muslim. Moustafa passionately exclaimed: "I love the city, I love the coffee, I love the life . . . I just love Melbourne city that much, it's ridiculous."<sup>121</sup> Timur declared: ". . . Melbourne's a fantastic place to live because the people are so you know, welcoming. Australia's welcoming."<sup>122</sup> Multicultural legislation and policies were not mentioned by group members in any respect, yet these have played an important structural role in shaping the social space in which Muslims live and the cosmopolitan atmosphere enjoyed by group members as pivotal to their experience of Melbourne.

### **Theoretical Application: Field, Capital, and Habitus**

#### ***The Field of Australian Muslim Cultural Politics and Field of Power***

In considering the core fields for analysis, it is important to keep in mind Bourdieu's conception of fields as a "space of both potential and active forces and hence a space of struggles that seek to maintain or change the location of these forces." The Brothahood could be examined on the basis of their participation in the field of Muslim hip-hop, or field of hip-hop more broadly. However, hip-hop remains the medium for the group to act in the field of Australian Muslim cultural politics, seeking to build self-esteem amongst Australian-born Muslims and increase their sense of belonging whilst challenging the dominance of the older generation and hardline textualists in defining that culture. The group also acts in the field of power, aiming at challenging white cultural hegemony and racism. Hip-hop and the discipline associated with writing, rehearsing, and recording this powerfully political form of music has bestowed group members with a vehicle for achieving meaning and gaining recognition (symbolic capital) in an often hostile social climate where their very existence is questioned.

Within Australian Muslim communities, the stakes of the field that are contested may be considered to be based upon sanctity and authenticity of Muslim identity as perceived amongst fellow Muslims (symbolic capital) and the ability to shape the future of Australian Islam. In this sense, the group clearly sought and gained a level of symbolic capital as "good Muslims" through their assertion of an affirmative Muslim project identity that focuses upon the promotion of pride and self-esteem amongst young Australian

Muslims and simultaneously challenges the legitimacy of the older generation of leaders and hardline textualists. Religious legitimacy and authenticity are clearly heavily contested within Muslim communities and The Brothahood have been criticized by other Muslims for the medium they utilize to express this identity and the content of their message in the field of cultural politics. In this sense, the group is clearly competing against alternative voices in the field, largely more hardline textualist voices that have, through open public exchanges and more general debate sought to challenge the group's authenticity as Muslims and have sought to redefine the bounds of the field to exclude The Brothahood as apostates.

There exist two competing and antagonistic logics within the field. One logic, that of the hardline textualists, claims that any form of cultural production is *bidah* and impermissible. They claim that by utilizing mediums such as hip-hop that The Brothahood (and by extension other young Muslims) are acting in contradistinction to the *Sunnah* and are hence not true Muslims, through their actions contributing to the continued structural domination and subordination of Muslims and Islam. The other logic, employed by The Brothahood, is based upon the notion that participation in the field of Muslim cultural politics is an act of *dawah* and hence favorable to not acting at all. To this extent the Australian Muslim community is experiencing its own "culture" wars,' with the ability to shape the development and future of Islam in Australia, the ultimate stake.

In the field of power the primary stake is that of control of political governance and the subsequent ability to shape the future of the nation economically, culturally, and politically. This stake is clearly well beyond the scope of what the group could ever achieve. However, minor stakes, including the ability to shape cultural discourse about the place of Islam and Muslims in Australia, are clearly possible and require a level of symbolic capital and cultural capital. The central logic of the field of power as it concerns culture is, simply put, that the loudest voices (as amplified through the tabloid mass media) have the greatest potential to shape public space and thought. To this extent, the group is competing not only with the older generation of Australian Muslim leadership and hardline textualists (the field of Australian Muslim institutional and cultural politics), but also with those committed ideologues that are vehemently anti-Muslim in their political perspectives and are seeking to reinforce white cultural hegemony through a range of political attacks and cultural interventions.

The Brothahood may be considered to have achieved a high level of success within the field of Australian Muslim cultural politics. Within Muslim communities the group is consistently requested to perform at festivals by organizers keen to appeal to young Muslims and their performance in the

UAE at the Al Mahabba awards bestowed them with a level of symbolic capital that may have been impossible to gain within Australia. Whilst occupying a clearly subordinated position in the field of power, the group has also succeeded relative to their small size as far as gaining significant public attention and support. The group has gained valuable radio airplay and had their views telecast nationally and internationally. Media sources such as *Triple J* and *SBS* could be considered to generate their own symbolic capital and audience from featuring a diverse artist base and actively standing in contrast to mainstream white Australian normative mass media culture.

To this extent these organizations and The Brothahood worked in a symbiotic relationship within the field of cultural politics to actively challenge normative culture amongst a sizeable base of the Australian population who listen to and watch these media outlets. In these accomplishments, the group has demonstrated possession and use of various forms of capital that have led to their successes in shaping the field to favor their conception and practice of Islam.

### **Capital Accumulation and Utilization in the Field of Australian Muslim Cultural Politics and Field of Power**

The key forms of capital requisite to success in the field of Australian Muslim cultural politics are symbolic capital (recognition and legitimacy) and cultural capital, the "know-how" to compete for, and accumulate symbolic capital. This cultural capital is embodied in the voices and bodies of the group who physically express an identifiably Australian Muslim identity. As an examination of the field reveals, symbolic capital is heavily contested in Australian Muslim communities. Social capital is accumulated through the ability to promote the group as possessing Islamic legitimacy and requires cultural capital, the requisite knowledge to make a strong Islamic argument for the fusion of Western and Islamic cultures and the permissibility of hip-hop as a form of Islamic expression. As previously examined, this has been based on a contextualist approach emerging from the groups *Tasawwuf/Hanafi* Islamic base. The jurisprudential tradition of Islam has meant that scholars, both formally trained and self-taught must engage with different legal perspectives and points of Islamic law for their validity. This bestows more practicing individuals with a level of critical thinking and ability to articulate and project a perspective. In this case, Hesham and Jihad both possessed a high level of Islamic cultural capital through their Islamic training that equipped them to define a legitimate place within Islam for the group and their use of hip-hop. It must be noted, however, that the target audience of the group in this field, young Australian-born Muslims, may not follow, let alone have any

knowledge of these debates. The significance of the group's possession of this form of capital lies in their ability to negotiate with community gatekeepers, those organizing Muslim youth events who must choose whether to book the group and the potential impact of this on their own standing in the wider Muslim communities.

The forms of capital requisite to success in the field of power are similar; symbolic capital as Muslim hip-hop artists and the cultural capital to negotiate the processes of recording, editing, and disseminating an album; dealing with media outlets, technological innovation in reaching fans on social media, organizing tours; and continuing to write politically persuasive and powerful music. In this sense Jihad is a particularly pivotal member of the group due to his possession of a high degree of institutionalized and embodied professional cultural capital gained through his formal tertiary education focusing upon production and experiential skill set gained through working as a producer on *Salam Café*. Jihad's pursuit of education was directly influenced by his wife and her family, whilst his professional capital stems from his experience working at a major telecommunications company and development of important associated attributes including the ability to work as part of a team, confidence, organizational skills, discipline and professional disposition, and physical presentation. Jihad's skill set has undoubtedly been the driving force in the group's growth and success as he has steered them toward numerous opportunities and driven their rehearsal and recording-production cycle. With regards to hip-hop, the capital to write lyrics is not concentrated in the hands of any one member. The medium of hip-hop is inherently democratic and offers the space for those without institutionalized capital yet in possession of a base level of intelligence and motivation to write songs that may be widely disseminated.

Whilst possession of other forms of capital has been less pivotal to the success of the group, they have still been influential in steering the decisions taken. The group does not possess the economic capital necessary to produce large scale highly professional studio recordings that more established artists or artists from more affluent backgrounds may possess. This has led them to pursue alternative forms of funding (such as that offered by the Australian embassy in Indonesia in its efforts to shape the development of Islam there). In their utilization of a form of expression that valorizes "authenticity," the group's work ethic and success in the absence of substantial economic capital may endow them with a level of symbolic capital in the eyes of their fans. Possession of this form of capital is particularly pivotal in providing group members with a sense of honorable recognition and fulfilment of the urge to live a meaningful and viable life. With regards to social capital, it may be understood that The Brothahood possess a significant level of social capital

amongst young Australian Muslims due to their level of community work and level of exposure. This includes the network of contacts that consistently invites the group to appear in public.

Having defined the key fields (and their stakes and logic), and having examined the key forms of capital requisite for success in these fields, including their accumulation and utilization, it is necessary to examine how and why the practical efficiency of the group has gained the group such success, relative to their size and initial standing in these fields. Applying the concept of habitus allows for a consideration of how these social influences are internalized, shaping political action.

### Habitus

In seeking to analyze the habitus of group members it is important to refresh an understanding of the concept as the "strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" and as "a system of lasting and transposable dispositions, which integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions." It is also important that these serve only in relation to a specific field. Here two key fields have been identified with their own stakes and logics: the field of Muslim cultural production and the field of power. In the former, the logic is predicated on over 1,400 years of Islamic jurisprudential tradition and key groups within this broad field, whilst in the latter the logic is based upon the secular Western liberal democratic premise that shaping public opinion can lead to societal change. The dispositions and strategies needed to compete in both fields would appear to be vastly different and indeed oppositional. However, The Brothahood have achieved a moderate level of success in both, suggesting a unique, dynamic habitus that fashions group members' responses according to the social context. Here, the following analysis reveals the underlying structural contributors, both past and present that shape this habitus, allowing it to transcend both fields and increasing the group's chance of future success.<sup>123</sup>

Islam was considered by group members to be the most significant influence upon their trajectory, both personally and as a group, with teachers and peers considered particularly significant influences, yet a deeper thematic analysis revealed the significance of parenting styles (particularly in introducing Islam), *Tasawwuf* Islam, the liberal Hanafi *madhhab*, the YMA group, and female role models also playing very significant roles in fashioning the group's matrix of dispositions.

Parents did not force Islam upon their children, yet lived it culturally, allowing the men of the group to forge identification with Islam yet



simultaneously engage in wider Australian society from a young age. It may be considered that with Islam fused into the familial culture (rather than forced upon them), this forged a positive affiliation at an important formative period. The unique environment of the YMA including its organization by second-generation Australian Muslims, gender inclusion, and residential environments (camps) with an emphasis on *Tasawwuf* proved pivotal to the development of the group; indeed The Brotherhood were founded at a YMA camp. The core values inoculated by the YMA—service, respect, gender equality, emphasis on achievement, and positivity in approach—are virtually identical to what may be considered Australian civic values. These values foster self-esteem, encourage group members to engage in wider Australian society, and to seek to make a positive difference. Importantly, the Islamic base from which these values were derived, *Tasawwuf* Islam is found in the spiritual traditions of the Prophet as a base for self-improvement. A key teaching here is the emphasis on overcoming the *nafs*, the “worldly desires” or “ego” and the desire to claim exclusivity for their understanding of Islam. This has arguably developed a high level of social resilience within the group. Whilst the majority of group members had experienced a lack of recognition and respect (and even bullying), with the corresponding potential for injury elaborated by Humphrey, rather than reverting to aggressive displays of hyper-masculinity suggested by Greg Noble or into “resistance identities” based on “trenches of resistance and survival based on principles different or opposed to the institutions of society,” the group sought to reach out to wider Australia through their music to achieve change, utilizing a strategy of engagement. Here it may be considered that the example of Muslim female role models was significant, shaping the young men of the group by setting an example of faith, dignity, and strength in an often hostile social environment.

Wider Australian structural factors have been significant in influencing the group member’s habitus, including education and employment experiences. Despite average or low tertiary entrance scores, group members all completed year 12 of high school. The structure of schooling could be considered to have bestowed group members with a level of discipline in meeting timelines and requirements, following school rules and more importantly, a base level of critical thinking embedded in subjects including English, with its emphasis on textual engagement and critical analysis. Combined with the further religious instruction undertaken by Jihad and Hesham, this enabled the group to engage with wider society through the social critique embedded in their music and to make strategic decisions that built upon the group’s initial successes, increasing their upward trajectory in the field. Professional experiences were also important to the group, with Jihad’s extensive repository of

professional experience through his studies and work experiences with information technology and new media and professional disposition serving the group exceptionally well. This was particularly important to enabling the group to put its values into political action across two fields.

The structure of the field has also shaped the habitus of group members. Multiculturalism, articulated through the Australian and Victorian government's policies and legislation, has seen funding for an international tour and shaped the social space inhabited by the group, including individual member's interactions with State institutions. Group members relayed positive stories of Melbourne and State institutions including the police force. Multicultural engagement has been a core component of the Victorian government for close to a decade and the extensive anti-vilification and discrimination legislation enacted has shaped the public space through setting margins about acceptable social behavior. Continued statements of public support for multiculturalism by successive Victorian premiers have further ingrained the centrality of respect and recognition in public space. Whilst difficult, if not impossible to quantify, this could be considered to increase the sense of belonging felt by group members and their sense of a stake in society.

Western forms of music have played an important role in shaping the dispositions of group members. Music reflecting the social location of group members, namely rock and hip-hop, is infused with a youthful articulation of working class male masculinity and projects the voice of the artist into the public sphere. Jihad's statement that "hip-hop attracts wogs" yields more than cursory insights into the dynamic of the medium; in a country where white hegemonic culture is all pervasive, group members creatively exploited hip-hop as a tool for expressing their views. Here exists a potential tension between the "apolitical" teaching of *Ustadh* Kürkçü and the group's intelligent utilization of the dynamic of hip-hop as an inherently political form of music. This is arguably reconciled by an examination of the group's album content. Over half of the album was dedicated to building a sense of belonging and self-esteem amongst other young Muslims. Those tracks that may be considered more political in nature deconstructed the position of the racist or hardline textualist Muslim, seeking to expose the source of ignorance rather than open condemnation, and to build community belonging. The songs could be considered as seeking both religious capital and wider political capital to leverage the group within both fields. The music of the group itself may be considered to be a direct physical manifestation of the group's dispositions. In the process of writing the album the group has displayed a disciplined and embodied creativity that has enabled the construction of a "publically recognized self" and source of meaning and identity. In projecting their voice and music into the public sphere, the group has allowed themselves to be

vulnerable to condemnation and critique, including having the very base of their religion attacked. This has taken considerable courage.

Whilst many other potential influences have shaped the group, this in-depth analysis has revealed key contributors to the group's dispositions and ability to strategise their participation and indeed successful competition in the fields of Muslim cultural production and field of power. This provides an important base for consideration of the implication for the hypothesis and research questions.

## Conclusion

This chapter contributes to supporting the hypothesis that young Australian-born Muslim men engaging in acts of cultural production possess significant levels of capital that provide them with confidence and empowerment to act within their fields. This capital has not been equally distributed amongst the group, yet has shown the influence that key members have had upon others in building an upward social trajectory. In so doing, this chapter addresses numerous gaps in contemporary literature, demonstrating how social influences interact to shape political action by the group and yields important information that aids in answering supplementary research questions, providing a significant point of comparison for other studies in the overall analysis.

The young men of The Brothahood have developed significant levels of cultural and social capitals that have enabled them to act simultaneously in the field of Muslim cultural production and the field of power. Cultural capital particularly that pertinent to the field of Muslim cultural production has been developed from a variety of social influences including Islamic teachers, parents, the YMA, further Islamic training courses, and Muslim female role models, whilst cultural capital suited to the wider field of power has been derived from influences including education and employment experiences (the development of critical thinking, confidence, organizational ability, discipline), interactions with the multicultural State and Western culture, most particularly, hip-hop. These have bestowed The Brothahood with key attributes and skill sets embedded in group members "matrix of dispositions." These are difficult to quantify, yet clearly determinant attributes including personal and collective resilience, courage, creativity, and confidence have accompanied the development of key skill sets (cultural capital) pivotal to the group's success including the ability to negotiate conflicting textual interpretations of the permissibility of music and cultural innovation in Islam. These have equipped The Brothahood to challenge social injustice on terms that listeners can understand. The group has displayed moral courage in

both defending themselves against attacks and in standing up for what they believe are inequalities within both Australian Muslim communities and wider Australian society.

The Brothahood have displayed an entrepreneurial approach to their music and upward trajectory within their fields that has seen them emerge from performing in front of fellow YMA members at a youth camp to performing on the world stage and undertaking collaborations with international artists. Through challenging ingrained and often invisible power structures, including the domination of Muslim community politics by the older generation and hardline textualists as well as white cultural hegemony, the group has employed what Frisina would term "strategies of local and national inclusion,"<sup>124</sup> seeking, as their album title suggests, to contribute to positive social and political change and a transformation of the social structure. In doing so, the group is, with a small, yet increasing level of success, contributing to the development of both Islam and Australian multiculturalism, extending the boundaries and social spaces of both.

## CHAPTER 4

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# Waleed Aly: “To Live in the Realm of Ideas”

### Introduction

In the decade post September 11, 2001, Waleed Aly has emerged as arguably the most well-known Australian Muslim intellectual and public figure. In a period where Australian-born Muslims felt that their communities were under immense scrutiny and social pressure and had little voice to challenge this, Waleed established an extensive presence across a spectrum of media including newspaper, television, and radio, and was involved in a wide array of speaking and training engagements across the government, not for profit and private sectors. In the period defined by Australia’s participation in the “War on Terror,” Waleed Aly became a significant individual player in the fields of power and Muslim cultural production, challenging negative discourse about Australian Muslims in wider society and positioning himself as an interlocutor in shaping the development of mutual understanding and respect between Muslims and the wider community (Figure 4.1). This chapter seeks to develop an understanding of Waleed’s identity and through application of the theoretical frame uncover key social influences on how the nature of their interactions has shaped his political activity.

### Background

Waleed’s parents came to Melbourne from Egypt to study in the late 1960s, settling in the then outer suburb of Vermont, 20 kilometers east of Melbourne. They briefly returned to Egypt to give birth to Waleed’s older brother Ahmed in 1968, whilst Waleed was born in 1978. His first newspaper article (critical of attacks upon Muslim women’s right to wear the hijab) was published in *The Sunday Age*; Waleed was just 24 years of age. By the



**Figure 4.1** Waleed Aly

Waleed Aly 2014. Photo credit to Newscorp Ltd and Tony Gough (Photographer).

time he was 30, he would have over 150 articles published in local and international newspapers and magazines including *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Guardian* and *The Times of India*. Waleed's emergence into the public sphere may be considered to date to November 2002 when his first newspaper article (critical of attacks upon Muslim women's right to wear the hijab) *The Monthly* was across a broad spectrum of issues<sup>1</sup> (though often related to the Muslim perspective he offered). In 2007, aged 29 and working as a lawyer at a major city law firm, Maddocks, Waleed produced his most recognized work *People like us: How arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* and commenced as a Politics lecturer at Monash University. Waleed published seven academic articles about Muslims and radicalization, terrorism, women, multiculturalism, and the law in collections edited by leading Australian intellectuals including Robert Manne, Raymond Gaita, and George Williams. One essay, on the "future of conservatism" in Australia, in the *Quarterly Essay* 37 (2010), signaled the emergence of Waleed into the wider non-Muslim specific field of intellectual activity. In 2005 he commenced as a co-host of ABC radio's *Conversation Hour* with Jon Faine, leading to further radio work and his own fortnightly drive time program in 2008. Waleed has also featured on many television programs in Australia and overseas including the ABC's *Q&A*, *The 7.30 Report*, *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*, the ABC 24 channel's *Morning News* and Channel Ten's *The Project*.<sup>2</sup>

Highlighting the extent of his public profile and symbolic capital, in 2011 Waleed won the "Victorian Local Hero" Australia day award for services to multiculturalism, was listed in the 2010 *Who's Who in the World* and the 2009–2011 editions of the *500 Most Influential Muslims in the World*, won a 2009 selection for the *Fulbright International Visitor Leadership Program* offered by the US Department of State and a 2008 selection to the *Prime Minister's 2020 Summit (Australia's Future Security and Prosperity in a Rapidly Changing Region and World Panel)*. Waleed won the prestigious *Walkley Awards* for his commentary in 2014. That this comprehensive national and international recognition has been bestowed upon a relatively young Australian-born Muslim man from Melbourne makes Waleed Aly an ideal study for both the nature of his project and his ability accumulate and wield vast quantities of capital to build an upward trajectory in the fields in which he participates.

### Waleed Aly as Public Intellectual

The overwhelming majority of Waleed Aly's vast body of written work may be considered to be located in the public sphere. Indeed as he stated in interview, "I see my public engagement as a contribution to conversation."<sup>3</sup> Between 2002 and 2011 the vast majority of his published work was disseminated through mainstream media or periodicals that have a publically accessible focus. This clearly positions Waleed as a public intellectual.

Definitions of the "public intellectual" abound. Stefan Collini defines the concept of the public intellectual as "those few academics who enjoy a significant media presence and who use the opportunity to address current political and social issues,"<sup>4</sup> whilst Stanley Fish considers the public intellectual as someone who "takes as his or her subject matters of concern and has the public's attention."<sup>5</sup> The most resonant definition for the purpose of this study, however, is that proposed by Edward Said, one of the twentieth century's most prominent intellectuals. Said claimed that the role of a public intellectual is to "speak truth to power" and to "be a witness to persecution and suffering . . . supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority."<sup>6</sup> To Barbara Miztal, to be "effective," a public intellectual must display two defining characteristics: *civic creativity* that "provides us with ideas on how to democratize and humanize the workings of modern society" and *civil courage* or "acting on conviction."<sup>7</sup> The role of a public intellectual is inherently political. To position oneself as a public intellectual it may be argued that one has to have an acute awareness of the dynamics of the field of power and where one is located within the field, and be able to leverage one's position to increase their

capital within the field. Importantly, the public intellectual must be able to distil complex ideas and concepts for wider public dissemination, increasing the potential base of followers. Waleed described his role as that of an “explainer”:

I explain things that people don't understand in a way that resonates with them and it allows them to feel that they've really learned something . . . The thing I find more rewarding than anything else is to decode the world or at least a portion of the world that I feel I have some insight in for people who don't . . .<sup>8</sup>

Waleed, similarly to The Brothahood members, noted that Muslim voices have been absent from the public sphere and that Australian Muslims in particular remain poorly represented. He notes in particular, the lack of adequate cultural capital within the community:

We don't as a rule have good spokespeople. By good I mean people who understand the way the media works, understand the symbolic resonance and consequences of their comments or actually engage with broader society in a way that makes them able to speak to it in a coherent way . . .<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of Australian-born Muslim voices in Australian public life, particularly in the years after September 11, Waleed Aly emerged as the pre-eminent young Australian Muslim voice in the public sphere in Australia. He has contributed to shaping the fields of power and Australian Muslim cultural politics, challenging the centrality of both white cultural hegemony, the older generation of Muslim leadership and hardline textualist perspectives of how Muslims in the West and Australia should live. It is to an examination of the works through which he has achieved this that the chapter now turns.

### **Core Themes in Waleed Aly's Work**

Waleed's body of work pertaining to Australia's Muslim communities may be broadly grouped into the two fields in which he may be considered to participate.<sup>10</sup> In the field of power, Waleed's work constitutes a substantive critique of attacks upon Australian Muslims by government, media, and wider society. In the second, the field of Muslim cultural politics, Waleed criticizes hardline textualist positions of insularity, seeking to redefine the boundaries of both fields toward greater honorable recognition and respect for the “other.”



### **Speaking Truth to Power: Challenging Attacks on Australian Muslims**

Of Waleed's numerous newspaper contributions from 2002 to 2011, one particular article titled "Canberra's Demons" (2006) is particularly compelling for its elucidative and impassioned defense of Australian Muslims against a hostile federal government and social climate. In this in-depth article, Waleed, writing as the media spokesperson for the Islamic Council of Victoria (a position he attained in 2003), surveys the proposal by Conservative New South Wales politician Fred Nile that Muslim students in state schools should be banned from wearing the hijab, and subsequent failure of the federal government to repudiate this. Waleed argued that the debate sought the views of everybody except Muslim women: "the great unpeople of our day: spoken of as though they are not in the room."<sup>11</sup> Evoking the work of Stanley Cohen, he asserts that Australian Muslims had been made central to a textbook case of "moral panic" and "cast involuntarily in the role of a threat to societies interests and values":

Put simply, today's moral panic surrounds the Muslim folk devil. This way Muslims can find themselves in the middle of almost any policy debate, without having said or done anything. They can be evoked as effortlessly as an alien, threatening reference point to jolt us into action.<sup>12</sup>

Waleed lists a series of government ministers he believed had been particularly vociferous in their prosecution of this panic, including Bronwyn Bishop, Dana Vaile, and Peter Costello before criticizing their highly selective use of marginalized Muslim figures to attempt to legitimize their case. Waleed singled out then government frontbenchers Tony Abbott and Alexander Downer as exceptions to this behavior, though noted that:

Howard, Costello, Bishop and Nelson are unencumbered by such concerns. More likely their vision is most firmly fixed on the domestic political zeitgeist. Right now, that means trading on fear . . .<sup>13</sup>

This article constitutes a direct foray into the field of power, singling out key government ministers by name and publically admonishing them. In so doing, Waleed directly sought to extend the boundaries of the field to incorporate an Australian Muslim perspective. Given that such a challenge would place him personally in the spotlight as opposing the Australian government on political grounds, this was an act that may be considered to have taken considerable courage.

It is perhaps due to his familiarity and knowledge of the law that Waleed's most dynamic and powerful condemnations of government approaches to Australian Muslims are centered on the counter-terrorism laws enacted after the London 7/7 bombings. In an article for the *Alternative Law Journal*, with an intended audience of lawyers, legal academics, and policy makers, he seeks to illustrate a "worrying trend in Australian counter-terrorism toward unthinking and irresponsible belligerence,"<sup>14</sup> proceeding to criticize and indeed, publically berate, the conduct of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) officers in their handling of the arrest and charging of University of New South Wales student Izhar Ul-Haque, labeling the investigation "hairy chested sloppiness," "incompetent," "illegal," and "oppressive."<sup>15</sup> Waleed continued, examining the politicization of the Dr Mohammed Haneef affair by the Howard Government, drawing a link between "draconian legislative measures and aggressive posturing" and the potential alienation of young Australian Muslims:

If an entire community feels targeted, and the counter-terrorism landscape is so emotively intensified, alienation must surely follow—which provides fertile ground for radicalization.<sup>16</sup>

In a similarly themed chapter for the book titled *War and Liberty and the War on Terror* (2007), Waleed sought to debunk the myth of a cohesive Australian Muslim community, yet simultaneously argues that despite broad differences amongst Australian Muslim communities that the counter-terrorism laws had generated great uncertainty and an almost unprecedented grassroots consensus against them. Waleed adds that Muslim populations have "involuntarily and artificially politicized public identities"<sup>17</sup> and vigorously reinforced this point, challenging the essentialization of Australian Muslims:

It is increasingly unthinkable that Australian Muslims may be chaotically diverse human beings. They do not have mundane struggles and aspirations. And certainly they have no spiritual dimension. Rather, they are an inhuman abstract; a singular political entity; nameless and faceless, except where punctuated by the image and speech of some villainous radical caricature who shoots rapidly to symbolic infamy.<sup>18</sup>

In his writing on the treatment of Australian Muslims in wider Australian society, Waleed powerfully and indeed courageously entered the field of power and publicly challenged its key players and stakeholders: federal government ministers, ASIO, and the media.<sup>19</sup> In this respect it may be argued that he was accumulating significant personal symbolic power in the process that was contributing to his prominence in the field. Waleed also turned his attention

to elements of Australian Muslim communities that he perceived as contributing to social conflict and the dominant discursive portrayal of Australian Muslims: hardline textualists.

### Critiques of Hardline Textualist Positions

Waleed Aly's seminal work *People like us* constitutes a direct entry into the field of power and field of Muslim cultural politics. The book takes as its central thesis that "Islam" and the "West" have defined themselves in relation to each other, constituting themselves in binary opposition and contributing to mutual distrust, animosity, and indeed, hatred. Waleed was critical of what he labeled the phenomenon of "negative Islam" in Muslim communities in the West, where attempts at introspection and engagement with non-Muslims are criticized:

Where your identity is one of differentiation, any attempt to look for points of connection, to build bridges, very quickly becomes an act of treachery. Accordingly, it is now common in the Muslim conversation for ideas and arguments to be dismissed on the grounds not that they lack merit, but that they are "Western," and hence automatically a corrupting, "un-Islamic" influence.<sup>20</sup>

Waleed critiques the worldwide responses to the Danish Muhammad cartoon controversy (2005–2006), labeling them a "dismal failure" and "hysterical" reactions more likely to be interpreted as a sign of profound weakness and insecurity.<sup>21</sup> He critiques *al-Muhjiroun* "Britain's most vile terror loving group"<sup>22</sup> and *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, who, he considers to display "humiliated arrogance" at the perceived decline of Muslim power.<sup>23</sup> Speaking several years earlier in 2005 as ICV spokesperson, Aly labeled the Benbrika Jama'ah who had just been arrested as a "splinter of a splinter," and immediately distanced the wider Muslim community from the group:

As far as I am concerned, he has no more sway over the Muslim community in Victoria than any cult leader would have over the religious communities from which they are splintered.<sup>24</sup>

Waleed Aly has sought, as a core theme throughout his work, to distance extreme groups from the majority of Muslim populations, particularly the perspectives and actions they promote. Whilst he has stopped short of condemning hardline textualist and extremists as apostates (outside the realm of Islam), his efforts have sought to marginalize their perspectives in the field of Muslim cultural politics and in so doing bring his perspectives to the fore.

### A Heavily Contested Position in the Fields of Power and Muslim Cultural Politics

Waleed seeks to locate himself in the middle ground between Islam and the West, challenging hypocrisy and ignorance and naturalized “symbolic violence” wherever he comes across it. His discursive style, whilst often powerful, is also highly articulate and creative, fashioning a consideration of alternate perspectives into a project aimed at overcoming “egocentricity and ‘arrogance’ that Waleed has argued defines relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.”

Waleed’s call for dialogue between Muslims and wider society may indeed be regarded, particularly considering the sociopolitical context at the time of writing, to constitute a project identity, “seeking to build a new identity that redefines their position in society and the transformation of the overall social structure.”<sup>25</sup> Waleed clearly speaks his “truth to power” and displays *civic creativity* aimed at humanizing the workings of modern society and *civil courage* through acting upon his convictions. Whilst gaining a high level of symbolic power within the field of power in Australia and Muslim cultural politics (as his awards in both fields highlight), Waleed has also been heavily critiqued by those he challenges.

The spectrum of this criticism ranges from the extreme right, conservatives and Christians through to Muslim extremists. Internet “hate sites” such as “*Islamistmonitor.org*” condemn Waleed for seeking to Islamize Australia:

How does this guy get a university job and endless memberships of committees and boards discussing Australia’s future? Well, he’s Muslim, has a suit, pretends to be Western—I mean he likes footy—did I say he’s Muslim?<sup>26</sup>

Such perspectives view Waleed as occupying a favorable position in the field of power precisely because he is a “moderate” Muslim. The *Australian Conservative* website brands Waleed as an “Islamic spin doctor,”<sup>27</sup> whilst tabloid columnist Andrew Bolt has labeled him an “apologist for Islam” and “hypocritical.”<sup>28</sup> In a review of *People like us*, Barry Peter’s writing for the right wing *Quadrant* magazine is at times positive toward Waleed’s “even handed approach,” though viewed him as naïve and “starry-eyed” about the true nature of the Islamic world’s attitudes toward non-Muslims.<sup>29</sup> From the opposite end of the political spectrum, Australian Islamists have identified Waleed Aly as a “moderate,” with the 2010 President of the Muslim Student Association of Victoria, Yasser Morsi publicly stating that “his one dimensional politics chokes the Islam out of Muslims; or chokes what it means to be a Muslim out of Islam.”<sup>30</sup> Morsi continued, claiming that dialogue (as promoted by Aly) “reduces religion to a secondary thing”<sup>31</sup> and is essentially the

"liberal secularist position"<sup>32</sup> that hides Muslims true natures from themselves. Morsi, and other Islamists are asserting that Waleed has in effect legitimized the domination of Muslims through affirming the importance of dominant social structures and norms and contributing to the perpetuation of symbolic violence that keeps Muslim identity subordinated. Understood through this paradigm, Waleed would be seen as displaying a legitimizing identity that *reproduces the identity that rationalises the sources of structural domination*.<sup>33</sup>

The expression of Waleed's project identity in the period 2001–2011 has played an important role in shaping the fields of power and Muslim cultural production in Australia. Like *The Brothahood*, Waleed has utilized cultural mechanisms to seek change within these fields, however, has done this individually, and arguably, on a significantly larger scale. An analysis of how key social influences have interacted to shape his project identity has important implications for both the research question and the development of Islam in the Australian multicultural context.

### **Key Social Influences: Family Influences**

Family influences were considered especially important by Waleed. This emphasis on family, as with *The Brothahood*, is consistent with the literature highlighting the role of family in the transmission of Islamic values. Waleed's father was a scientist and worked as an engineer; a "very Egyptian thing,"<sup>34</sup> before becoming a teacher in Melbourne at the high performing Haileybury College and moving on to become a school principal later in his career. Waleed's mother studied an Arts degree on arrival in Australia and became a history and English teacher. Both Waleed's parents were active in his development, with his father driving him to many of his sporting commitments and his mother actively supporting his musical development. Waleed states "I definitely saw mum and dad when I was growing up as a unified couple"<sup>35</sup> and that whilst his father was the parent who decided most things, his mother was "certainly a strong presence in the family."<sup>36</sup> A clear contributing factor from Waleed's parents was their role in imparting values that remain central to his character today: "What I got from both of them I think, I got a very clear message about what was and wasn't acceptable behavior."<sup>37</sup> The inculcation of values such as respect is a central responsibility of parents beyond the meeting of primary needs, equipping children with key social skills to equip them for success in future endeavors.

Importantly, Waleed's parents, particularly his father, were determined that his ethnic background should not impede him in the predominantly white middle-class suburb of Vermont where he grew up: "Vermont's not the

easiest place to grow up in some senses because at the time it was pretty Anglo-Australian. There was me and a Vietnamese family down the road and that was it.”<sup>38</sup> Waleed’s father encouraged him to play Australian rules football (not football) and he did not attend Saturday religious school, a staple for many young Australian Muslims. His parents would attend the Mosque for religious festivals such as *Eid*; however, even though Waleed’s father designed an outer suburban mosque, and later became its president, he did not seek to impart a strong Islamic identity upon their son.<sup>39</sup> Waleed’s parents spoke only English at home, despite Arabic being a first language. The emphasis upon assimilation into the dominant culture by Waleed’s parent’s contrasts with literature that suggests that the older generation continue to cling to home country traditions. This emphasis on the development of Australian-based cultural capital could be considered important aids to Waleed’s success with schooling and encounters with dominant culture in years to come.

Waleed identified his older brother Ahmed as “socially the biggest influence,”<sup>40</sup> stating that he was extremely important because “. . . he was ten years older than me which meant he was more like having another father but unlike dad he’s grown up in Australia so it meant we had experiences that were more aligned.”<sup>41</sup> Whilst Ahmed was an important contributor to Waleed’s sporting prowess in childhood, his most important contribution to Waleed was introducing him to a more serious form of Islam than that bestowed by his parents:

My religious awareness came from my brother . . . by second, third year of uni, that was probably when he started becoming more religious and then he passed it down to me. So my religious awareness probably came in about grade five, until then it was really not a feature in my life at all.<sup>42</sup>

The nature of the religious instruction was more rudimentary and cultural than detailed religious instruction:

He made sure that I knew that I was meant to be praying five times a day and he’d give information . . . it wasn’t really authoritarian or anything . . . I think he just saw that I wasn’t going to get a huge amount of religious education from mum and dad so it was gonna be him that did it.<sup>43</sup>

Waleed’s upward trajectory in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics has directly paralleled his marriage to Susan Carland. Waleed married Susan, an Australian of Anglo-Celtic origin (who converted to Islam in her late teens) in 2003. Carland is a well-known public figure in her own right

due to her involvement in Salam Café and subsequent appearances on various ABC television panel shows, interviews, and work as a lecturer at Monash University. Additionally, Carland was named a United National Alliance of Civilizations "Muslim Leader of Tomorrow" in 2009.<sup>44</sup> Waleed and Susan have two young children and continue to live in the area in which both grew up. He considers that Susan was of very high influence upon him:

It's pretty central. There's no doubt that we influence and mold each other, and that's the way it works... we've gone through a lot of phases and we tend to go through them together, in fact it tends to be a mutually reinforcing thing, I think that's the nature of marriage generally. Certainly marriages that survive...<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his marriage to a woman who has achieved significant success, Waleed has had sufficient space and support to explore his sources of meaning, though this has also been mediated through Susan's Anglo-Australian cultural background and exposure to her practicing Christian family.<sup>46</sup> These have all had a significant influence upon Waleed's writing and constructive engagement in the field of cultural production.

### Islam: Childhood and Youth

The complex interplay of familial and educational influences and capital upon Waleed's Islamic development is evident in the role that Waleed's brother Ahmed played in his Islamic development from a young age. Whilst Ahmed was, as discussed, a key Islamic influence upon Waleed as his initial teacher, importantly, he also introduced him to the Young Muslims of Australia (YMA) group.<sup>47</sup> Ahmed had become closer to Islam whilst a student at the University of Melbourne where he studied medicine and became involved with YMA and brought this home to his younger brother.

YMA is not explicitly acknowledged as an influence by Waleed; however, it emerged through interviews that this organization instilled him with key Islamic values that have shaped his work to this day. As stated, Waleed began to attend YMA youth camps and outings with his brother and was exposed to the service ethos that defined the organization and its more spiritual orientation. Importantly, Waleed forged a greater identification with other young Muslims: "It was fun, they were a good group of people... getting people together as a community, imparting religious awareness and religious education..."<sup>48</sup> Whilst a *Tasawwuf* element was central to the groups teaching, he believed they also had a traditionalist focus, placing a "really strong emphasis on respecting and listening to scholars."<sup>49</sup> He stated further that "what

the YMA does really well and what it did for me was give you a really good introduction to Islam . . . a good grounding . . .”<sup>50</sup> Additionally, Waleed noted the potential impact on those who attended:

. . . it’s not uncommon I would suggest for people who have had some exposure to Islam through YMA, you know, to, they may not be that practicing in their sort of adolescent years or whatever but they’ll usually come back, even if they don’t come back to YMA, they usually come back and be pretty serious Muslims because they kind of had that seed planted . . .<sup>51</sup>

The key influences upon Waleed’s Islamic identity from his childhood and youth are clearly his brother Ahmed, and the YMA group, demonstrating a complex interplay of Australian educational and cultural influences, social values, and Islamic influences including the YMA, *Tasawwuf* emphasis on service and Hanafi traditionalist approaches to the interpretation of Islamic sources. It is important to consider that these influences ran concurrently with other influences including schooling and socialization in his broader neighborhood. These are especially significant influences considering the next stage of Waleed’s Islamic identity development through his exploration of a form of Islam that may be considered in many ways antithetical to the basic perspectives and values of traditional and *Tasawwuf*: Salafism.

### Islam: Young Adulthood

Waleed’s transition from high school to university studies signaled a shift in the immediate Islamic influences around him that were easily accessible and offered a form of belonging. The University of Melbourne Islamic student society was dominated in the late 1990s and early 2000s by Salafis – hardline textualist Muslims.<sup>52</sup> Salafism is associated with Wahabbism, “a strict, puritanical faith that emphasizes literal interpretation of the Quran and the absolute oneness of God”<sup>53</sup> that has formed the basis of the Saudi Government and been propagated worldwide by Saudi oil money through funding of mosques, schools, libraries, and printed materials. According to John Esposito, Salafi Islam has become a popular term for this movement and its simultaneous focus on *tawhid* and the strict application of *Sharia* (Islamic law). Salafism requires unerring commitment to follow the literal textualist interpretation of the Quran and so may be considered anathematic to more traditional approaches within Sunni Islam that focus upon arriving at a position based upon analysis of both local cultural context (*Urf*) and jurisprudential analysis deriving from one of the four main *madhhab*’s (schools) of Sunni Islamic thought. This requirement of blind obedience



was already taking a toll upon Waleed by the time he became President of the Islamic Students Society at Melbourne. Not only had Waleed maintained links with the YMA, helping out at camps when requested, but the polarized discourse had started to alienate a young man that had grown up in a relatively plural and accommodating Australia and received a critical education:

I looked around me in a society that I didn't particularly like and I thought there was essentially no place for women in it, there was very little outreach done to non-Muslims. But my main concern was to the internal workings of the society. So as I exited my Salafi phase I took the organization with me with a focus particularly on greater female involvement and just broadening the Islamic discourse in the society . . .<sup>54</sup>

In this internal struggle with his own values and external struggle with Salafi students, Waleed could be considered to have experienced a strong disjuncture between his habitus and field of Muslim student politics at the University of Melbourne. This *hysteresis* could have caused Waleed to question his source of meaning and to face a level of existential angst, yet here it is clear that he "took the organization with him," leading from the front on a more inclusive platform. This suggests a significant level of cultural capital and self-confidence clearly gained through prior family and educational experiences.

A key catalyst in this movement away from Salafism was Waleed's participation in Adelaide in a "Train the Trainer" course funded by a Nigerian Islamic organization and run by Nurudeen Lemu, the son of one of Nigeria's most prominent Islamic jurists. Waleed would undertake the course whilst still President of the Islamic Students society at Melbourne in 2001 (prior to 9/11).

Waleed framed the course as offering training in how to approach common questions that emerge within the Islamic communities, claiming "There's a very strong focus for example on understanding differences of juristic opinion, imams, scholars, things like that . . ." <sup>55</sup> This clearly challenged Waleed's Salafi orientation and sense of meaning at the time. Nurudeen Lemu in an interview ten years later clearly remembered Waleed as:

. . . the most obnoxious participant. He just wasn't satisfied with anything you say and he dug further and further. And when he was satisfied you would know it. And if he wasn't you would know it as well. And I've found from the trainings we do that those usually end up as the best participants. They're not learning for themselves.<sup>56</sup>

The “Train the Trainer” course clearly differs from the hardline textualist approach that discourages a critical approach to Islamic sources and claims of exclusivity:

the idea of the course was not to choose one over the other . . . it was like, I understand where this came from and next time you encounter someone who has it you can feel that you don't have to dismiss them or treat them as your enemy . . . my understanding of Islam and of Islamic jurisprudence became a lot more complex because I'd suddenly been exposed to a lot broader range of ideas.<sup>57</sup>

Nurudeen Lemu considered by Waleed to have had a very high level of influence upon his development and transition from Salafism to more contextualist perspectives. Lemu equipped Waleed with the intellectual tools (Islamic cultural capital) to position himself more effectively in the field of Muslim cultural politics and to challenge competitors on terms of his choosing.

### **Islam in Adulthood**

As Waleed moved out of university into the workforce and transitioned out of what could be considered an experiment with Salafism, Waleed distanced himself from individual teachers and took on the responsibility of teaching himself, utilizing traditional sources. Waleed identified seven influences upon his identity that may be considered to constitute “Islamic intellectual” influences. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Law Professor and Islamic scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl was considered to have a very high level of influence whilst Cambridge University Islamic Studies scholar Abdul Hakim Murad—also known as T.J. Winter and fourteenth-century Andalusian Islamic legal scholar Abu Ishaq Al Shatabi had a high level of influence upon Waleed. Waleed considered US-based Islamic Scholars and activists Umar Faruq Abd-Allah and Hamza Yusef to have a moderate level of influence while International Islamic University of Malaysia law Professor Mohammed Hashim Kamali and Saudi Arabian- based Islamic scholar Abdallah Bin Bayyah exercised lower levels of influence.

Scholars identified by Waleed as influential share several common traits. All are traditional “classical” scholars who focus in some way on the jurisprudential basis of Islam and its application in a contemporary Western context. The majority of these scholars (certainly the more influential scholars) are

based in Western nations (Britain or the United States) and all have a powerful command of English, speaking it fluently and eloquently and use it to forcefully assert their arguments. Importantly, all scholars have either learned or taught in both Western and Muslim majority nations and received their formal educations at Western universities such as Princeton, Cambridge, The University of Chicago, and the University of London. Additionally, three of these scholars (Murad, Abd Allah, and Yusef) are white converts to Islam who have studied extensively in Muslim nations and developed a formidable reputation for their work in relating Islam to practice in the Western context. This cross-pollination of Islamic legal and theological training with Western formal education, focusing upon the development of critical thinking and emphasis upon liberal traditions including reason and progress, has resulted in some of the most innovative and powerful contemporary works on Islam in the West. There are three key themes that link the scholars listed as influential by Waleed that have visibly shaped his project identity: their having links to the Maliki *madhhab*, criticisms of extremism, and their exhibiting activist project identities.

These scholarly influences upon Waleed are significant. All may be considered "Muslim elites" with high levels of educational and symbolic capitals in both the field of power and Muslim cultural politics. Individually and collectively these actors constitute the intellectual vanguard of the development of Islam in Western contexts, grounded in traditionalist Maliki teachings emphasizing the significance of *urf* for growing local Islamic cultures and law, fiercely critiquing the Islamic base of their "puritan" extremist opponents and actively moving outside the realms of the academy to shape the development of Islam through adopting activist project identities, building local organizations to reach Western Muslims. It is possible to conceive that Waleed places himself within this broad category and draws a strong level of inspiration and meaning from their work that in turn shapes his own.

### **ICV Experiences/Muslim community Life and Work**

Waleed was asked to join the *Islamic Council of Victoria* Board whilst still the President of the Islamic Students Society in 2003, marking his entry into the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics as the ICV's public face. His first experiences in the role placed him firmly in the public eye as the ICV pursued *Catch the Fire Ministries*, an evangelist Christian group that had allegedly vilified Muslims utilizing the new Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001). This role gave Waleed an increased public profile that arguably paved the way for his involvement in other areas. Of these experiences and

his wider Muslim community experiences (including YMA and Salafism) he states:

No doubt it's informed greatly who I am today for better or for worse, a lot of my attitudes towards social behavior, towards the nature of Muslim community life and identities was forged in those experiences. A lot of them were great experiences, a lot of them were very painful so, sort of, a lot of the way I guess I apprehend and analyse things that are going on within the Muslim community but also generally are informed by those experiences.<sup>58</sup>

Waleed considered the ICV to have had a high level of influence whilst his wider Muslim community experiences had a very high level of influence. As a spokesperson for the ICV Waleed was effectively a gatekeeper for Muslim communities' general political sentiment and exposed to the full range of Muslim communities political perspectives on issues. This arguably bestowed him with a level of symbolic capital within Muslim communities, whilst his ability as a well-educated, Australian-born Muslim to articulate arguments to the wider Australian community clearly marked his entry into public life.

### Education

Waleed identified a number of influences upon his project that may be understood as educational influences. These relate particularly to his high school and university experiences. The literature review notes the potential influence of schools as sites of exposure to the dominant culture and values embedded in curriculum design and pedagogic practice. These are unlikely to be identified by interviewees as conscious influences upon their practice. Where possible, these embedded value systems are explored and their impact upon Waleed contemplated.

Waleed commenced his education attending Barryburn Kindergarten<sup>59</sup> then moved to the local state government school, Vermont Primary, where he considered himself "pretty popular" because of his sporting ability.<sup>60</sup> Waleed developed a love for music and sport in primary school, excelling at cricket and making the Victorian primary school representative team in 1991. Waleed attended Vermont Secondary College until year ten before succumbing to his parents' desire for him to attend a private school<sup>61</sup> and moved to the prestigious Wesley College, an Associated Public School (APS) run by the Wesleyan Church. Wesley claims to be a "world class coeducational independent school developing the whole person through timeless principles of learning—with innovation and wisdom."<sup>62</sup> Values listed by the school as integral include a diverse academic curriculum, openness and creativity, a broad

understanding of human and cultural diversity, a nurturing commitment to social justice and spirituality embracing Christianity and other faiths.<sup>63</sup>

Waleed decided to study the International Baccalaureate (IB) (an alternative to the more mainstream Victorian Certificate of Education), defining this as "one of the best decisions I'd ever made and one of the best pieces of guidance my parents ever gave me."<sup>64</sup> This reveals both the educational cultural capitals he benefited from (due to his parents and brother) and the proactive, discerning approach taken to education. It was during his schooling at Wesley that Waleed further developed his love for theater and music through undertaking the IB. Particularly pivotal was the tutelage of Dr Bill Miles, a teacher at Wesley who "really pushed me with my theoretical understanding"<sup>65</sup> and who was considered a moderate influence.

Waleed excelled at school, particularly in the Wesley environment which he enthusiastically described as having "a culture of celebrating achievement," contrasting this to state schools, which he believes do not.<sup>66</sup> Other extracurricular activities including participation in the school play and two school cricket tours to England (once as a player, once as a mentor) that offered a holistic, inclusive school experience that maybe considered to have imbued a young Waleed with a high degree of cultural capital and confidence to express himself whilst simultaneously embedding within him a disposition associated with the English Protestant liberal humanist tradition. Waleed excelled academically in this environment, obtaining a tertiary entrance rank (TER) of 98.90 out of a possible 99.95. This clearly placed Waleed amongst the state's top performing secondary students and enabled him to commence a combined Engineering/Law degree at the University of Melbourne.

## University

Waleed's engineering studies may be considered somewhat consistent with his cultural background, though he was more preoccupied with his law studies. Through his study of law, Waleed developed his already burgeoning interest in the manner in which knowledge and decisions are arrived at, in this case through training in the jurisprudential process:

Legal training, legal education and also the process of working as a lawyer has been really important in my own development, it was one of the key things that informed my transition religiously. It teaches you an intellectual rigor and an intellectual method that has been really important in informing the way that I go about forming my views of the world and then articulating them.<sup>67</sup>

If law school developed an intellectual capacity that may be considered steeped in the development of the Western philosophical and political

traditions of the enlightenment, it may be considered very interesting that despite Waleed's immersion in this training and his exposure to the best educational practice of the Western elite school system that he was ever taken with the teachings of Salafism, a form of thought and practice that stood in direct contradiction to these. Waleed, usually eloquent and thoughtful throughout the interviews, had some difficulty in explaining this:

There'd be a lecture at Melbourne uni and I'd go along. And I certainly hadn't really got my head around the idea of different groups within Muslim communities, different doctrine, doctrinal positions and different sectarian positions . . . I just kind of found myself being pulled along by that mainly because of the absence of anything else.<sup>68</sup>

That Waleed not only joined but became an active member (and indeed President) of the Salafi-oriented Muslim student society, then proceeded to challenge this perspective, presents an ideal study of the pressures facing Australian-born Muslim men.

### Employment Experiences

To fully understand the influences upon Waleed's wider public intellectual status and project it is important to delve into the key influences he lists as pivotal to his professional development. These may in many ways be considered important elements of his on-going education.

Waleed did not work his first job until age 22 (unusually late for many Australians). This was at the Telstra call center in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Waleed was employed as a "Sales Professional" and worked at Telstra until his last year of university studies in 2002, when he worked a seasonal clerkship at Maddocks Lawyers in Melbourne. Toward the end of his university studies Waleed was unsure whether he wanted to pursue law or journalism. He was offered a job as a legal associate to Justice Kaye in the Family Court and was simultaneously accepted into the exam stage for a cadetship at *The Age* newspaper. Ultimately he took the secure employment. After this experience Waleed gained articles at Maddocks in the Public Law group working predominantly for the state government and gained extensive insights into the nature of governance: "you need not just the right legal answer but the right political answer as well."<sup>69</sup> During this time Waleed was simultaneously writing extensively for a range of newspapers providing commentary and analysis, and had started to co-host the *Conversation Hour* on ABC talk radio "which was a tricky thing at times to try and balance . . . but I managed."<sup>70</sup> This media work had a very high level of influence upon Waleed,

helping him to "interrogate" his views and "understand them within a broader social context."<sup>71</sup>

On the strength of his symbolic capital resulting from his media profile Waleed was approached by academics from various universities including Melbourne, Monash, and Griffith (Queensland). Waleed chose Monash as the area of study he was offered was most aligned with his interests and left his job as a lawyer before even being guaranteed an academic position.<sup>72</sup> This allowed him to move into the field of academia:

The opportunity to move into academia; I can't tell you how much I enjoyed that. To live in the realm of ideas. All that stuff that I used to want to do in my spare time and that I did do to get all this, the writing that I did done, that could be my job now, to you know, my job to think about that stuff and that's pretty hard to knock that back.<sup>73</sup>

The logic of moving away from a job as a lawyer with potential for upward mobility within the firm and significantly higher financial reward than academia at first appears problematic. Yet to Waleed this was a calculated move that would allow him to devote himself to his work and in so doing increase his output and profile in the wider public sphere:

I had ways of earning money beyond academic salaries, by writing articles and occasionally you get paid for public speaking things like that. So you know there were ways with coping with the financial thing. But really what was exciting was just the prospect of spending my time writing. . .<sup>74</sup>

In this regard Waleed provides a strong point of contrast with patterns of Muslim employment identified in the literature review and sociopolitical context chapters. Waleed not only had no problem converting his educational capital into economic capital, he was well placed to choose the career in which he chose to invest this cultural capital and did so with a trajectory that may only be described as meteoric. Whilst Waleed often explained these opportunities as "accidents"<sup>75</sup> he also employed the phrase "action brings reaction"<sup>76</sup> to explain how opportunities were presented to him. Waleed is highly skilled at deploying his educational and social cultural capitals to open opportunities and develop social capital, including links to high-profile politicians from both sides of politics such as Lindsey Tanner, former Labor government Finance Minister and former Liberal Party Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1930–2015), and understands the importance of social networking. Nowhere is this more evident than in an analysis of the centrality of role models in aiding Waleed's career.

### Role Models

An analysis of Waleed's influences reveals that above all other contributors to his professional development role models have been pivotal. This speaks not only to Waleed's ability to elicit support through his project identity, but to broader political currents in society, including the reaction of intelligentsia and the self-identified liberals against the stigmatization and marginalization of Australian Muslims from society. These role models may be split into two main areas of influence: journalism and academia, though Waleed's social capital extends into formal institutional politics.

Journalist Martin Flanagan from *The Age* newspaper was considered to have had a high level of influence. Flanagan had written a story after 11 September about a Muslim family he observed at a Richmond football club game—this coincidentally happened to be Waleed's family. Waleed emailed Flanagan stating that this was his family and asking advice on how to write for a newspaper, to which Flanagan obliged by offering to read his work, resulting in the acceptance of one of Waleed's pieces shortly after. Flanagan has served as a mentor for Waleed from his initial forays into journalism to the present day. Another key figure in the journalistic field has been George Megalonis, an author and senior writer for *The Australian* newspaper. Waleed met Megalonis whilst appearing on the SBS television program *Insight* and states “for discussions about Australian politics I find talking to him immensely valuable and he's very influential in that way.”<sup>77</sup> Whilst not specifically mentioned, it must be noted that ABC presenter Jon Faine, himself a former lawyer, was instrumental in bringing Waleed to ABC radio and establishing this form of public presence. These figures, all middle-aged white males, are well-established journalists whose support has been invaluable to him in establishing a career in the public sphere.

Waleed was also actively recruited to the Monash University's “Global Terrorism Research Centre” (GTReC) by two senior academics, Dr Peter Lentini and Associate Professor David Wright Neville, who were both considered to have had a very high level of influence upon him. These two academics were also pivotal in gaining Waleed employment as a lecturer without his having obtained a Masters or PhD in the area in which he was lecturing. An important influence listed by Waleed, though not known through personal acquaintance, is sociologist Zygmunt Berman, who had a high level of influence, leaving a “deep impression on the questions I ask about the world and how I go about answering them.”<sup>78</sup> Once again, all influences listed were middle-aged, white men with an arguably liberal political perspective.

The question may be asked as to what it is that makes high-profile actors including Lindsey Tanner and Malcolm Fraser, often whom act as



gatekeepers for their professions, take an active interest in Waleed's project. These are older, often highly influential white Australian men who have little to gain professionally from an association with Waleed as they are very well established. This could be considered to exist at two levels; friendship and identification with Waleed's project. Waleed considers these senior political media and academic figures as friends and is, through the sum of his experiences capable of engaging with them on topics of mutual interest, something requiring a high level of cultural capital; however, of equal importance is that these individuals appear to take a genuine interest in and support Waleed's project at a political level. Broadly speaking these role models are highly educated and informed and could be argued to have a broadly liberal approach to politics, emphasizing the importance of liberal democratic politics and approaches to a raft of issues including human rights. To this extent, aligning with Waleed could offer these individuals a level of multicultural symbolic capital in the field of power and Australian cultural life as progressives, value adding to their own interventions in public debate.

### Western Popular Culture

Waleed's passion for music, both theoretical through examining structures and through playing in his band "Robot Child" (in the genre of "original jazz and funk infused rock"),<sup>79</sup> is a strong emergent theme that was not anticipated prior to interviews. Waleed considered "great musicians" as having a high level of influence. Central amongst these musicians are rock super-groups Queen (to whom his brother introduced him at age seven) and Pink Floyd. Waleed asserts that the theatricality and "grandness" of their music was central, although these groups may also be understood as interesting in another manner. For whilst constituted of Western (British) white males, Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury was overtly homosexual and adopted an openly "queer" hyper-masculinity through his performances and the music of Pink Floyd is often associated with psychedelic culture and its associated drug use. Waleed also lists Billy Joel, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Whitlams and Ben Folds Five as influences, whilst Beethoven and saxophonist Charlie Parker are also mentioned. None of these musicians reflected the experiences *per se* of Waleed during his youth and in fact the culture of Queen and Pink Floyd appear anathema to Islam (and religious culture generally). It is worth considering that having gone through a "Salafi phase" where such music is considered *haram* that he maintained his love of what may be considered generationally defining music in the Western cultural context.

Theatricality pervades two more obscure and less significant cultural influences mentioned by Waleed; British humor and twentieth-century absurdist

theater. Waleed declares that shows such as *Blackadder* and *Fawlty Towers* have “enlivened my love of words,”<sup>80</sup> whilst twentieth-century absurdist theater influenced his critical thinking ability, “deconstructing and reconstructing art and literature and so on, and then potentially ideas.”<sup>81</sup> The critical dimension of this influence must not be overlooked. The ability to dissect ideas and literature enables the critical interpretation of competing textual positions.

Importantly, during his youth, Waleed avoided activities popular amongst other young people of his age such as nightclubbing and drinking alcohol, instead preferring to attend sporting events, particularly Richmond Football Club games. He has also avoided “buying in” to other facets of mainstream consumer culture such as particular clothing brands: “I don’t think about brands, and I don’t actually purchase much stuff, except like food and musical equipment.”<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, despite his refusal to buy into popular Western culture, Waleed consciously wears a beard for religious reasons, stating: “Depending on which view you take, having a beard is either for Muslim men either compulsory or highly recommended.”<sup>83</sup> This statement reveals into the conscious projection of Waleed’s Muslim identity into the public sphere and his beard could be argued to constitute a visual marker of difference that adds to Waleed’s symbolic capital in the field of power.

### **Australia: Interactions with the State**

As with Waleed’s ability to convert his educational capital into an upward career trajectory, his interaction with the State stands in contrast to experiences examined in literature. Asked about his experiences growing up and interactions with various arms of the State and government, Waleed could not easily recall any that came immediately to mind:

I’d be hard pressed to name a government agency or an organ of government that I’ve dealt with forever. I suppose I’ve probably dealt with the police when I lost something. I had to get a stat dec [Statutory Declaration] or something.<sup>84</sup>

As with *The Brothahood*, Waleed did not recall instances of being specifically targeted by the Victoria Police or being discriminated against by the State/government whilst growing up. Indeed, whilst noting that he lives in a society that’s not “broadly sympathetic to Islamic practice or identity,”<sup>85</sup> Melbourne is a city that he would “describe as tolerant.”<sup>86</sup> Waleed has, as examined in a review of his work, thoroughly engaged with powerful institutions of the State from a position of power. Waleed was even brought in to

train federal and state agencies as to how to better work with Muslim communities, highlighting the significance of multiculturalism to his trajectory in the field of power.<sup>87</sup> This engagement inverts the popular conception of Muslim victimhood, demonstrating that Muslims are indeed capable and potentially powerful political actors:

I'm more than happy to criticize them, in fact when the AFP approached me they, they were under the impression that I was quite profoundly hostile to the whole organization, so they weren't under any illusions that I was their friend. I really thought they had overestimated my position, but whatever criticisms I have of government departments and of the laws, I stand by. So I'm not compromised in that way and in those circumstances.<sup>88</sup>

Through his educational and cultural capitals, Waleed has proven capable of engaging dominant institutions not only through the press and academia, but at a personal level on his own terms. This reveals important insights into Waleed's disposition. He is clearly comfortable engaging in the field of power as an individual and public intellectual. His exposure to the dominant institutions of power in Australian society, from Wesley College, to the University of Melbourne, working as an associate to a judge and for a top tier legal firm and in continuous engagement with powerful individuals and groups has bestowed him with cultural capital and confidence to speak "truth to power" in a manner that arguably, no Australian Muslim has done before him.

### **Theoretical Application: Field, Capital, and Habitus**

#### ***The Field of Power and Australian Muslim Cultural Politics***

If a field may be conceptualized as a "space of potential and active forces" and "space of struggles between these forces that seek to maintain or change the location of these forces" then Waleed Aly may be considered a key figure in both fields in which this research locates him. Waleed has acted with civic creativity and civil courage to challenge dominant cultural hegemonic conceptions that marginalize Australian Muslims from accessing the opportunities of common citizenship. Waleed has built an extensive base of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals that has combined to contribute to his meteoric career trajectory as a public intellectual and advocate for Muslim communities in the field of power. Waleed has simultaneously been an important actor in the field of Muslim cultural politics, challenging extreme textualist positions and arguing for a contextual approach to Islam in Australia and the West. The mediums utilized by Waleed, ranging from print media and radio to television have exponentially increased his leverage and potential audience

within the field, projecting his perspectives and influence to many hundreds of thousands and possibly, millions, both in Australia and internationally. This has resulted in his attaining increased symbolic capital and consequently, further opportunities to spread his ideas and influence.

If, as discussed in the previous chapter, the key stakes of the field of power in a Western liberal democracy are control of political governance and the opportunity to shape the cultural and political life of the nation, then it may be argued that Waleed Aly has achieved a very tangible, concrete level of success as a public intellectual. Whilst not active in the formal political institutional sphere, he has become an influential voice within it. Waleed sat on a key panel at the 2020 Summit (2008) has met and befriended numerous politicians spanning both sides of politics including Lindsey Tanner, the former Federal Finance minister and former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Waleed has trained numerous federal and state government departments and agencies including the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and interviewed numerous prominent politicians on his radio program.

Waleed could be considered to have utilized “individual promotion tactics” within the field, as conceived by Anna Frisina, leveraging off his difference as a Muslim to create a public identity based on his religion before over time, he became more established, making this less central to his public image. Waleed could also be identified as utilizing tactics and strategies of national and international inclusion, challenging white hegemonic narratives in the public space and in so doing promoting mutual respect between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Waleed also participated in the field of Muslim cultural politics, seeking through his book *People like us* to shape the development of Islam in Australia and wider Western contexts. In a field where the stakes are perceived Islamic legitimacy and the ability to influence other Muslims and where religious capital is pivotal, his trajectory and overall influence has been considerably less spectacular than his rise in the field of power. Whilst reaching the height of Islamic institutional politics as a media spokesperson for the ICV at just age 24, Waleed has arguably not developed the requisite textual and Islamic scholarly knowledge of *fiqh* to see his work accepted on the same tier of *ijtihad* as those that he considers as influences. Furthermore, Waleed has received vociferous criticism from hardline textualists, particularly Islamists, on the basis that he has adopted a “legitimizing identity,” stripping Islam of its meaning and “essence.” Waleed’s opponents seek to challenge his religious capital and indeed to ostracize him from the field entirely. Yet Waleed Aly is everywhere that his opponents are not. His greatest influence in the field of Muslim cultural politics is, paradoxically, likely to occur through his success in the field of power as a public intellectual. Through his articulate, creative,

and courageous interventions in the field of power and his visibly Muslim presence, Waleed has contributed to breaking down distrust of Australian Muslims that dominates the white dominant narrative (earning him critics, particularly from the political and Christian right) and contributed to the development of greater social inclusion. Such work is vital to breaking down "resistance identities" that are based upon the concept of a hostile "other" at "war with Islam." In doing so, Aly is contributing to depriving his opponents of a key component of their narrative and contributing to the development of more contextualist approaches.

### ***Capital Accumulation and Utilization in the Field of Power and Muslim Cultural Production***

A large and continuously expanding repository of cultural capital and ability to wield it to maximal effect in conjunction with possession of other related forms of social and symbolic capitals is central to Waleed's success. He exhibits, through his work and success a very high level of cultural capital, particularly embodied and institutionalized capital in the key area of education that equips him to speak authoritatively in the field of power. By this definition, Waleed is clearly able to be defined as a "Muslim elite," engaging in the political field and influencing decision making. The accumulation of these capitals may be considered to occur somewhat unconsciously for Waleed (as discussed above) as a result of a nexus of inheritance, natural ability, and opportunity.

Waleed's formal educational qualifications (the IB at Wesley College and a combined Engineering/Law Degree at The University of Melbourne) may be considered as amongst the most prestigious of formal educational qualifications and to bestow a "legally guaranteed value" in the cultural field. Waleed's educational capital may be considered to have been strongly influenced by his familial culture, where his parents and brother all placed a premium value upon education and possessed the knowledge as to how to achieve success. Education was central to both Waleed's parents moving to Australia and both ultimately worked in the field of youth education. They were both in a position to pass onto their son the values and capital that equip young people for success. Significantly, Waleed's older brother was also a beneficiary of this value system and his discipline and diligence served as a powerful example. Intelligent and capable, Waleed stayed within the state school system despite having numerous opportunities to attend a variety of prestigious private schools before finally choosing Wesley at his parent's behest. Under the guidance of his father, Waleed chose to complete the IB, gaining a very high score that provided him with the opportunity to attend The University

of Melbourne on a Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) that subsidized his education. Waleed's legal studies equipped him with the intellectual resources to engage critically with texts at a wider level and "naturalized truths" that shape dominant discourse.

Waleed's employment experiences have also bestowed him with extensive cultural capital and "know-how" as to how government and the media work. From his work as a Judge's Associate and then solicitor at Maddocks to his position as ICV spokesperson, Waleed has developed a familiarity and expertise in working in areas that require political solutions and working with often powerful public figures. This has been built upon by his experiences in the field of power since these earlier days. Waleed is clearly at ease with "power" and could be considered to have knowledge of its express limitations in a liberal democracy, bestowing him with the confidence to criticize abuse of power and those he believed were seeking to marginalize Australian Muslims.

Waleed's religious capital drawn upon to write (and sell) his book was arguably developed largely through his engagement with traditionalist Islamic sources and exposure to the practice of Islam in Australia through his brother and the YMA. It is arguable that his education first at Wesley and then through the University of Melbourne law school supplemented the critical analysis of Islamic sources, including Salafism and traditionalist sources. Exposure to Nurudeen Lemu's "Train the Trainer" course further challenged Waleed to ask questions about texts and bestowed him with the necessary intellectual resources and knowledge to write *People like us*.

In understanding the manner in which Waleed has utilized capital to achieve success in the field of power it is important to consider that if Bourdieu emphasized the competitive aspect of capital accumulation, Waleed, on the surface, appears to challenge any notion of this being a deliberate and explicit competition, often using the term "accident" as a descriptor for his life and success. In talking about his life and work Waleed also shied away from the public role of "advocate" preferring "explainer." However, despite this tendency to downplay the active dimension of his project, he has displayed an entrepreneurial and proactive approach, systematically and vigorously pursuing his education and taking full advantage of the subsequent professional options that have emerged. His statement that "action brings reaction" provides an important insight into the manner in which Waleed has leveraged from opportunities presented. From school scholarships to Presidency of the University of Melbourne Muslim Students Society to contacting Martin Flanagan from *The Age* to becoming media spokesperson of the Islamic Council of Victoria, working for Maddocks and working in wider spectrum of journalism, Waleed gradually built a base of symbolic capital that ultimately led to his recruitment by Monash University as a politics lecturer

and development of high levels of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals. The utilization of Waleed's capital has led to an "upward spiral" of opportunity and greater levels of social and symbolic capitals, allowing Waleed to bypass his critics and author his own future.

### *Habitus*

Of the many potential influences upon Waleed Aly's "matrix of dispositions" and sources of meaning, this analysis seeks to examine those in particular that have equipped him for success in his primary field of operation, the field of power.

While Waleed has placed little emphasis upon his early cultural influences, through growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class area, he was intimately exposed to dominant Australian identity and masculinity. His parents, particularly his father, encouraged him to seek to "fit in" by playing Australian rules football, cricket, and basketball (all with their own vernacular dress codes and cultures) and his brother had already paved a path, having undertaken much of the identity work of a second-generation Australian Muslim and was able to nurture Waleed's Islamic identity without forcing it upon him. His involvement in Islam through the YMA was similarly nurturing in an organization that encouraged an Australian Muslim identity and civic service to the wider community. Waleed's involvement in childhood sport, love of rock music, education at both a public and elite school and university, and employment in areas of the workforce dominated by middle-aged white Australian men allowed Waleed to tap into the dominant white male hegemonic masculinity; he is fluent in the language of sport, music, and work and even passionate about elements that form the cornerstone of dominant Australian culture (particularly in relation to male culture) including Australian Rules football and rock music.

Whilst Waleed attended state schools for the vast majority of his childhood and youth he was adamant that his time at Wesley was by far the most significant period of his schooling. There is little doubt that the encouragement of critical thinking and creativity necessary to achieve success in the IB and supportive environment for academic excellence strongly impacted upon him. The value system underpinning the delivery of the school's educational curriculum, particularly the emphasis upon social justice, appears easily compatible with the Islamic values Waleed was being instructed in through his brother and YMA. Importantly these values appear to have inoculated Waleed against prolonged involvement and absorption into Salafi politics during his time at the University of Melbourne. Indeed apart from what may be considered experimentation with political ideas, in much the way many

non-Muslim students explore different political movements at university, Waleed ended up displaying significant individual strength and leadership to not only be elected President of the society, but to change its political trajectory, steering it toward greater inclusion of women and opening up to greater engagement with non-Muslims.

In his education Waleed was largely instructed and influenced by white Australian men. Throughout his professional employment he has worked for and with or been influenced by white middle-aged men who are powerful players in their fields, including the law (Justice Kaye), media (Martin Flanagan, George Megalonis, Jon Faine), and academia (Pete Lentini, David Wright Neville). All are to varying degrees influential in the field of politics and cultural production at a level that may be considered a “liberal” opposition to the extremes and excesses of the political right. Indeed Waleed’s professional referees have been at the height of political power in Australia as a Prime Minister (Malcolm Fraser) and Federal Finance Minister (Lindsey Tanner).<sup>89</sup> The powerful ability to not only relate to these figures, but to elicit their active and continued support for his project identity and to form professional associations and friendships with them speaks directly to his mix of physical dispositions, presenting as a non-threatening, likeable, often humorous figure, and his inherent ability to easily relate to dominant white Australian hegemonic masculine culture.

Waleed’s desire to work in journalism and academia, areas he considers the “realm of ideas,” effectively aligns with the field of power, field of politics, and the field of Muslim cultural politics. Whilst Waleed maintained his professional development and training in engineering and law (even accepting guaranteed work as a judges associate with Justice Kaye in the Family Court over a cadetship exam at *The Age* newspaper), Waleed has constantly steered toward participation in these fields, to the extent that he left his job at law firm Maddocks before being guaranteed a job at Monash University. Waleed has utilized his embodied cultural capital that aids him in forming personal and professional relationships with similarly educated, white males with liberal perspectives and extensive social capital, and utilized his objective, institutionalized capital to steer toward his ideal career.

Waleed has consciously located his project in opposition to extremes from all ends of the politico and religio-political spectrum, actively challenging those he considers to be motivated by narrow self-interest and ignorance. He has taken full advantage of opportunities presented to him and indeed worked very hard to obtain them and is reflexively very aware of perceptions surrounding his position as a successful Australian Muslim, particularly criticisms. Waleed has actively utilized his cultural capital to defend Australian Muslims where necessary and to address wider issues from a position of



political power. Indeed whilst displaying civic courage and creativity in doing so, Waleed also reveals an awareness of his agency to act in the field of cultural production without concern about potential ramification that may discourage less confident and knowledgeable individuals.

Many influences have shaped Waleed Aly's matrix of dispositions including education (particularly exposure to critical thinking and hegemonic values), exposure to contextualist Islamic sources and scholars, comfort and active engagement with Western cultural influences and most importantly, a professional experience with power and dominant institutions. These have been internalized by Waleed, shaping the development and enactment of his project identity and his continued successes in the field of power and Muslim cultural politics.

### Conclusion

This chapter supports the hypothesis that young Australian-born Muslim men engaging in acts of constructive political action through cultural production possess significant levels of capital that provide them with confidence and empowerment to act within their fields.

Waleed clearly commands a vast amount of capital that he has actively wielded to improve his position in the field of power and to further his work as a public intellectual working toward a society that recognizes and accepts differences based on common humanity. This chapter reveals that not only are Islam and family important contributors to political action, but that education and employment experiences and internalization of Western culture is also a key contributor to the form of action. These findings also challenge data suggesting that educational capital amongst Australian Muslims is not converted into an improved social trajectory. It sheds further light on this problem, suggesting that both the type of degree and its mix with exposure to Western cultures, building a level of cultural capital to communicate with wider non-Muslim society may play a role.

This study of Waleed Aly serves as a study of the complexity of Australian Muslim male identity and as a powerful challenge to reductionist discourse of the Muslim man as disempowered and "at-risk," or as "threat" of participation in terrorism. This study in fact inverts these stereotypes and reveals the inherent capabilities of Muslim men in Australia. In a field where competition is often fierce and public, Waleed has thrived without the need for espousing polarizing discourse that brings publicity and attention much more easily than nuanced insights. Waleed's extensive resources of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals have equipped him to negotiate the complex power structures and dominant institutions that pervade the field of power, ranging from

elite educational institutions and law firms to the media and government. These successes have supplemented his participation in the field of Muslim cultural politics, shaping the broader field in which Australian Muslims live and contributing to denying hardline textualists the political climate conducive to their narratives based on a hostile “other.” Waleed has experienced a continual upward trajectory, highlighting the positive potential for political engagement by Australian Muslims should adequate social resources such as education and professional opportunity be accessible. For this reason, Waleed Aly may be considered a powerful study of the emerging face of Islam in Australia.

## CHAPTER 5

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# The Benbrika Jama'ah: "The Reward of the Mujahid"

### Introduction

In the decade 2001–2011, one group of Australian-born Muslim men came to the forefront of government, media, and wider public consciousness to an unprecedented degree. In 2005 the Benbrika Jama'ah became the first Australian Muslims subjected to Australia's new counter-terrorism laws, being arrested as part of Operation Pendennis, a multi-agency operation involving the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and Victoria Police. This resulted in the 2008 conviction of Jama'ah members and their leader, Algerian-born Abdul Nacer Benbrika, making them Australia's first convicted terrorists. These young men moved from a highly marginalized position with the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics to central to political debates within both. Far from achieving their goals, group members could be considered to have reinforced and indeed strengthened the position of the dominant hegemonies they were seeking to act against. Due to the nature of their attempted action the Benbrika Jama'ah serve as an important comparative study of political action by Australian-born Muslim men. This chapter, based on an analysis of transcripts and wider sources, seeks to develop an understanding of the Jama'ah's identity, social influences, and how these have interacted to shape their seeking to act politically.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The young men examined within this study are those that were convicted of terrorism offenses as a result of Operation Pendennis. These men with their age and suburb of residence at the time of arrest are: Aimen Joud



**Figure 5.1** Benbrika Jama'ah

Members of the Benbrika Jama'ah during a court appearance (February 13 2008). From Front Left: Abdul Nacer Benbrika, Aimen Joud, Shane Kent, Fadl Sayadi, Hany Taha and Shoue Hammoud. From Rear Left: Amer Haddara, Majed Raad, Ezzit Raad, Ahmed Raad, Bassam Raad and Abdullah Merhi. B. Raad, M. Raad, H. Taha and S. Hammoud were acquitted.

Credit to Anne Spudvilas.

(21, Hoppers Crossing), Abdullah Merhi (21, Fawkner) Fadl Sayadi (26, Coburg), Ezzit Raad (24, Preston), Ahmed Raad (23, Fawkner) Amer Haddara (26, Yarraville), Shane Kent (29, Meadow Heights), and the group's leader, Abdul Nacer Benbrika (46, Dallas) (Figure 5.1).<sup>2</sup> Izzydeen Atik (24, Williamstown) gave evidence against the group and was sentenced separately.

All members of the *Jama'ah* except Shane Kent (Anglo-Australian) and Benbrika (Algerian) were of Lebanese background, whilst all members other than Shane Kent (who converted at age 19) had become practicing within the five years prior to their arrest.<sup>3</sup> The *Jama'ah* had an average age of just over 24 at the time of arrest (excluding Benbrika). The geographic spread of the group across Melbourne's northern and western suburbs correlates with areas of high Muslim concentration whilst the predominantly Lebanese background of group members has been the focus of considerable attention as very few instances of global terrorism are documented to involve young men of this background.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless the group may be considered multicultural in nature with the leader coming from Algeria and an Anglo-Australian member.<sup>5</sup>

The group formed when Benbrika met Joud and Sayadi through the Islamic Information and Support Centre of Australia (IISCA) organization and the other members through the death through coronary heart

disease of Mansour Raad (brother of Ahmed and Ezzit Raad) in 2003.<sup>6</sup> The Jama'ah first came to the attention of authorities in 2004 when a member of Melbourne's Muslim communities informed the Government that the group was planning a terrorist attack.<sup>7</sup> This led to the establishment of Operation Pendennis and an extremely intensive surveillance regime focused upon the group. In the 16 months between the tip off and arrest of group members on November 8, 2005, the full resources of the state were deployed against the group. The agencies involved cumulatively conducted over 5,000 hours of visual surveillance, intercepted 97,480 calls, and collected over 16,400 hours of listening and phone intercept device material. In addition, over 26 gigabytes of Internet data use was collected.<sup>8</sup> This cost the state over \$25 million.

The trial of group members in the Victorian Supreme Court occurred between February and September 2008, attracting significant national and international coverage ranging from the *New York Times*<sup>9</sup> (United States) to *The Guardian*<sup>10</sup> (United Kingdom). Group members were convicted of belonging to a jihadist terrorist organization seeking to carry out a violent terrorist attack against their fellow citizens, most likely through the detonation of an explosive or incendiary device in pursuit of violent jihad at a site or event of cultural significance. Group members received sentences ranging from four and a half to seven years (non-parole periods) whilst Benbrika, as the group's leader, received a 15-year term. In the absence of a tangible cultural output it is beneficial to consider terrorism as a political act in and of itself.

### **Terrorism as a Political Act**

A vast body of literature has been written, particularly in the past decade that seeks to examine "terrorism" and to define its attributes and root causes. This inquiry ranges from the political, sociological, and anthropological to the legal and philosophical. Richardson argues from a political perspective that "Terrorism simply means deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes . . ." <sup>11</sup> whilst from a philosophical perspective Muhammad Kamal considers the essence of terrorism is "not to subjugate but to annihilate the other."<sup>12</sup> According to Kamal, the terrorist identity is "not enriched with the element of difference"<sup>13</sup> and "therefore, it stands as an impediment to the progress of human history."<sup>14</sup> Terrorism may therefore be understood as not only physically, but socially and culturally destructive. It has been widely considered that it is legally difficult to define a terrorist act due to the wide variety of variables such as intent, purpose, and method. In this respect Nicholas Perry asserts that "the search for a definition for has aptly

been compared to the quest for the holy grail.”<sup>15</sup> The Australian Government, define terrorism as:

...an act or threat, intended to advance a political, ideological or religious cause by coercing or intimidating an Australian or foreign government or the public, by causing serious harm to people or property, creating a serious risk to the health and safety to the public, or seriously disrupting trade, critical infrastructure or electronic systems.<sup>16</sup>

This definition is clearly concerned with enabling the prosecution of those individuals and groups that the state deems as seeking to carry out terrorist acts. An individual has to be proven to be a member of a “terrorist organization” defined as: “an organization that is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in, or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not the terrorist act occurs).”<sup>17</sup> This research acknowledges that terrorism can be considered a tool of both the state and individual issue motivated groups alike. These legal definitions are very broad and successful prosecution under this legislation reveals very little about the nature of identity in those convicted other than that terrorism is clearly considered a significant threat by the state.

### **The Benbrika Jama’ah: Aims, Method, and Targets**

The following analysis proceeds from the fact that members of the Benbrika Jama’ah were found guilty in a jury of their peers in a court of law and exhausted all avenues of appeal. It acknowledges that no court proceedings are perfect and, indeed, that the process is very human and as such open to human flaws. The prosecution built a narrative out of “facts” that they were able to successfully tie in to the counter-terrorism laws in the mind of jury members. This analysis acknowledges that listening device and telephone intercept transcripts were attained involuntarily, without the consent of the men of the group, yet were done so as a matter of public interest and that the Honorable Justice Bernard Bongiorno released the transcripts in this interest so that lessons may be learned. Unlike the previous two chapters, not one member of the group was interviewed by the researcher and no public statements were released by any of the young men of the group (Benbrika’s *7.30 Report* interview on ABC television in 2005 involved none of the men). Hence, without the opportunity to meet the individuals concerned and for participant observation it was very possible for the researcher to project pre-conceptions upon the group. In addition, the researcher had access to just 482 conversations utilized in the prosecution (though this results in approximately 4,000 pages of transcripts). As much as possible reflexivity, sensitivity, and honesty were utilized in analyzing and representing the data.

The data source did, however, have important benefits. In capturing the informal and unguarded conversations of group members, transcripts revealed considerable insights into group dynamics and individual dispositions and, if carefully considered, the social influences and their interactions that shaped group members. Access to these transcripts overcame the impracticalities of interviewing potentially hostile young men that were under sustained social pressure from authorities during this time. Utilized properly and with great care, these transcripts offer unparalleled depth and insights into the everyday experiences and influences upon young Australian-born Muslim men discussing and seeking to utilize terrorism as a form of political action.

Aims, method, and targets reveal the effect the group sought to achieve in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. In the absence of a public statement by group members about their activities it is necessary to rely upon the Crown's summation of the case in court. The Crown Case against the Benbrika Jama'ah established the centrality of the concept of jihad to the Benbrika Jama'ah's actions:

The cause to be advanced by terrorist action was said to be the belief—taught by Benbrika and accepted by members of the organization—that they were under a religious obligation to pursue violent *jihad* against the *kufr* (non-believers).<sup>18</sup>

In this case, the terrorist act itself was to be the ultimate public statement. The aim of a terrorist act, as discussed is to shape the field of power, highlighting the group's message and undermining the legitimacy and strength of the dominant hegemony by proving its inability to protect its citizens and indeed causing a level of societal fear and "terror" that may be exploited. This was manifested in the three independent, yet related key motivations and aims emerged from an examination of evidence: the primary desire was to force the Australian Government to *alter foreign policy and withdraw soldiers from "Muslim lands,"* to take *revenge for the death and perceived suffering of fellow Muslims* and finally, to *radicalize the Australian Muslim community* in the cause of their jihad. A fourth separate, yet key motivator was to *gain spiritual rewards* for participation, revealing the significance of group members' desire to accumulate religious capital.

### **The Foreign Policy Imperative**

Group members sought to coerce the Australian government to withdraw its soldiers from what the group considers Muslim nations, particularly Iraq.

In one particularly important conversation Benbrika states to Merhi the significance of carrying out a terrorist act with mass casualties:

*Benbrika:* When you, in here, in Australia, when you do something they stop to send the troops. If you kill, we kill, here a thousand, the Government is going to think . . .

*Abdullah Merhi:* Bring the troops back. Because if you get large numbers here the Government will listen . . . And then *Allah willing*<sup>19</sup> that's been, that's helping our brothers and sisters, you see all these people in, in they get the people and they say to this country leave or else . . .<sup>20</sup>

In this conversation Benbrika refers to the Madrid train bombing of 2004 that killed over 200 and wounded over 2,000 Spanish and international citizens and is considered in jihadist discourse to have resulted in a change of Spanish government and subsequent Spanish withdrawal of troops from Iraq. In a separate conversation Benbrika mused “. . . Spain, why did it stop? Because it was hit.”<sup>21</sup> Benbrika and group members appear to have calculated that a terrorist act of significant scale would similarly undermine the resolve of the Australian government and people to persist in the Iraq war. Terrorist action was deemed a viable tool to influence the Australian government and to assist Muslims in nations where coalition forces were present.

### Revenge for the Suffering of Muslims

Importantly, whilst the group sought the withdrawal of Australian soldiers, punishment and revenge for the humiliation and suffering of Muslims was also central to their aims. This aim and motivation closely ties in with Kamal's “essence of terrorism” although it may also be considered to have a close relationship with the concept of social injury expanded upon by Noble and Humphrey. Revenge is considered a legitimate end in itself. In the same pivotal conversation with Merhi, Benbrika urges:

*Benbrika:* Whoever transgresses you, transgress him as he transgress you and

*Merhi:* The innocent ones?

*Benbrika:* The innocent ones. Because he kills our innocent ones.<sup>22</sup>

Here a strong current of humiliation and injury at the perceived suffering of Muslims overseas pervades the discussion. The concept of *umma*, the Muslim community, is an important aspect of Islam, transcending across national



boundaries and resulting in a level of solidarity Muslims suffering injustice anywhere on earth. In this particular case the humiliation and injury of group members was linked through the concept of *umma* to the wider international Muslim community. Benbrika was arguing for revenge for these perceived transgressions:

If we want to die for jihad we do maximum damage, maximum damage. Damage their buildings with everything, and damage their lives just to show them. That's what we waiting for . . .<sup>23</sup>

The revenge and punishment to be extracted was to be purely of a violent and destructive nature with no recourse to debate or discussion. This would inflict upon the perceived aggressor an experience of the injury and humiliation felt by the group.

### Radicalization of the Australian Muslim Population

Another lesser, though nonetheless important, aim of the Benbrika terrorist organization was to awaken the Australian Muslim population to the international struggle and requirement for jihad. In a conversation with Fadyl Sayadi, Benbrika decries the humiliation of Muslims internationally and the leadership of what he considers illegitimate regimes across the Muslim world, inferring that the group's activities would open Australians Muslims up to the realities of the world:

*Benbrika:* . . . Fight them until there is no *polytheism* and until the religion will be all for Allah . . . This is strange people doing here something strange, *now, now, the people over here, even the Muslim, how many there are?* Four thous, four hundred thousand five hundred thousand maybe more, need to be, *gradually, gradually these things they will learn them.*

*Sayadi:* [Inaudible]

*Benbrika:* *You'll say* maybe it's strange for them because [Inaudible]. *Gradually, gradually,* everyone is going to talk, will become like normal.<sup>24</sup>

The aim of awakening the Australian Muslim population to the necessity of jihad, as with influencing Australian foreign policy, is a political motivation for terrorist action. This statement also demonstrates that whilst seeking primarily to act within the field of power, the group was also seeking to change

the field of Muslim cultural politics through the “naturalization” of radical ideas. In this the Jama’ah would, through their actions, act as change agents.

### Accumulating Spiritual Capital

Whilst the first three categories here may be understood in the context of the group seeking to act politically, the concept of spiritual “rewards” for their actions was arguably the key motivating factor in the group’s activities. An accumulation of rewards was considered pivotal for entry to heaven, a place in the Islamic tradition of “rest and relaxation, free from pain and suffering and full of plenty.”<sup>25</sup> Bereft (as an analysis reveals) of other forms of capital, the spiritual capital offered by participation in jihad was a clear motivator and provided an important source of meaning for group members, aiding them in redeeming past actions, in gaining a sense of personal significance and in seeking a better future. This is a factor comparatively understated in contemporary academic literature. This is expanded upon shortly.

### Method

The steps taken by the Benbrika Jama’ah toward a terrorist act are as revealing as their targets. They reveal the similarities and inspiration drawn from overseas jihadist terrorist organizations and nature of identity whilst providing an insight into the level of capital possessed by group members involved in the plot.

The prosecution argued that the proposed terrorist act was the intentional detonation of one or more explosive or incendiary devices, or the use of weapons.<sup>26</sup> The prosecution argued that the group was constituted as an “organization” because individuals filled key roles. Ahmed Raad, for example, was the alleged “treasurer” of the group whilst Fadl Sayadi was the “coordinator” of the group, organizing meetings. It was asserted by the prosecution that under Benbrika’s direction, the group established a *sandooq* (collection box), with members required to give to the box what they could afford on a regular occasion. The prosecution sought to establish that this fund was central to the group’s efforts to finance their attack. The *sandooq* totaled \$18,000 when seized by Australian Federal Police in the raids of 2005. Whilst seemingly a low figure, it is important to consider that the Madrid train bombing in 2004 is estimated to have cost as little as \$10,000.<sup>27</sup>

To achieve their aim of committing a violent terrorist act, group members attempted to source explosives and weapons. Benbrika was propositioned with the opportunity to purchase ammonium nitrate, a key ingredient in

many bombs used successfully in terrorist actions, by an ASIO agent, "SIO 39."<sup>28</sup> Benbrika discussed this at length with the agent<sup>29</sup> and was captured on film by an ASIO surveillance team checking the aftermath of the detonation of a test device at the Mount Disappointment State Forest, 60 kilometers north of Melbourne, arguably a key piece of evidence. Izzydeen Atik and Aimen Joud sought to obtain pistols though refused to pay the \$3,000 asked<sup>30</sup> whilst in a poorly coded conversation with a middleman, Joud was offered "9 mil tiles" (code for 9 mm pistols) for \$6,500. The lack of awareness of Joud about weaponry was established by his argument with a middleman that he wanted a .22 caliber weapon (air rifle) when he was offered significantly more powerful weapons. Whilst attempts to obtain weapons were somewhat amateurish, they nevertheless constituted a significant step toward the actual act of terrorism.

The prosecution argued that the Jama'ah undertook training camps and group bonding exercises as a prelude to carrying out a terrorist act. Examples included trips to Louth, in New South Wales where some group members met and camped with members from a New South Wales-based group later convicted of terrorism offenses. Batteries were found in the campfires with electrical wires attached, suggesting detonation devices were tested. Bullet casing and rounds were also found.<sup>31</sup> Members of the Jama'ah were also stopped by police in the rural town of Kinglake, in the Dandenong Mountains north east of Melbourne, at night after a suspicious local heard them raucously moving through the bush.<sup>32</sup> This amateurish attempt at stealth indicates a lack of requisite cultural capital or "skill sets" necessary to successfully conduct such activity within the group.

The prosecution argued that these and similar activities signaled the "intent" to act, triggering the state to intervene and arrest group members before an attack could be carried out. They demonstrate that far from possessing "terrorist capital" the group was seeking to follow instructions obtained from online materials (discussed shortly) and to "copycat" other successful actors including the Spanish and London train bombers.

## Targets

Targets of the group provide critical insights into whom the group considered the "other" and the "enemy." The Benbrika group was found to have actively sought to target innocent civilians at sites of dominant cultural hegemony and tactical infrastructure. Possible targets of the Jama'ah identified by the prosecution included the 2005 Australian Football League (AFL) Grand Final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, a 2006 National Australia Bank Pre Season Cup AFL game, Crown Casino,<sup>33</sup> the West Gate Bridge,<sup>34</sup> the rail network

at Yarraville<sup>35</sup> the Stock Exchange, Flinders Street rail station,<sup>36</sup> and the 2004 Federal Election.<sup>37</sup> Many of these were discounted on the quality and veracity of evidence given by the presiding judge, the Honorable Justice Bongiorno.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, in examining these an interesting dichotomy emerges between those possible sites chosen for their tactical significance such as rail and transport hubs that would likely inflict greater casualties (due to their confined nature), and those chosen for their symbolic dimension as a site of cultural hegemony such as the football, casino, and stock exchange.

### **Neo-resistance in the Fields of Power and Muslim Cultural Politics**

The Benbrika Jama'ah's position in the field of power and Muslim cultural politics was highly marginal prior to their arrest for plotting acts of terrorism. They possessed virtually no symbolic capital to act successfully in the field of power with the wider Australian community whilst possessing at best, a level of subcultural capital within a small section of Melbourne's Muslim communities. The group was clearly not increasing in size nor were they building a general base of community support vital to ascension in a liberal democratic society. In contrast the group was ostracized, excluded from mainstream institutions for their perspectives and by their own logic, sort distinction from these institutions.

In their actions the group displayed characteristics consistent with Sageman's definition of radicalization.<sup>39</sup> The group clearly displayed moral outrage at the perceived treatment of Muslims overseas and perceived a "war against Islam." Resonance of the jihadi narrative with personal experiences is evident in the Jama'ah whilst the group led by Abdul Nacer Benbrika clearly acted as a mobilizing factor. In seeking to carry out an act of terrorism using an explosive device at a place of symbolic cultural hegemony such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground or Casino or of tactical significance such as a train station, the group sought to assert a form of physical and symbolic primacy in both fields, triggering political and cultural change. That would both bring their agenda to the fore and gain them spiritual rewards (religious capital), earning them favor with God. This attempted incursion into these fields earned fierce and unrelenting opposition from key players in both.

The full resources of the state were deployed against the Jama'ah from the time of the first "tip off" about the group in 2004 until the time of writing, with the continued incarceration of several members. Extensive legislation (The Counter-Terrorism Act) was passed on November 3, 2005, just days before it was used directly against the group. Tens of thousands of man hours costing millions of dollars were spent surveilling, analyzing, prosecuting, and imprisoning the group.

The key players in the field of power and Australian Muslim cultural politics acted very quickly to distance Muslim communities from the Jama'ah plot and members. In the field of power, the then Prime Minister John Howard asserted in a radio interview that Australian Muslims were against terrorism and that the arrested suspects and their intentions were "totally unrepresentative of Islam."<sup>40</sup> This was very closely aligned to the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) perspective. In a press release dated November 9, 2005, the ICV President Malcolm Thomas stated:

Muslims are profoundly concerned, perhaps more than anyone else at the possibility that these people are planning to commit terrorist acts in Australia . . . As long as the authorities act within the limit of their powers, they should have the community's support.<sup>41</sup>

Waleed Aly as ICV spokesperson expressed his faith in the court process, stating further that:

The accused can plead their innocence and if the prosecution proves its case, these people should be punished. That's the way it should be.<sup>42</sup>

Sheikh Fethmi el Imam strongly condemned Benbrika a week later claiming:

Islamic *jihad* asks for this man to do jihad first and foremost on himself to purify his thoughts, his mind, his intentions toward his country which sheltered him, protected him and allowed him to reside here peacefully and gave him a chance to earn an honest and honorable living, and when unemployed it fed him and his children with the Centrelink offerings. Islam teaches this man to be grateful to those who treat him well.<sup>43</sup>

That very similar responses came from a Prime Minister heading a government that maligned Australian Muslims as not adhering to "Australian values" and leading Muslim political and Muslim spiritual leaders reveals the marginalization and ostracism of the group from both fields, whilst highlighting the unique dynamic of Australian multiculturalism that saw efforts to buffer the impact of the arrests upon the wider Muslim community; a reinforcing of a commitment to dominant legal and political principles in the wake of the arrests by two sides that were actively opposed on the introduction of the new terrorism laws.

The Benbrika Jama'ah may be understood as displaying a radicalized "neo-resistance" identity that effectively led to an existential struggle for what they believed to constitute Islam. This is an extension of Manuel Castells conception of "resistance" identity. Whilst the group may be considered to occupy

positions devalued and “stigmatized by the logic of domination” and to have built trenches of resistance on the basis of “principles different from and opposed to those permeating the institutions of society,” their planning an act of terror saw them leaving the trenches of resistance and actively taking the fight to their perceived enemy.

The failure of the group was comprehensive. Group members lost their liberty, potential for a viable future and most significantly, reinforced and contributed to building further the capital possessed by their adversaries. The Australian government continued to maintain the presence of soldiers in Muslim nations including Iraq and Afghanistan and projected its ability to protect its citizens from danger. Muslim community institutions continued to shape the public face of Islam and define the political agenda. If Salafi jihadist terrorism is an act of the politically weak designed to project a political perspective and build a base of support, then an attempted act of terrorism that never got beyond planning and attempts to acquire weapons before it was crushed and that had little to no influence in projecting a political agenda and building support was an indicator not only of weakness, but complete disempowerment and a downward spiral.

In seeking to understand the complete lack of success of the group and their downward trajectory in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics it is necessary to examine how social influences and their interactions shaped the political activity of these young men.

### **Key Social Influences: Islamic teachers**

Leader of the Jama’ah, Abdul Nacer Benbrika, first came to Australia from Algeria (a nation that has experienced the brutal legacy of postcolonial conflict and repression for over half a century) in May 1989. Benbrika married a Lebanese woman with Australian citizenship in 1992 (with whom he fathered six children) and was granted permanent residency in 1996 and citizenship in 1998. Largely self-taught, Benbrika relied upon welfare payments to his family that doubled as a scholarly stipend, building a reputation as a knowledgeable, yet marginalized and radical scholar. Benbrika was expelled from the Preston Mosque and in 2000 moved to a Brunswick prayer hall with another prominent radical figure, Sheikh Muhammad Omran<sup>44</sup> and his group the IISCA. Benbrika was soon after expelled from IISCA for views that were even more hardline than those proposed by Omran.<sup>45</sup> From this hardline textualist Salafi perspective, Benbrika established his own Jama’ah, acting as what Yasmien would consider as a “free agent,”<sup>46</sup> cultivating a small following of young men with whom his emphasis on hardline textualist interpretation and on action over reflection “touched a nerve.”<sup>47</sup> Original members were

Aimen Joud and Fadl Sayadi, who moved with Benbrika from IISCA, whilst others followed in 2003. It was established that in the case of Ahmed Raad, the death of his brother caused him to "recommit himself to his religion" and to seek out a range of spiritual teachers.<sup>48</sup> The nucleus of this group formed the "terrorist organization" at the heart of this study.

Abdul Nacer Benbrika anointed himself as the *Amir* of the group, positioning himself as the most significant source of guidance in his follower's lives:

*Benbrika:* Your family has got a problem. Where do you go?

*Izzydeen Atik:* Amir.

*Unidentified Male 2:* To Amir.

*Benbrika:* Ah that's it. The problem would be finished when the Amir will come.<sup>49</sup>

In the above conversation, Benbrika positions himself as the go to point for individuals in times of vulnerability and stress. Here the pivotal role of family brought to light in literature is supplanted by the teacher. Benbrika's teachings may be defined broadly as falling in line with the jihadi Salafi narrative. Jihadi Salafis view the world in polarized terms perceiving a cohesive and united attempt to destroy Islam and positing themselves as the true defenders of the faith. This is clearly evident in Benbrika's only public statement, a television interview for the ABC's 7.30 Report shortly after the first counter-terrorism raids:

... my religion doesn't tolerate other religions. It doesn't tolerate. The only one law which needs to spread—it can be here or anywhere else—is Islam . . . Here are two laws—there is an Australian law and there is an Islamic law.<sup>50</sup>

This narrative resonates with other hardline textualists groups such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, providing adherents with a potent source of meaning, positioning them as a part of the international struggle to restore Islam to centrality in the field of power. However, some key differences exist in both the violent form of action advocated and sources utilized to inform these opinions. The following section analyzes the key sources utilized by Benbrika and the group that formed the base of this identity.

### Islamic Texts

The Benbrika Jama'ah drew upon four interrelated categories of sources; The Quran, Salafi tracts, jihadist tracts, and "how-to" manuals providing information for building weapons. This analysis draws upon those sources derived

from listening device and telephone intercept transcripts and the court case against the group, examining both the core themes of these sources and the style that Benbrika used to impart his interpretations in his role as Sheikh.

The evidence source utilized for exemplar experiences a difficult juncture in describing the lessons taught by Benbrika as only those referring to violent jihad were tendered in evidence by the prosecution. They may represent only a percentage of the teachings. However what is clear is that select verses are utilized by Benbrika in his teachings that emphasized the personal responsibility to engage in jihad and the rewards for doing so. In one listening device intercept Benbrika is heard stating clearly: “we have to do something here you know, the *kufri*; they’re killing our brothers and sisters.”<sup>51</sup> An intercept from a later class reveals the centrality of terrorism to Benbrika’s conception of jihad:

... Terrorism. *And that’s why, Allah praise is to he, what he said in the Quran ‘And prepare for them whatever force you can and the whips of horses to terrorise the enemy of Allah and your enemy’. Prepare yourself, so, in jihad . . . Prepare all that you’ve got, to terrorise them. To Terrorize, the enemy of Allah and your enemy.*<sup>52</sup>

Important aspects covered in Benbrika’s class related the concepts of “rewards” for participation in jihad and Martyrdom, dying in the cause of Allah, which both dramatically increases the magnitude of reward and expedites the process to receive it. In a particularly detailed lesson in September 2005 on the rules of jihad as Benbrika and likeminded scholars interpreted them. Benbrika outlined various rulings about the permissibility of killing innocents prior to a discussion of the rewards for participation. Benbrika assures Amer Haddara and Mostofa Osman (a group associate) that even though they have not yet become “*Mujahid*” (warriors), they still gain rewards for their intent to act:

*Benbrika: As far as the reward is concerned. With respect to the issue of the faith. The reward—that’s why the prophet, Allah’s prayers and blessings on him, said, he said, ‘The person who dies in his bed but wants to carry out jihad’, what reward does he give him?*

*Mostofa Osman: The reward of the Mujahid*

*Benbrika: The reward of the Mujahid even if he dies in his bed—he is advancing the cause, he is asking, he is searching a gap, he is searching and so on, he is gathering men, the main thing is that he is a part, he will be given the reward of the active Mujahid . . .*<sup>53</sup>

Transcripts also reveal a preoccupation with the verses most focused on wars during the time of the Prophet such as the “Cow” chapter and “Bee”



chapters.<sup>54</sup> These verses written in a time of tribal warfare that characterized seventh-century Medina are applied directly to twenty-first-century Australia to provide a source of religious sanctity for the group's actions, providing them with a sense of purpose and source of deep meaning.

Historical works of scholarship mentioned within transcripts are evidently influential upon the group, revealing the intellectual lineage of the groups thinking and providing context for their more contemporary Islamic influences. Ibn Tamiyah (661CE/1268AD – 728CE/1328AD) emerges as a revered and influential figure upon Benbrika and group members.<sup>55</sup> Richard Bonney notes, "No other Muslim writer, medieval or contemporary, has exercised as much influence on the modern radical Islamist movement."<sup>56</sup> The selective utilization of Ibn Tamiyah by members of the group is clear when for example Ahmed Raad, in conversation with Ezzit Raad, refers to Ibn Tamiyah's justifications for killing "the *Kufr*,"<sup>57</sup> and later pleads with Benbrika to teach Tamiyah's "*Book of Jihad*."<sup>58</sup> The subtleties and nuances of Ibn Tamiyah's work and the fourteenth-century context in which it is located are clearly lost upon the group, who take a textualist and dogmatic perspective regarding his contribution to their cause.

A key insight into important historical influences upon the group emerged in Benbrika's outlining of a "lesson plan" in the months prior to the conclusion of Operation Pendennis. This plan included *Kitaab al Tawhid* ("The book of Monotheism"), *Bolough Al Maram min Adilat al Ahkam* (Achieving the Objective According to the Evidence of the Ordinances), and the *Book of Jihad*. The clear lineage of these historical works—written by those throughout Islamic history who have emphasized the importance of a return to the time of the prophet, the importance of violence, and conflict to protect and extend Islam and a highly proscriptive way of life for which adherence gains rewards with Allah is clear. It is important that very little, if any, contemporary academic literature focuses upon the engagement of historical sources by young Western Muslims and how these are mediated. This constitutes a clear gap in important knowledge about factors influencing political action.

The prosecution referred to the collection of material utilized by the group as a "common jihadi library"<sup>59</sup> shared predominantly amongst Aimen Joud, Abdullah Merhi, and Ahmed and Majed Raad. It was argued that this constituted "doctrinal material" that served as a base for the group to plan and coordinate their activities. Titles included *Clarification of what occurred in America*, *The Islamic Legitimacy of Martyrdom Operations*, *In the Heart of Green Birds*, *The Battlefield: The Safest Place on Earth*, *Essay regarding the rule of the blood, wealth and honor of the disbelievers*, and *I am not sad, from the son of a Shaheed*.

Importantly, not one of these sources originates from within Australia and the majority of them are reproduced into English from Arabic. Contrary to Gary Bunt's perspective that "cyber Islamic environments can foster the development of religious understanding and expression,"<sup>60</sup> it appears that very little effort was made to seek alternate perspectives online by group members. Lacking in local content and context these Salafi jihadi sources may be considered entirely foreign, yet powerful influences upon young Australian-born Muslim men who were more than likely introduced to them by Benbrika. The sources, with their emphasis on spiritual rewards for martyrdom, appear to have been accepted *en masse* without critical introspection and engagement, ensuring their consistency and minimal "corruption" from Australian cultural influences.

### Muslim Peers

Friendships amongst the group and their consolidation behind Benbrika as their spiritual guide and organizer were clearly an important influence upon the Jama'ah's preparation for a terrorist act. As noted previously, radicalization literature is more likely to consider the group as a social influence on individual behavior. In addition to his "four prong" approach, Marc Sageman argues that the group functions as an "interactive echo chamber encouraging escalation of grievances and beliefs in conspiracy to the point of hatred."<sup>61</sup> Sageman proposes the paradigm of "in-group love" and "out-group hate" as a broadly applicable frame for understanding the group's influence on the individual, suggesting a clear delineation between the two. This frame is utilized to consider the nature of group influence upon its constituent members.

It is evident that group members had a loyalty to the Jama'ah and Benbrika as their leader. Individuals actively contributed to a *sandoog* and referred to each other as "bro" or "the brothers" on many occasions.<sup>62</sup> Many conversations are punctuated by jokes and other forms of humor, indicating enjoyment by group members in each other's company. The various activities undertaken by group members including dirt biking, camping, and fishing trips as well as the sheer volume of phone calls amongst the group indicate their familiarity and the closeness of their relationships. A clear code exists that no individual member is to talk against the group.<sup>63</sup> However, in-group suspicion and competition are also important attributes of the dynamic that yield significant insights into the dispositions of group members.

A great deal of time and effort by group members is spent questioning other group member's loyalty and commitment to the Jama'ah and on in-fighting. In conversation Ahmed Raad claims to Benbrika that Aimen Joud

has failed to repay loans from the *sandoog*. Clearly emotional Raad complains, "How are you meant to do things with these brothers when you can't even trust them?"<sup>64</sup> In a later conversation between Benbrika and Atik, Benbrika complains that "every brother is talking against the other"<sup>65</sup> whilst Fadl Sayadi complains to Benbrika in emotive terms:

*... no one wants to work anymore Sheikh . . . No one is working anymore. No one wants the whats-called you know. The brotherhood is very bad I swear to Allah, man. I'm disgusted . . . If they can't work as they please they don't want to work anymore . . . I swear to Allah it's sickening . . .*<sup>66</sup>

Sayadi later goes to great lengths to stop "the brothers" fighting on a week-end trip away, reporting seating arrangements for the trip to Benbrika stating "You can't just put them together, they are like chickens. They fight with each other."<sup>67</sup> These themes pervade the group's dialogue and clear tensions exist between different group members at different times. Far from "in-group love," this in-group tension, competition, and suspicion actively undermined the group's operational capability, revealing an apparent lack of professional cultural capital involved in actions such as working together cooperatively (teamwork), planning, and discipline.

Out-group hatred is a clear feature of the group dynamic. Benbrika expressed in one lesson "What you have to do in jihad, you have to show them the hatred."<sup>68</sup> Sufis in many ways at the opposite end of the Islamic spectrum are disparaged<sup>69</sup> and more "moderate" individuals such as Sheikh Fethmi and the Preston Mosque are actively criticized within group discussions.<sup>70</sup> However, whilst such criticism is common to the group throughout the transcripts, a greater ferocity of critique is reserved for fellow Salafi Muslims. Samir Mohtadi, the leader of IISCA in Coburg, was subjected to particular vitriol as a suspected informant to the Australian government on the group.<sup>71</sup> Benbrika refers to Mohtadi as a "dog"<sup>72</sup> on several occasions and declares that he is "close to not being a Muslim" on another.<sup>73</sup> On one occasion Bassam Raad, an individual closely aligned with the group, threatened to shoot Mohtadi in the aftermath of police raids.<sup>74</sup> On another occasion, Shoue Muhammad, acquitted in the court case, however, closely aligned with the group, pleaded with Benbrika to approve the bashing of suspected informers:

*Shoue Hammoud: . . . Sheikh even if we don't want to get involved we get brothers, they'll come from interstate . . . They'll break their heads and then leave. This will shut them up. Because Sheikh . . . these people big problem. They're big problem them brothers.*

*Benbrika: They are—not, not [inaudible] . . .*

*Shoue Hammoud:* They're big problem, very big problem. *I know* Sheikh, I gone to the Preston Mosque and *I've seen, I've seen them*, they plot, they love plotting, you understand? Always together, sitting there, I know 'em, they're like that, laughing at us, *I mean*, like, these brothers, they're misguided and this, that.

*Benbrika:* Every minute, every second . . . <sup>75</sup>

That such animosity and displays of aggressive hyper-masculinity are directed at other Muslims, particularly those with the politics and beliefs closest to their own could be argued to reveal the sense of isolation felt by group members and the lack of honorable recognition and social injury caused by this. This behavior fits within the conception of a *rebellious* masculinity outlined by Dwyer et al. that is highly performative and “constructed and enacted in relation to male peers”<sup>76</sup> or “protest masculinity,” recuperating a sense of dignity. The aggressive hyper-masculinity evident in threats to shoot and or beat opponents reveals a lack of resources (cultural capital) and social resilience to deal with problems in a more constructive manner.

One additional important characteristic of the group dynamic that influenced the form of political action taken was the level of organic “upward pressure” from group members upon Benbrika to “organize them” and to carry out an attack. This stands in contrast to common media portrayals of the central role of Benbrika within the group as a corrupting influence.<sup>77</sup> Benbrika may well have been a facilitator, spiritual guide, and organizer of the group; however, others took initiative and an active role in the organization and Benbrika’s teachings tapped into an anger and predisposition to act violently that was already arguably existent within group members.

The pattern of upward pressure on Benbrika emerges for the first time during a conversation between Aimen Joud, Hany Taha, and Benbrika where Joud urges Benbrika to deliver more *duroos* (lessons), particularly on the “base of jihad.”<sup>78</sup> Shortly after Joud again urges Benbrika, “Sheikh you have to, you have to organise us . . . *There is no half half here.*”<sup>79</sup> On one occasion Hany Taha relayed to Benbrika that Abdullah Merhi did not want to speak to him because he disapproved of Merhi’s plan to fight overseas. Merhi claimed to Taha “It’s like he shut the door in my face.”<sup>80</sup> Pressed in the same conversation to discuss jihad, Benbrika grows exasperated with the two: “. . . think of another topic. Always when you come to my home you bring me this topic.”<sup>81</sup> In a conversation between Joud, Benbrika, an unidentified male, and Shane Kent in late September 2004, Joud continues his relentless urging of Benbrika, pushing him “*Listen, come on, bring the tools, Sheikh, bring the tools* and before the election we’ll make sure of something.”<sup>82</sup> In October

2004 Abdullah Merhi again seeks guidance from Benbrika about traveling overseas to fight:

*Benbrika:* . . . now we are thinking to do something big.

*Abdullah Merhi:* Yeah but see, look see, everyone's saying we need money and this and that, and it looks like it's not going to happen because if it takes that long to get money.

*Benbrika:* No, no it's not take long. It's not . . . *I mean* the problem is not the money the money it's a it's a problem, but it's a matter of time.

*Abdullah Merhi:* Time?

*Benbrika:* Yeah a matter of time, that's all.

*Abdullah Merhi:* How long do you reckon?<sup>83</sup>

The push is not limited to the youngest members of the Jama'ah. In November 2004, Ahmed Raad expressed his impatience to Benbrika:

I'll tell you the truth Sheikh alright. *Now*, I know you gotta be patient. But from *I mean* not doing nothing, *I mean* just sitting at home and waiting and having patience and, *I mean* not, not seeing the brothers much and this and that. You lose *faith* . . . It's going backwards instead of forwards . . .<sup>84</sup>

In another conversation at Benbrika's home, Sayadi states his desire for action to Joud who actively disparages Benbrika:

*Fadl Sayadi:* Let's get some action. I wanna do some action. *Come on*, man. Didn't you say to love with your heart is good to say in your tongue is better but to action is best, *Come on*.

*Aimen Joud:* He's taken a step back mate he's easin' up you know? Old age is getting to the bones.<sup>85</sup>

Izzydeen Atik also revealed his desire to act to Benbrika, complaining that "none of the *shabaab* are doing anything" and "Everyone is, is asleep."<sup>86</sup> The urgency with which the group sought action resonates with Oliver Roy's perspective that "without terrorism," radicalized Salafi jihadists "cease to exist."<sup>87</sup> To attribute the identity expression of these young men solely to the influence of Benbrika clearly overlooks the urgency with which the young men of the Jama'ah were seeking to act to gain religious and symbolic capitals and the extent to which the Salafi jihadi narrative imbued them with a sense of self-worth and meaning.

### Family Influences

Two key sources provided insights into the familial influences upon the men of the Benbrika Jama'ah. Media reports provided some interviews and demographic information about families whilst listening device and telephone intercepts reveal the efforts of parents to keep their sons out of trouble associated with the group.<sup>88</sup>

Of the men convicted, all except Shane Kent (Anglo-Australian) have Lebanese parents that migrated from proximate Lebanese villages to Australia after the Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s. All were Australian born, except Fadl Sayadi whose parents migrated in 1983. All, it may be surmised, came to Australia for the opportunity for a more secure future. Aimen's father, Mahmoud Joud for example stated in an interview "We run away from the problems overseas" and said that the family came to Australia to live in a "democracy where there are no troubles."<sup>89</sup> Upon arriving in Australia these parents settled in Melbourne's working class northern suburbs and established small businesses or worked in unskilled professions. Abdullah Merhi's parents worked in a small business and assisted with the running of a service station owned by the extended family whilst the fathers of both Aimen Joud and Amer Haddara were taxi drivers. As a broad group, Jama'ah member's parents did not seek nor earn a high level of educational capital nor did they develop momentum toward an upward social trajectory. What this generation of parents did was to establish roots in the new country.

Whilst the intricacies of the relationships between children and parents are not clear, it is of note that parents appeared to value the culture and religion as an important part of their child-raising. Aimen Joud, Ahmed and Ezzit Raad, and Fadl Sayadi were all at one point enrolled in King Khalid College, an Islamic School in Melbourne's north. Amer Haddara left school in year nine to study Arabic in Syria for two years before returning to finish his studies.<sup>90</sup> Abdullah Merhi's mother Anne is a practicing Muslim who wears Hijab. When having trouble with her son's mental illness, Izzydeen Atik's mother took him to a Sheikh rather than a medical professional,<sup>91</sup> demonstrating the connection with the folkloric "low Islam" of Lebanese villages. It is clear that Abdullah Merhi's mother was loving and affectionate toward her son, with her praying daily that he would be released so he could spend time with his young children because:

... Whatever you give your young children, like the love you can give, nobody else can give that love. They need your love, your support, from your mum and your dad.<sup>92</sup>

Maintenance of culture, as evidenced by the Arabic language skills of group members, appears to have been imparted to the group by their parents. The

two youngest, and arguably most emphatic in their pursuit of terrorist action, Abdullah Merhi and Aimen Joud had notably both lost a parent. In Merhi's case, his father died shortly before he became involved with Benbrika, and in Joud's case, his mother at a young age.<sup>93</sup>

The reactions of the families to their sons becoming involved with Benbrika, particularly after public attention was drawn to the group through police raids, reveal strong insights into the families' love and concern for their welfare. In September 2004 Hany Taha (an associate of the Jama'ah charged with though not convicted with terrorism) asks Benbrika how to handle his father who had told him not attend Benbrika's classes and to tell Benbrika not to visit his family run shop:

*Hany Taha:* It's like the first time he told me, he made sure I understood, he goes "*Do you understand?*," I didn't say nothing, he kept going on a bit, then he stopped. What I do in this situation Sheikh?

*Benbrika:* [inaudible] situation you tell him to get lost.

*Hany Taha:* I'm not worried about him you know.

*Benbrika:* *That's it.*<sup>94</sup>

Transcripts capture two December 2004 conversations between Mahmoud Hammoud and his son Shoue, in which Mahmoud urges him to leave the group<sup>95</sup> whilst Aimen Joud claimed to group members he had left home for three months to avoid his family's pressure.<sup>96</sup> Ramzi Elsayed who knows the Joud family well states that Joud's father was "begging" him to distance himself from the group.<sup>97</sup> Family, especially parents, emerged as highly protective of their sons and were overwhelmingly critical and hostile toward their involvement with Benbrika and were particularly horrified at their involvement with police. It is clear that the families of members of the Jama'ah were not advocates of extremist perspectives and that they did not actively contribute to the men's neo-resistance identity.

Literature suggests, that as predominantly working class young men, group members would favor the idea of a "stay at home" wife and that the wives of group members would be highly subordinated and exercise little influence upon their husbands. However, as an analysis of telephone intercepts and listening devices reveals, group members overwhelmingly exhibited both love and respect for their wives and actively sought to keep their activities secret from them.<sup>98</sup> Clearly the full nature of the group's discussions was not evident to the wives. Maryann Raad, wife of Ahmed, commented to the media, "He is not an extremist. He's been targeted for practicing his religion, for being a Muslim."<sup>99</sup> Whilst difficult to measure their level of influence, it can be considered that the men of the group undertook activities secretly from wives to both protect them and possibly because they knew their wives

may seek to prevent their involvement. To this extent wives of the men may be considered to have a reasonable amount of influence upon their husbands.

### Education

Education levels amongst the group were of a low level, with the majority of the group failing to complete formal schooling. Aimen Joud attended Altona Gate Primary School, a government school, whilst Ahmed and Ezzit Raad attended King Khalid, an Islamic primary school.<sup>100</sup> More information is available regarding high school. Aimen Joud attended Thomas Carr Catholic College in Melbourne's western suburbs before being expelled for alleged involvement in the theft of 30 laptop computers halfway through year nine. He then attended King Khalid College, where he left school at 16. Joud was described by his Principal at Thomas Carr as "an average kid—no genius, but a good quality average kid."<sup>101</sup> A former Principal of King Khalid described Joud as "a loner" that had "disappeared" before sitting his Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) exams.<sup>102</sup> Ahmed Raad left King Khalid College at year 11 level. Fadl Sayadi left high school in year ten, whilst Izzydeen Atik, bullied at school and with an apparent mental illness, left school at age 15.<sup>103</sup> Just two group members Amer Haddara and Ezzit Raad completed their VCE. If, as Mansouri and Wood consider, schools constitute a space where individuals can 'consolidate their sense of identity and belonging,'<sup>104</sup> then it is clear that this was clearly very limited in group members and indeed possibly contributed to a sense of alienation and exclusion.

### Post-school Education

Several group members had undertaken apprenticeships, with varying levels of success.<sup>105</sup> Ahmed Raad commenced spray painting and plumbing apprenticeships, both of which he failed to complete, whilst Abdullah Merhi had almost completed an electrical apprenticeship at the time of his arrest. Ezzit Raad was a qualified electrician. Aimen Joud, Izzydeen Atik, and Fadl Sayadi had no formal qualifications, Sayadi having failed twice to complete Technical and Further Education (TAFE) training courses. Only Shane Kent (multi-media TAFE course) and Amer Haddara (Advanced Diploma in computer systems engineering from Victoria University) had successfully undertaken further study after leaving school.

This very low level of formal education and low take up of post-school study stands in contrast to statistics suggesting that on average Australian Muslims are more highly educated in the population,<sup>106</sup> whilst following the trend for Australian Islamist terrorist be less educated than their European



counterparts.<sup>107</sup> Whilst for some members in the trades their training may have enabled some upward social mobility through potentially running a small business, for those without any post-school training this opportunity was severely limited. As individuals, it appears that the vast majority of the group was not only not academically inclined, but actually sought to leave formal schooling at the first opportunity. This limited the ability of the Victorian curriculum to actively influence these individuals and to equip them with all but the most basic critical thinking skills necessary for engagement with religious-political texts and teachings. Parents appeared to emphasize the transmission of cultural values and language (some men attended Islamic schools and all spoke good Arabic), rather than achievement within the formal education system. All forms of post-school education were purely technical and skills-based in nature (electrician training, plumbing, computer engineering). This training did not emphasize or develop higher abstract thinking or analytical skills that may have aided the individuals and the group in dealing with the complexities of Islamic thought and engaging with Benbrika's teachings critically.

### Employment

Of the entire group, just one, Amer Haddara, was employed at a professional level, working for *Macro Recruitment*, a specialist recruitment agency for engineers and IT professionals. Haddara also owned his own *Hajj* travel agency, *Harramaine Travel*, and volunteered for the *Royal Institute for the Blind* in 2003. Ezzit Raad was a qualified tradesperson whilst Merhi was working toward his qualification as an electrician. Aimen Joud worked for his father as a construction site manager. Fadl Sayadi was a forklift driver.

Izzydeen Atik had previously worked as a cabinet maker with his brother, although at the time of arrest was unemployed, receiving a government pension. He was, however, relatively successful at credit card and welfare fraud. Shane Kent, at one time employed as a website designer, was also unemployed and receiving Centrelink benefits.<sup>108</sup> Ahmed Raad was also receiving Centrelink payments,<sup>109</sup> in part due to a lack of success in businesses, including door to door telephone sales. His initial foray in October–November 2004 was earning Raad between \$200 and \$600 a week (below the average wage) with Raad expressing optimism that he could make \$500 a day.<sup>110</sup> By April 2005 Raad's business had failed dismally:

... the boss he dropped the percentage on me, he gave me lower prices, tight *I swear to Allah*, he wants more money, and I lost all my customers ... *I Swear*

*to Allah. I made \$97, I Swear to Allah . . . From, from about \$700 down to \$100 a week I dropped . . .*<sup>111</sup>

Several instances provide insight into the level of frustration that the men faced in their work. Amer Haddara would write in his CV, “I will make as much cash as I want but I will not transgress my own way of life and belief,”<sup>112</sup> and complains vigorously to Aimen Joud:

. . . you know you wake, you open your eyes you have to work, you close your eyes by the time you finish work. Bloody hell. And they call this life.<sup>113</sup>

Haddara would declare to one member of the Muslim community who refused him a job on the basis of his CV “I would like to be remembered in this life by my brothers to have changed something in this world.”<sup>114</sup> On a different occasion, Fadl Sayadi complains to Joud:

. . . they break your balls there, bro . . . Always taking boxes off pallets and putting them on different pallets and then moving the forklift on and off. It’s off man.<sup>115</sup>

This evidence, in a group that stands at the extreme end of the spectrum for Australian-born Muslim men in terms of perceived disengagement, challenges the perception found in the study *Social and Civic Participation of Australian Muslim Men* that Muslim men possess lower levels of human capital such as “ambition” and “hope.”<sup>116</sup> It is clear that group members possessed both ambition and hope to contribute to something that gave them a sense of a viable existence and were clearly frustrated in their current employment, a key potential source of meaning and upward social mobility. To this extent this evidence more closely correlates with Ghassan Hage’s conception of misinterpellation, where the young men felt excluded from society (and potentially were as a result of the active projection of their embodied Islamic masculinity through their beards and communications with potential employers). This sense of exclusion has contributed to the “shattering” that occurs as a result of this experience and the search for a source of meaning provided by the Salafi jihadi narrative.

Employment in an area of one’s choosing (or at least the feeling that one has the potential to move into such an area) offers the potential for the development of professional capital that aids an upward social trajectory vital to the belief that one has a viable life and future. Where this is not the case, the potential for immense frustration and a sense of dislocation and exclusion are evident. Benbrika Jama’ah members were clearly not working in areas that

provided them with a source of meaning or an income that offered them any social mobility. Four members of the Jama'ah were not working at all, relying upon welfare payments from the government. Others, such as Amer Haddara, displayed an entrepreneurial approach or had paid employment, yet felt deeply frustrated, and found little meaning in their work. The core theme in employment for group members is clearly a lack of meaning in their work, lack of potential for upward mobility, and a low chance of their developing professional capital to do so.

### Criminality

If the street is viewed within literature as a site of self-definition for young Muslims,<sup>117</sup> an examination of the Jama'ah makes it clear that social influences from the "street" including criminal gangs and violence are also capable of mixing with Islam to shape practice. It emerges in transcript analysis that many of the group members were clearly knowledgeable criminals who had previously engaged in illegal activities. Aimen Joud had been previously convicted for possession of a handgun,<sup>118</sup> whilst Fadl Sayadi had a criminal history of assault, criminal damage, and theft stemming from his teenage years.<sup>119</sup> This was noted by some observers at the time. Cameron Stewart of *The Australian* labeled group members "young hotheads and small-time criminals from Melbourne's poor northern and western suburbs."<sup>120</sup> Stewart further perceived them as "hardened street boys armed with attitude and the Koran [sic] who saw in Benbrika a father figure and a way to reclaim their lost souls." Sheikh Omran described many of the group as having been "wild" in their youths.<sup>121</sup> Pete Lentini from the Monash University Global Terrorism Research Unit has observed that "those who tended to follow Benbrika were young . . . many had been trying to reform their lives following periods of criminality, violent and deviant behavior and alcohol and drug addiction."<sup>122</sup>

The criminality of the group reveals numerous powerful insights into their group, their habitus and practicing of identity. Key elements of criminal identity include a heavily polarized view of the world divided between "us" and "them." This perspective is a key element of survival in a criminal culture where traditional concepts of morality are challenged and often nonexistent. This bares a strong resemblance to elements of Salafism. Muslim community psychologist Monique Toohey asserts that Salafist organizations are very "black and white" and consequently "attract a lot of ex-prisoners."<sup>123</sup> Criminality has a wide variety of potential motivations and in some cases can be argued to be a means of survival. However, in this particular case, this is not in question. Individuals came from "good families" and indeed some still lived at home. Much as quick financial rewards are sought within small-scale

criminal activity, so too were they sought through the paradigm of Salafi jihadism from those deemed less worthy. Paradoxically, once the Jama'ah was organized and a *sandoog* was established, the group sought to utilize their extensive criminal capital to make money for the group. The act of saving for the group invested their criminal activity with a source of meaning and offered the opportunity to gain spiritual rewards. Aimen Joud, Ahmed Raad, Ezzit Raad and Fadl Sayadi were involved in car re-birthing whilst Bassam Raad and Izzyden Atik were involved in credit card fraud.<sup>124</sup> It was found in the court case against the group that Izzydeen Atik was a “liar, a cheat, and a fraudster of significant accomplishment”:<sup>125</sup>

He specialized in credit card fraud but also defrauded the social security system to such an extent that he was able to receive a disability pension for a psychiatric illness whilst living in a luxury townhouse, driving a motor vehicle of commensurate standard and employing a butler.<sup>126</sup>

This level of criminal cultural capital and activity appears to have some resonance with observations from overseas-based terror cells. Sageman notes that “many dedicated Islamist terrorists do turn to petty crime to fund their activities . . . because they are disconnected from Al Qaeda central.”<sup>127</sup> Less noted in literature is the level of internal debate engaged in by groups engaged in such activity. During one conversation Ezzit Raad consistently questioned the legitimacy of having a stolen car in his garage:

*Ezzit Raad:* How is it right? I can't see how it is right.

*Ahmed Raad:* What do you mean you can't see its right? Praise to Allah. What's theirs is ours . . .

*Ezzit Raad:* I don't know man, show me them proofs one more time man. I got to get it through my head man, I don't know . . .

*Ahmed Raad:* You know, this is your garage in Allah's cause . . . the reward you're getting . . .<sup>128</sup>

On another occasion Benbrika states his refusal to accept the proceeds of credit card fraud because it involved signing an agreement to pay interest (even though there was no intent to ever pay).<sup>129</sup> A disjuncture clearly exists between the morality of Islam and justification utilized by group members of taking from disbelievers in order to serve Allah. Rationalization and justification for criminal actions center on a utilitarian notion of the greater good—in this case, serving Allah. However, this may be considered far from altruistic; individuals within the Jama'ah similarly to any criminal enterprise are seeking “rewards”—the net gain of their work. In this instance, members of the Jama'ah were clearly seeking to gain rewards from Allah from both

their criminal enterprises to make money for the *sandoog*, and for any terrorist action that they took part in, possibly in an attempt to make up for their past behavior. For Fadl Sayadi this was clearly the case:

I wish, *I swear to Allah* you know, I, I wish, *I swear to Allah*, even till now, I wish *oh my Allah* man, I could swap my *life* with a, with someone's *life* who was good all his life.<sup>130</sup>

This reward could be gained irrespective of the killing and destruction metered out to others and indeed was rationalized as an attack on "non-believers." There is a strong argument that the extreme selfishness and desire to accumulate rewards irrespective of the cost to others has its genesis in the group's criminal experiences and mindset.

### Western Popular Culture

Western cultural influences had significantly greater impact on group members than prosecution portrayals of the group might suggest. It is known that Abdullah Merhi played Australian Rules football for Fitzroy Juniors for several years,<sup>131</sup> coached by his brother Omar, whilst members of the group enjoyed sports including swimming, running,<sup>132</sup> and bodybuilding.<sup>133</sup> Members of the Jama'ah displayed, through their car re-birthing activities, a keen interest in and knowledge of cars, makes and models that appear to reflect the masculinity of young men from Australian working-class backgrounds.

At the level of popular culture, the young men of the group exhibited, to varying extents, Salafi tendencies to label certain activities *haram* (forbidden) or *fitnah* (seduction). Izzydeen Atik complained on one occasion to Aimen Joud "everyone's doing *haram* stuff; I can't handle it"<sup>134</sup> and assaulted his housemate for watching television and playing music.<sup>135</sup> This reveals a large identity shift given Atik's past gambling and illicit drug use.<sup>136</sup> Abdullah Merhi approached Benbrika for advice due to his regular viewing of pornography on his brother's computer.<sup>137</sup> Shane Kent's lawyer claimed that he had abused illicit drugs and alcohol prior to conversion.<sup>138</sup> Kent, a former heavy metal musician prior to his conversion, was also allegedly tattooed; something considered *haram* within Salafi Islam. It appears that the Salafi jihadi paradigm offers young Australian Muslim men the opportunity to overcome their past misdeeds through commitment to jihad.

A key identifying signature for the group was in their manner of dress and appearance. All men, except Merhi, had very short hair and full beards at the time of their arrest. This outward indicator of religious piety also delineated membership of the group and acted as a physical bond. Whilst group members often wore Islamic headdress, along with Benbrika, they are clearly

differentiated from him in their choice of clothes. The mixing of Western and Islamic culture is impermissible in the textualist Salafi mindset, yet was managed rather more fluidly by the men of the group. It is clear that their ability to pick and choose elements of the “Salafi lifestyle” would render them inauthentic, particularly in the minds of spiritual Salafi’s, calling into question their commitment to Allah rather than violence. Yet where Benbrika wore traditional Islamic garb, the clothing favored by group members may be considered Western in style and specifically, “street wear” with brand track-suit pants and “hoodies” being a staple. Some media photos and transcripts of group members reveal them wearing brands such as Everlast (a boxing label), Fila (a Tennis label) Adidas, and Converse,<sup>139</sup> whilst media reports indicate that Amer Haddara was fond of “smart suits with a flash of gold jewellery.”<sup>140</sup> Brian Walters SC, a lawyer for one of the group, stated the men were “petrol heads from the western suburbs who wear baseball caps backward and baggy pants.”<sup>141</sup> If clothing is worn as an expression of identity, then the conscious adoption of Western clothing by group members, accompanied by Salafi style beards, could be considered to provide some insight into the extent that Western culture had fused and played a part in shaping the dispositions of group members, adding further to studies by Shannahan<sup>142</sup> and Ameli.<sup>143</sup>

### Interactions with the State

A consideration of the influence of the state on members of the Jama’ah is a complex undertaking. Whilst literature brings to light the negative impact of government counter-terrorism legislation and interactions with Australian Muslims, as noted, very few studies examine the potential influences of access to welfare and other support mechanisms. In the case of the Benbrika Jama’ah these support mechanisms fuse with the most punitive elements of state power; to surveil, coerce, arrest, and imprison.

As previously noted, Benbrika, Ahmed Raad, Izzydeen Atik, and Shane Kent received governmental support through Centrelink and Benbrika utilized a government funded “disbeliever” doctor.<sup>144</sup> Transcripts reveal that at the very same time, Jama’ah members faced intense pressure from Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and state and federal police forces, resulting in extreme animosity from Jama’ah members. Benbrika recalls in one conversation his interaction with an ASIO agent:

I said I hate you, don’t you understand this? He said fair enough. I said *that’s it*, what do you want more? Do whatever you want . . . You’ve got the power in this country, so do whatever you want. And they went, like a dog so that’s it.<sup>145</sup>

On another occasion, in conversation between Benbrika and Ahmed Raad, Benbrika asserts 'ASIO, they rule the country...' to which Raad replies 'Only the country? They rule the world...' <sup>146</sup> The preoccupation with ASIO stemmed directly from the raids prosecuted by ASIO and Federal police against the group and threats made by others in the Muslim community that they would inform on the group to ASIO. Police are consistently termed as "dogs" and "pigs" <sup>147</sup> throughout the transcripts. This in itself does not necessarily depict a religious-based bias against them. Both terms are commonly used by Australian criminals in describing police and such language is arguably common at the level of criminal street talk. However, such language provides important insights into the extremity of the group's animosity toward the state. The state is viewed as the opponent of the group and actions are aimed at posing a direct challenge to state hegemony.

### Australia: Social Space

Wider Australia and its citizens are almost an abstract entity to the group, possibly due to their level of insularity. Targeting Australians is deemed acceptable because they all broadly contribute to helping the government. <sup>148</sup> Australians are generally understood as white Anglo-Saxon's and are broadly referred to as "kufr" <sup>149</sup> or, as Fadl Sayadi labels them, "dumb Aussies." <sup>150</sup> In a particularly emotive conversation with Ahmed Raad and an unidentified male Sayadi complains that Australian Muslims are failing to aid Muslims overseas because they are distracted by Australian culture:

... look what we're doing now, man. *I swear to Allah*. We're sleeping with them, we drinking with them, sit down and play cards with them. <sup>151</sup>

Sayadi continues claiming that Shoue Hammoud lost his Greek friends when he started to practice Islam <sup>152</sup> and if friends truly wanted "what's good for you" they wouldn't want him to go out and to "get married, not have affairs." <sup>153</sup>

Social exclusion and a sense of being persecuted for being Muslim clearly permeate the group's conversations. Whilst practicing multiculturalism within the group, wider Australia is not viewed for its diversity, but as a monolithic block based on notions of White cultural hegemony. However, despite this apparent hatred of non-Muslims, there is evidence that group members were influenced by aspects of Australian life. This represents a paradox between the vocabulary of the Salafi and abstract descriptors for non-Muslims as "kufr" and actual practice by the men. Many of those that knew the young men, and, who were importantly not Muslim, were highly surprised by their

arrests. Amer Haddara, for example, was described as “an ambitious, business focused young man” and “not a bad bloke.”<sup>154</sup> Another neighbour called him “a polite, friendly boy . . . a beautiful man who was very well dressed and good looking, who would always be polite and say good morning . . .”<sup>155</sup> *Macro Recruitment*, Haddara’s employer just prior to his arrest considered him “pleasant.”<sup>156</sup> Neighbors of Ezzit Raad described him as a “quiet man.”<sup>157</sup> No information was available about the religion or background of these neighbors; however, this does suggest that the social *injury* and sense of exclusion felt by the men of the group was not overtly visible and that even those men displaying an overtly embodied *religious masculinity* were not incapable of functioning within society.

### Theoretical Application: Field, Capital, Habitus

Theoretical application of Bourdieu’s concepts relies upon analysis and thematization of transcripts, a consideration of the bodily dispositions of the group obtained from attendance at two days of the trial,<sup>158</sup> a reading of transcripts and extensive media footage and coverage of the group. This adds significant depth to what may otherwise be a one dimensional analysis. The analysis relates primarily to the group as a collective, though where possible key individuals are referred to. The following application of theory and analysis based upon the interrelated concepts of field, capital, and habitus seeks to reveal the most significant key social influences and interactions shaping the Benbrika Jama’ah’s political actions.

### The Field of Power and Australian Muslim Cultural Politics

As in the case of the two previous studies examining project identities, it is important to utilize Bourdieu’s conception of fields as “spaces of potential and active forces” and as a “space of struggle that seeks to maintain or change the location of these fields.” The Benbrika Jama’ah may be located in a variety of fields, including the field of international Salafi jihadist terrorism; however, it pays considerable analytical dividends to locate them also in the field of power and Muslim cultural politics, allowing for a direct comparison with other studies, including the location within the field, level of success, key forms of capital, and key social interactions shaping political action in the field.

The young men of the Benbrika Jama’ah may be understood as acting primarily within the field of power. There are two key stakes that were contested by the group. The first relates specifically to the ability to shape the cultural and political life of the nation. This was sought through the group aims of



altering Australia's foreign policy and radicalization of Australian Muslims. It was believed that these would change the political landscape, as it did in Spain and ultimately would lead to an increasingly politically active and aware Muslim population that would potentially challenge for control of the mechanisms of political governance. In this sense the Jama'ah were not unlike other Salafi jihadist organizations worldwide. The act of terrorism in this respect captured the key logic of the field of power, seeking to become the "loudest voice" through violent and destructive behavior and in so doing gaining the public and media spotlight and shaping public perception.

The second key stake contested is unique to the Jama'ah amongst the studies presented here. The aims of gaining revenge for the mistreatment of Muslims internationally and in gaining spiritual rewards may be located within the field of power; specifically in seeking to overcome humiliation and injury felt by group members against a hegemonic "other" and in gaining a level of meaning in their lives they felt denied to them. This takes Ghassan Hage's concept of misinterpellation to a highly uncommon, but conceivable extreme. Feeling excluded and blaming the other (irrespective of the "others" level of responsibility), the group sought revenge against sites of white cultural hegemony and an alternate form of "spiritual" capital that could meet their need for recognition. This stake, overcoming humiliation and injury, combines with the desire for public recognition and the forms of capital available to shape this form of political action. This is discussed in greater detail shortly.

The Jama'ah's absolute lack of success in the field of power stems from their failure to plan for contingency; maintain information security and secrecy; inability to work cooperatively over a sustained period; mistrust; emphasis on hyper-masculine posturing; and failure to move substantively beyond speculation about an attack, resulting in their arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment. This reinforced the position of the group's key opponents: the Australian government, state agencies, white cultural hegemony, and Muslim institutional representatives operating within the framework of Australian multiculturalism. This demonstrates the extremely marginal position of the group within the field prior to their arrest, and their complete lack of the requisite capital to participate as competent actors within it.

The group's aim to radicalize the Australian Muslim population also places them within the field of Muslim cultural politics. Whilst internally highly critical of other Muslim groups, including less radical Salafi's, the group did not (and could not by their nature as an underground group) contribute to public discourse. The group employed the logic that a terrorist attack could polarize political debate about the place of Islam in Australia, increasing social and political pressure and possibly leading Muslims to become more politically active in "protecting" their faith. This would see the narratives of Muslim

political institutions and other political actors about the compatibility of Islamic and Australian values challenged and replaced by the Salafi jihadist narrative and would gain the group Islamic capital as the vanguard of the jihadist movement and gain the Jama'ah the key stake of the field in shaping the development and future of Islam in Australia.

A terrorist action would be fundamentally without roots in the community and impose an autocratic perspective of how Islam should develop. Whilst the level of success that the group could have attained in achieving this stake will never be known, their absolute failure and indeed, arguable reinforcement of the perceived Islamic and political legitimacy (Islamic capital) of institutional community representatives and other political actors advocating *dawah* and engagement highlights again, the group's complete lack of the required forms of capital necessary to act successfully, and a downward trajectory within the field resulting in their almost complete ostracism from it.

### **Capital Accumulation and Utilization in the Field of Australian Muslim Cultural Politics and the Field of Power**

An examination of the group's key social influences makes clear that members of the Benbrika Jama'ah were clearly lacking in important forms of capital requisite to success in the fields of power and Muslim cultural production. This strongly inhibited their ability to compete for cultural and symbolic capitals and recognition was a significant factor in steering them toward destructive forms of political expression.

Arguably most important is the low level of educational capital within the group. Educational capital is a key contributor to the development of symbolic capital and recognition, facilitating access to wider social networks and creative and innovative solutions to social problems. Just two group members completed their schooling to year 12 level, whilst only three members of the group (Ezzit Raad, Shane Kent, and Amer Haddara) had or were undertaking a technical qualifications post school. Not one member of the group had undertaken any course that specifically focused on the development of critical thinking, creativity, and cooperation as a member of a team that may have aided engagement with Islamic sources and an ability to individually critique aspects of their teaching by Benbrika. No member of the group, unlike the other studies, had undertaken any higher level of Islamic instruction in interpreting texts such as the "Train the Trainer course" undertaken by members of previous studies, resulting in a lower level of Islamic educational cultural capital that further contributed to the group's downward spiral.

Closely related to the low level of educational capital evident amongst group members is the low level of professional capital resulting from employment experiences. Just one group member had any professional experience whilst just one had fully completed trade qualifications and work experience. Many group members were on welfare benefits or worked in unskilled areas of the workforce. It is clear that few group members (if any) had developed important attributes including organizational ability and discipline, confidence, team work, and the physical dispositions (including tone of voice, posture, and manner) to conduct oneself successfully in formal interactions. Indeed the opposite, displays of hyper-masculinity pervaded group member's daily interactions almost as a matter of course. Accompanied by consistent colloquialisms punctuated by very poor grammar it is clear that this was not an individual attribute that could be readily altered based on social context. This could be considered to have had an important limiting influence of the potential for upward mobility by group members and contributed to the attractiveness of the Salafi jihadist narrative.

One area where group members were able to display a small level of initiative and resourcefulness was in their criminal activities. Group members did display a level of entrepreneurialism (albeit illegal) through the car re-birthing racket and credit card fraud. Whilst possessing sufficient knowledge of how to commit crimes such as car theft and fraud and generate profit to contribute to a small revenue stream for the group's activities, it is also clear that this did not extend to the development of a higher level of knowledge such as obtaining weapons and explosives. Indeed "how-to manuals" were poor substitutes for group members. Importantly the group was successfully surveilled for a great deal of time despite the group's suspicions and without effective counter-surveillance measures being implemented. Higher level criminal gangs have significantly greater awareness and likely take far more effective steps to avoid state surveillance. This low level of criminal capital, developed throughout the teenage experience of group members, likely contributed to group members failing to seek more sustainable forms of income, contributing to their downward social trajectory and importantly, their spectacular failure in the actual carrying out of a terrorist attack.

The development of social capital within the group was severely constrained by a variety of contributors including the Salafi jihadist narrative to which group members subscribed, ensuring a level of insularity and polarized perspectives of the "out-group." This was reinforced by the embodied religious capital of group members including the distinctive "short hair, long beard" appearance. This clearly distinguished the members of the group to the wider community as at the very least textualist Muslims and was unlikely

to encourage others to seek to interact with group members beyond an elementary social level. Transcripts reveal that interaction with Muslims outside the group and the groups extended network, suggested by literature to be of high importance in building social capital, was minimal and based on necessity. This inhibited group members gaining access to wider varieties of social and cultural capitals.

The young Australian-born men of the Benbrika Jama'ah not only possessed low levels of important forms of educational, professional, and social capitals that may have contributed to an upward economic and social trajectory and gained them leverage in the fields of power and Muslim cultural production, they also possessed criminal capital based upon dishonesty, deception, displays of hyper-“resistance” masculinity, and a polarized perception of the outsider. As an examination of the habitus of group members reveals, this combination of social interactions contributed significantly to the group's neo-resistance identity and adoption of terrorism as a form of political action.

### Habitus

Of the variety of potential social influences and interactions upon the “matrix of dispositions” of Jama'ah members, this analysis focuses particularly upon those that contributed to the group embracing the Salafi jihadist neo-resistance identity and their complete lack of success as political actors in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics.

The members of the Jama'ah could be understood as fitting the profile of many young Australian Muslims, particularly in the inner suburbs that experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty leading to difficulty in achieving an upward social trajectory. As literature suggests, Australian- and Western-born Muslims have displayed a tendency to explore their religion when facing social pressure and a sense of alienation from society due to institutionalized cultural racism and consequent social injury. This has some similarities within the group, with all except Shane Kent turning to Islam in the five years post the September 11 attacks and in the context of considerable social pressure. However, the question must then be asked why this group specifically turned toward the Salafi jihadist narrative and adopted a violent neo-resistance identity.

It may be considered that the group had a very specific set of social dynamics, a “royal flush” of social influences and interactions that contributed to their embracing this narrative.<sup>159</sup> Throughout their youths many group members developed a level of criminal capital, and an embodied hyper-masculinity that served to protect their position and status within their fields

of interaction. However, despite these interactions and activities, it could be considered that this activity ran counter to their upbringing. No parents or wives are known to have participated in violent or criminal activity. Group members may have experienced a level of *hysteresis* between their upbringing by loving parents and their participation in fields with very different sets of values and activities that ran counter to this. In an effort to compensate for their past actions group members may have turned to Islam as a form of both redemption for what they self-perceived as sins and simultaneously as a form of empowerment that offered them a sense of belonging. Low levels of educational and Islamic capital meant that group members were poorly equipped to "shop" for Islamic knowledge in the manner that many young Western Muslims do. Traditional jurisprudence and engagement with texts takes a considerable level of personal effort and resources including critical thinking, discipline, and patience not evident from transcript analysis. The simplified answers offered by Benbrika likely held more considerable appeal than more nuanced perspectives of more established scholars.

It is also important to consider the impact of grief, sadness and subsequent feelings of vulnerability amongst key members of the group. Mansour Raad, brother of Ahmed and Ezzit had died of coronary heart disease shortly before their involvement with Benbrika. Similarly, Abdullah Merhi's father had passed away shortly before his becoming involved. Ahmed Raad had failed consistently in business and members of the group largely lived on the poverty line. Benbrika positioned himself as the key person to engage with on personal problems and the group offered a sense of shelter and empowerment in the face of uncertainty and weakness.

The classes offered by Abdul Nacer Benbrika were clearly considered to be located on the extreme fringe of Australian Muslim communities, yet it is precisely this fringe status that likely attracted group members, distinguishing them from other Muslims and providing them with a sense of distinction and symbolic capital (albeit stemming from "self-recognition"). Familial and peer networks played a role in growing the Jama'ah as the relationship between the Raad family (Ezzit, Ahmed, and Bassam Raad) reveals. Very little interaction occurred with non-Muslims throughout the transcripts, showing the insular dynamic of the group. As Salafi Muslims, Jama'ah members actively rejected what they considered "Australian" or "Western" influences such as sex outside marriage, drugs, and alcohol. Indeed Salafi Islam equipped group members with both a powerful frame and vocabulary for rejection; *fitnah*, *jahiliyyah* (ignorance), and *Kufr* are all terms with particular significance within Salafi Islam and utilized by group members to distinguish themselves. However, despite the power of the Salafi lexicon to shape thought, the groups dispositions were clearly shaped to a similar extent by Australian cultural influences,

particularly those that could be considered working class. Colloquial language and swearwords, street fashion, the love of cars and sport, and emphasis on expressions of masculinity and physicality are completely infused with the group's utilization of Salafi political and spiritual teachings and language. The group appeared to feel and express no contradiction between their seamless merging of the Salafi worldview with Australian cultural influences.

The desperation with which the men of the Jama'ah sought the spiritual rewards they believed were on offer reveals the lack of opportunity available to the men in other areas of their life due to a lack of educational capital and employment skill. The poor understanding by the men of the "rules of the game" to achieve success in employment and wider society were evidenced when Amer Haddara was captured speaking to a potential employer about his faith and its centrality to his professional life.<sup>160</sup> The upward push, in-group competition, and out-group hate displayed by group members in this urgent drive for rewards arguably all stemmed from the criminal mentality and hyper-masculinity that prevailed within the men's habitus and was manifested in their bodily dispositions, from the "street wear" they wore and their verbal mannerisms to their constant expressions of aggression. Street level criminality is characterized by aggression that ensconces the superiority and importance of dominance of the individual and the group and that seeks instant gratification in the form of illegally obtained "rewards" for work. The Salafi worldview, particularly that adopted by Salafi jihadi's, is very similar, "empowering" individuals with feelings of superiority and asserting the need for this form of Islam to attain dominance.

The teachings of Abdul Nacer Benbrika clearly provided his followers with a source of meaning and an opportunity to gain a form of Islamic "spiritual" capital. His emphasis on the existence of a state of war between Islam and the West and the importance of participation in violent jihad clearly resonated with the violent and marginalized dispositions of group members developed throughout their youth. It allowed group members to uncritically posit themselves as the vanguard of the fight for Islam, gaining them honorable self-recognition and the opportunity to link themselves to the global jihad. Importantly group members could gain rewards for even thinking about participating in an act of terror, increasing their level of spiritual capital in the absence of the capability to gain more permanent physical and worldly capitals. This profoundly modern manifestation of Islam has no historical precedent and is as far removed from the practices of the Prophet as any variant of Islam, including more spiritually focused forms of Salafism.

The complete failure of the group to actually successfully conduct an attack (or any other form of political action that expressed their views) may be considered to be located in their very low level of educational and professional

cultural capitals. Transcripts bring to light the absolute lack of organization, discipline, team work, and individual initiative in working toward a defined goal exemplified by the group's in-fighting, distrust, and being stopped by police whilst undertaking training activities in the King Lake National Park. Even the small level of criminal cultural capital possessed by group members was completely insufficient to both avoid detection and surveillance. A comparison of the Jama'ah with those Western-born Muslims that have successfully carried out terrorist acts reveals that the Benbrika Jama'ah were significantly less educated and had a significantly lower social trajectory. Ultimately it is arguable that few self-described jihadi's in Western contexts, if any, have been so unsuccessful and done more to reinforce the power of their opponents in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. This provides an important point of comparison for the hypothesis and research questions.

### Conclusion

This chapter through provision of a contrastive study of young Muslim men engaged in political activity supports the hypothesis that Australian-born Muslim men engaging in acts of cultural production possess significant levels of capital that provide them with confidence and empowerment to act in their fields. No single figure in the group possessed a significant amount of requisite capitals to either steer the group toward alternate forms of political action or to successfully carry out a terrorist attack and the ultimate result of the group's actions was to reinforce the hegemony of their opponents within the field of power (the state) and Muslim cultural politics (Muslim institutions and "Moderate" Muslims).

Importantly, by its contrast with previous studies this chapter also reveals the limitations of state policies of multiculturalism. Whereas the individuals of previous studies both benefited from a multicultural social space and in particular, being elevated as examples of positive Muslim contributions to Australian society, when it came to active intervention with a clearly marginalized group to seek engagement and the promotion of dialogue, multiculturalism was not present. It could be considered that the group clearly constituted a criminal threat and that the only solution was through law enforcement and security agencies. However, it may also be considered that the young men of the group had become increasingly disenfranchised with and alienated from society over time and that involvement in a group with a highly exclusivist and violent perspective was the end result of this. The group was clearly posited as the criminal "other" by the state that, with policing and security agencies that chose to surveil the group for a period of over a year and to consistently increase pressure on the group before their

eventual arrest and prosecution. The only in-depth state interaction with the group was through an undercover infiltrator, "SIO 39," acting as a protagonist within the group. Multiculturalism was sidelined as a source of treating the symptoms of social malaise whilst simultaneously acting only to offer support to groups that fitted the mold of acceptable social action, revealing the highly politicized nature of multiculturalism in Australia and its potential use in reinforcing dominant discourse.

The Benbrika Jama'ah represent a powerful example of the possibility of a downward social trajectory in Australian-born Muslim men lacking educational, professional, and Islamic cultural capitals. When a lack of attributes including critical thinking, creativity, confidence, discipline, ability to cooperate, and organizational ability are combined with a hostile political climate (resulting in a sense of injury and lack of honorable recognition), low levels of success within given fields of employment (increasing the likelihood of misinterpellation), criminal experience and emotions including grief and uncertainty (leading to feelings of vulnerability), this mix has the potential to fuel radicalization in the Australian context where the neo-resistant Salafi jihadist narrative with its tightly bounded identity and violent course of action appears to offer a legitimate alternate answer and source of meaning.



## CHAPTER 6

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# 9/11's Children: "Chasing Martyrdom"

A decade after the arrest of the Benbrika Jama'ah, the issue of Australian Muslim men involved in politically motivated terrorist violence has grown exponentially. Australians fighting in Iraq and Syria have been involved in suicide bombings and many of the worst atrocities including murders, beheadings, and the sexual enslavement of minority women. Importantly, by world standards, Australia is considered to have provided the highest per capita contribution of fighters of any English-speaking nation and amongst the highest of any Western nation alongside Belgium. Coupled with domestic terrorism threats and sectarian violence, it becomes clear that the Benbrika Jama'ah were a precursor to an ongoing challenge encompassing hardline young Muslim men for whom Islam is conflated with aggression and a willingness to use deadly force. This chapter focuses upon the emergence of young men raised in the post-9/11 world who have embraced Salafi jihadi politics. The chapter aims to engage with the social influences shaping what appears to be an emerging and concerning trend of young Australian Muslim men participating in suicide attacks post the 9/11 decade.

### Background

This chapter engages in particular, with the notion of younger, more violent, innovative, and interconnected nature of Muslim men engaging in extremist Salafi jihadist violence.<sup>1</sup> On July 17, 2014, 18-year-old Adam Dahman (Figure 6.1), also known as *Abu Bakr Al Australi*, from the rapidly gentrifying inner northern suburb of Northcote in Melbourne, detonated a belt bomb in a crowd near a Shiite Mosque in Baghdad, killing himself and five others. He had traveled to the war zone with an extended family member in November



**Figure 6.1** Adam Dahman  
Adam Dahman in Iraq or Syria (2014).

2013. Just months later, on September 23, 2014, Afghan-born, Melbourne raised 18-year-old Numan Haider (Figure 6.2), apparently responding to calls for attacks by Muslims in the West, stabbed two police counter-terrorism officers in the outer south eastern suburb of Endeavour Hills, attacking them in the car park of the local police station and inflicting serious injuries before being shot and killed. On March 11, 2015, 18-year-old white Australian convert Jake Bilardi (Figure 6.3) also known as *Abdullah Al Australi* drove a four wheel drive laden with explosives into an Iraqi army checkpoint, killing only himself. He had flown to Turkey and entered Syria in late 2014, placing himself immediately on the list for martyrdom operations. This was after he had decided that an attack in Melbourne would likely be detected.<sup>2</sup> As far as can be ascertained, these young men were not known to each other, although they were part of a broader extended network of Australian Salafi jihadists. All were just four to five years old at the time of the 9/11 attacks



**Figure 6.2** Numan Haider  
Numan Haider wearing a balaclava in his bedroom (2014). Credit: Facebook.

and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. All came from different ethnic communities, schools, and parts of Melbourne yet all made the decision to not only participate in the violence, but to use their bodies as weapons to do so.

### **Suicide Bombing and Attacks as a Political Act**

The most significant work on suicide bombing in recent years was conducted by Riaz Hassan, who considers suicide attacks as “the targeted use of self-destructing humans against a perceived enemy for political ends.”<sup>3</sup> For



**Figure 6.3** Jake Bilardi  
 Jake Bilardi flanked by ISIS movement fighters (2015). Credit: Facebook.

Hassan and others, suicide attacks are generally equated with bombing. He states further:

A suicide attack involves a bomber who carries the explosives on his/her body or in a vehicle driven by him/herself and, by personal choice and with full self-awareness, approaches a previously chosen target and blows him/herself up . . . The perpetrator knows in advance that the success of the attack will depend entirely on his/her death.<sup>4</sup>

While the most clear cut cases of suicide attacks are evident in bombings, it must be considered that cases where the chance of success is highly improbable, if not impossible, without facing death can also constitute suicide attacks. The Mumbai (2008) and Kenyan Westgate Mall (2013) attacks share this feature. So too does the case of Numan Haider, who attacked two armed counter-terrorism police officers with a knife. As at least one scholar, Anne Aly, has noted, it “begs to question whether he had in mind some kind of suicide mission.”<sup>5</sup>

While terrorism has been covered in the exploration of the Benbrika Jama’ah, and is understood as a political act that is physically, socially, and culturally destructive, suicide terrorism is generally accepted to occupy a special place in the spectrum of violence. Talal Asad argues it is not the motives, but that “the uniqueness of suicide bombing resides . . . not in its essence, but in its contingent circumstance,”<sup>6</sup> that is, “Suicide bombing is an

act of passionate identification—you take the enemy with you in a deadly embrace.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the horror of suicide bombing moves beyond fear and terror: “horror is a state of being that is *felt*.”<sup>8</sup> Suicide terrorism is indeed an act of ultra-violence that evokes raw panic amongst members of the public. Nevertheless, suicide bombing remains an inherently political act. As Hassan argues, “suicide bombing attacks are linked more to politics than religion.” Drawing on his extensive research on suicide over the past 40 years, Hassan argues that attacks can be “*a means to achieve multiple ends*, including self-empowerment in the face of powerlessness, redemption in the face of damnation [and] honor in the face of humiliation.”<sup>9</sup> Hassan argues further that suicide bombers are not exceptional. That rather, they are typically “psychologically normal and deeply integrated into social networks.”

Hassan argues that, in particular, humiliation, revenge, and altruism play key roles at the organizational and individual level in shaping the subculture that promotes suicide bombings.<sup>10</sup> Humiliation is considered a “complex and intensely personal experience . . . in which perceptions of self-worth, self-respect, and dignity are destroyed and revealed as apparently false and illegitimate affections.”<sup>11</sup> Revenge is considered to “. . . fulfil a range of goals, including righting perceived injustices, restoring the self-worth of the vengeful individual and deterring future injustice.”<sup>12</sup> Importantly, as Hassan states, “at the heart of the whole process are perceptions of personal harm, unfairness and injustice, and the anger, indignation and hatred associated with the perceived injustice.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, Hassan considers altruism as a key contributor, noting that “In its very essence altruism is costly action which benefits others.”<sup>14</sup> He considers that under conditions of massive social and economic dislocation due to prolonged struggle with a more powerful enemy that “under such conditions, people react to perceived inferiority and the failure of other efforts by valuing and supporting ideals of self-sacrifice such as suicide bombing.”<sup>15</sup>

### 9/11's Children: Neo-resistance Identity in 2014–2015

The initial “output” of Adam Dahman, Numan Haider, and Jake Bilardi considered is the death and injury caused. The secondary and more significant output is the symbolic capital these acts generated for both the individual and the Islamic State movement. Engaging with the motivations, aims, and targets of these young men reveals important insights into the fields they were seeking to impact their capital and decisions.

There are obvious methodological challenges in seeking to ascribe motivation to an individual that has not been interviewed. Likewise, there are important limitations in terms of the data that could be accessed. In the context of

immense and ongoing law enforcement and media pressure, a decision was made not to approach the families and friends of those close to the individuals. Not only were the actions criminal in nature, but they were relatively recent. As a researcher, to involve oneself in what are ongoing criminal investigations would risk the research being compromised or worse yet, data seized.

In the absence of interviews with the men central to these attacks, the chapter utilizes a variety of sources to gain insights into the men's motivations, aims, and targets. These include blog entries and Web forums gathered immediately after the attacks (much of which is now unavailable), social media use, and media interviews with family members, friends, and acquaintances of the young men. Corresponding with the different quality and quantity of sources available for the individuals concerned, the chapter will focus first upon Bilardi, then Haider and Dahman, before identifying broad patterns.

### **Jake Bilardi**

Jake Bilardi, labeled “Britain’s White Jihadi,” first came to the attention of the British Press in late December 2014. The image of a young, “baby faced,” “meek looking,” and gaunt Bilardi posing with a rifle in between two fit and athletic looking young bearded members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) movement provided an irresistible contrast for the British media who launched a campaign to identify him.<sup>16</sup> Some even considered the photo to be a “sophisticated fake.”<sup>17</sup> Yet a series of blog posts in February and March 2015 would reveal that far from an ISIS movement hoax, not only was the young man an Australian convert, but he was also on the list to conduct a “martyrdom operation.” A search of his Australian bedroom after his death uncovered explosives. It is these blog entries, clearly aimed at a mass audience, that reveal important insights into the motivation, aims, and targets of Bilardi. One in particular, an articulate 4,400 word entry titled “From Melbourne to Ramadi: My Journey,” would make these particularly clear.

In this entry Bilardi explains, in great depth, the process leading to his conversion to Islam, desire to travel to Syria, and eventual affiliation with the Islamic State movement:

With my martyrdom operation drawing closer, I want to tell you my story, how I came from being an Atheist school student in affluent Melbourne to a soldier of the Khilafah preparing to sacrifice my life for Islam in Ramadi.<sup>18</sup>

The blog outlines a rational decision based upon significant “research” into violent conflict worldwide, and in particular, its root causes. Detailing his research into “violent political and social movements,” Bilardi noted,

"Through my research I found a common link between all these organizations, they are made up of oppressed and neglected people seeking their own form of perceived justice."<sup>19</sup> Bilardi wrote of his early attraction to Islamic extremism:

Being just five-years-old at the time of the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, my knowledge of the operation was basically non-existent. Despite this, I was immediately drawn to the topics of al-Qaeda and "Islamic terrorism" based on the little information my brother had provided me with. I was intrigued, why would a group of people living in caves in Afghanistan want to kill innocent American civilians? . . . It was from here that my research into al-Qaeda, Shaykh Usama bin Laden (May Allah have mercy upon him) and groups with similar ideologies worldwide began.<sup>20</sup>

A series of entries on the disqus.com discussion forum from around 2011, when Bilardi was just 14, similarly reveals his intellectual capability, affirms his writing about conducting research and the origins of his conversion to Islam. One such entry replying to a post about the torture and death of 13-year-old Hamza al-Khateeb on the Al Jazeera website<sup>21</sup> stated:

When other children have been killed in the Arab uprisings, the security forces often say that they were just shooting into the crowd and accidentally hit a child. There is no reason for arresting then torturing and killing anyone, let alone someone so young. Bashar Al-Assad lost the right to rule Syria a long time ago, he and the people who committed this crime are brutal murderers.<sup>22</sup>

Another post, targeting a perceived troll on a discussion about the Libyan conflict in 2011,<sup>23</sup> reveals the temperament of a pre-Muslim Bilardi:

Get a better education on the real teachings of Islam and then post a comment, I am not a muslim but you see I am not a pathetic loser who doesn't know anything outside of their own home and I actually have a life I don't just go on the internet to abuse people and their beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

So to sum it up, you are the following:

A pathetic loser  
 You have no life  
 You are uneducated  
 And I can't stress this enough A PATHETIC LOSER

Bilardi outlined in his blog entry how, through his "research" (a word used close to a dozen times within the brief entry), he came to sympathize with both the Taliban and Iraqi's fighting US forces:

It was from my investigations into the invasions and occupations of both Iraq and Afghanistan that gave birth to my disdain for the United States and its allies, including Australia. It was also the start of my respect for the mujahideen that would only grow to develop into a love of Islam and ultimately bring me here to the Islamic State . . .<sup>25</sup>

These sentiments appear to capture the altruistic dimension of a suicide attack as identified by Hassan, yet the origin of Bilardi, a white convert growing up in outer suburban Melbourne from an “atheist” family challenges the strong identification he refers to when considering the social origin of suicide bombers from within their community. Further, the writing, while rational and articulate, is decidedly lacking in emotion.

If the motivation for joining the Islamic State came from “research” and identification with both their struggle and apparent empowerment in the face of superior forces, Bilardi was also clearly motivated by a hatred of his homeland:

I was growing tired of the corruption and filthiness of Australian society and yearned to live under the Islamic State with the Muslims. I now had the determination to finally remove myself from this land.

Bilardi stated that he actively sought a way to travel to Syria to participate in fighting, looking for contacts online until he was successful. Yet concerned that he would be prevented from leaving (it is common practice for Australian authorities to confiscate passports from suspected jihadists), Bilardi began “drawing up a Plan B”:

This plan involved launching a string of bombings across Melbourne, targeting foreign consulates and political/military targets as well as grenade and knife attacks on shopping centres and cafes and culminating with myself detonating a belt of explosives amongst the kufir. As I began collecting materials for the explosives and prepared to start making the devices I realized that the authorities were oblivious to my plans but if anything was to attract their attention it would be my purchasing of chemicals and other bomb-making materials and so I ceased the planning of Plan B and sat waiting until everything was prepared and I could exit the country undetected.

Ultimately Bilardi was successful; however, traveling to Syria and placing his name on a list for martyrdom operations, which he believed would see him bestowed with rewards from God:

I guess I was always destined to stand here as a soldier in the army of Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (May Allah have mercy upon him) considering the



great respect I had for him even before I entered Islam. May Allah accept him among the best of *shuhadah* and allow me to sit with him in the highest ranks of *Jannah*.

Indeed, in his reference to Melbourne and Australia, Bilardi considered Australian society to be filthy and corrupt and, should he have failed to reach Syria, he was prepared to launch bombings, grenade, and knife attacks. Bilardi initially referred to foreign consulates and "political/military targets"—targets against whom a case could be made before stating his willingness to use knives against members of the wider public, the "kufr." In a separate blog post titled "Let them feel our pain," Bilardi calls for Australian Muslims to do likewise:

You may think large scale bombings or shootings are the best methods of execution but wallahi, the best method is to simply take a knife and let it meet the throats of every kafr walking down the street, this is what scares them the most, that there will rise in their lands an undetectable undercover army attacking in suburban areas with simple tools.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, Bilardi's final attack was a military target in Iraq and one which was spectacularly unsuccessful. However, a eulogy released by the Islamic State praised his efforts stating:

... Allah made him successful in making hijrah to sham and fighting in Jihad there. He started fighting in Baiji against the ISF Radhida & was a lion on the battlefield although he was at a young age & with a weak body, he was like a mountain...

May Allah accept our dear brother Abdu-Rahim. For indeed this ummah needs true men like him who wish to sacrifice this worldly life for the hereafter. Brothers & sisters, this brother originated from an atheist family & ended up selling his soul to Allah for a cheap price, to defend this ummah & give victory to this religion, while you sit at home in the comfort of your family born into Islam & not doing anything to stop this oppression. What is wrong with you?<sup>27</sup>

Whilst an unsuccessful attack, Bilardi's death generated substantial media attention and symbolic capital for the Islamic State movement, who in turn, praised Bilardi as a hero.

### Numan Haider

If the actions of Jake Bilardi reflect a distanced and rational approach to engaging in violence, those of Numan Haider were vastly different. Haider is understood to have started to associate with known radicals as a 16-year

old through a local bookshop, raided by the counter-terrorism taskforce in 2012 (around the same time).

In the weeks leading up to the incident in which Haider was killed, he visited the Fountain Gate and Dandenong shopping centers in outer suburban Melbourne, handing out Islamic literature while dressed in camouflage pants and waving a black Islamic flag. Haider was questioned by police on two separate occasions. On the first of these occasions, on July 25, 2014, police were called to a group of men arguing about Jihad and martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after these incidents on September 16, 2014, Haider's passport was confiscated by authorities who were apparently concerned that he would travel to Syria or Iraq.<sup>29</sup> On the second of these occasions on September 18, 2014, at Dandenong, Haider and his associates were surrounded by up to 15 police officers. Haider would complain to one shopkeeper shortly after "I don't have the freedom to express my beliefs."<sup>30</sup> Shortly after, an apparently enraged Haider would upload a Facebook photo dressed in a balaclava and green camouflage t-shirt holding a black Islamic flag. Beneath it read:

Let's not put the focus on other things. The main message I'm sending with these statuses and photos is to the dogs of the Australian Federal Police and ASIO who are declaring war on Islam and Muslims. Go fist each other up the ass.<sup>31</sup>

Less than a week later, on Monday September 22, Islamic State recruiters released a call for Western Muslims to attack members of the public in Australia, including police and military personnel. A day later, on Tuesday September 23, Haider had been eating at Hungry Jacks with a group of friends before receiving a phone call from a family member stating that police had visited his home and searched his room. It is understood that police then requested Haider meet them at the Endeavour Hills police station for questioning. Haider's friends and family were reported to have urged him not to meet with the police, suggesting he was in an agitated state. Media reports (prior to the results of a formal investigation into the shooting) suggest that Haider attended the meeting at 7.40 P.M., calling the two police officers to ask them to meet outside in the parking, lot rather than inside the station, as he felt uneasy going inside. Immediately upon shaking their hand he is alleged to have stabbed the officers, one in the head, neck, stomach, and wrist, the other twice in the arm before being killed with a single shot.<sup>32</sup> It is alleged that he had a black flag in his possession.<sup>33</sup> Both officers survived.

These events made it through the media to Islamic State movement fighters. Notably, writing in a January 19, 2015, entry to his blog, Jake Bilardi stated:

We look towards our brother Abdul Nouman Haider (May Allah accept him as a Shaheed), who seriously wounded two police officers in Melbourne, Australia in a knife attack before he was shot dead, and we see nothing but an 18-year-old who loved his religion and brought honor to the Muslims in Australia and beyond. While so many young Muslims are being dragged towards fasad and kufr by the filth in Australia, he rejected their criminality and chose the path of tawheed and the path of jihad, seeking the pleasure of his creator and chasing martyrdom.<sup>34</sup>

In an ISIS video by senior Australian ISIS recruiter, Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled Al-Cambodi, released in April 2015 stated:

And I would like to praise the attacks of my dear beloved brother [inaudible] may Allah accept him and the other brothers. My dear brother Numan. I knew this brother personally. And the effort that he tried to make hijrah. When he failed, because the government took his passport, it did not stop him. Look what he did brothers. He rushed towards Jannah.<sup>35</sup>

Such celebratory releases could be read as projections of how these young men would like to be represented themselves.

### **Adam Dahman**

Comparatively very little is known about Adam Dahman. He did not author a manifesto nor did he come to the attention of the national media until after his death in Iraq. What is known is that on November 10, 2013, Dahman and another man, Mounair Raad (a cousin of the convicted Raad brothers from the Benbrika Jama'ah), traveled to Syria from either Sydney or Perth.<sup>36</sup> Dahman posted a number of photos on Facebook during his brief time, smiling while posing with children, an Islamic State Flag and in an all-black hooded outfit with an Adidas bumbag. These photos, on initial viewing, may be read as identification with the Syrian countryside and people and Islamic State movement. At some time, Dahman likely volunteered for a suicide mission and on July 17, 2014, detonated a belt bomb close to a Shiite Mosque in Baghdad, killing five and injuring up to 90 worshippers. This was celebrated by the Islamic State news outlet with a press release:

One of the knights of Islam, and a hero of the caliphate, our foreign brother who went forward when many Arabs had stood still, the brother immigrant knight (Abu Bakr Al-Australia, may Allah have mercy on his soul) who abandoned all the pleasures and ornaments of the world and embarked on what Allah has to offer.

He went ahead to plunge himself with his laden explosive vest amid one of the temples of Rawafed (Shia) in al-Shorja in Baghdad, which is used by their militias to wage war on Islam and kill and displace its people. Our commando knight went in then shouted Allah Akbar and blew it up, turning them, thanks to Allah, to shreds.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly to Bilardi, such press releases seek to lionize and celebrate “martyrs,” offering them as an example to other young Muslim men.

### **Neo-resistance in the Field of Power and Muslim Cultural Politics**

The actions taken by the young men examined here are profound. They left the “trenches of resistance” and sacrificed their lives in order to attack those who to them represented an enemy of Islam. Vitaly, those young men who slipped under the radar of law enforcement made it first to Turkey, then Syria, and Iraq, and successfully joined the Islamic State movement. Numan Haider’s passport was confiscated before he was able to travel and he appeared incapable of maintaining the demeanor necessary to avoid attention. Nonetheless, he too was grossly underestimated by authorities to the point that he could approach two police officers closely enough to attack them with a knife.

Eulogies and honor after death appear to be very important. The men were actively celebrated as martyrs after their death as well as “brothers,” lions, “mountains,” “true men,” “honorable,” “racing toward heaven,” “knights,” “heroes,” and even a “commando knight.” The potential suicide attacker may rest assured that he will be eulogized and that his legacy will inspire others. Despite the stated religious nature of these acts, they remain absolutely political in nature. Jake Bilardi very clearly outlined political motivations for his conversion to Islam and decision to join the Islamic state, while Numan Haider attacked the police force he felt had humiliated him. Dahman targeted Shi’ite Muslims—the arch enemies of the ISIS movement. In contrast to the Benbrika Jama’ah who were isolated and ostracized by the Australian Muslim community, the Islamic State offered these men a sense of belonging and source of meaning; instant honorable recognition as martyrs.

These acts may be all firmly located within the field of power. While referring to religious motivation, the driving rhetoric behind the acts is that Islam and Muslims are at war and that these men are warriors in that war. Indeed, Australia and other Western nations have joined an Arab coalition in fighting against the Islamic State while actively targeting sympathizers in Australia. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott committed 500 Australian

soldiers to the conflict<sup>38</sup> and an extra \$600 million in the federal budget to intelligence agencies over four years.<sup>39</sup> In addition, over 70 passports of potential ISIS movement recruits have been seized.<sup>40</sup> The security of the Australian people is viewed as a clear designated task of government and any successful attack, as in the case of the Sydney Lindt Cafe, may lead to criticism and a loss of political capital for the government.

Whilst the actors involved may be considered to be vying for power, their impact in the field of Muslim cultural politics in Australia cannot be overstated. While some community leaders have publically criticized the Islamic State movement, others have stated publically that they should not have to apologize for the actions of others. Further, groups such as the ICV that previously criticized the Benbrika Jama'ah have clearly felt a level of pressure from amongst Muslim communities have been critical of counter-terrorism raids and called for an inquiry into Haider's shooting. ICV Secretary Ghaith Krayem stated:

...I think it's wrong for anybody to be condemning this young man until the full investigation takes place and we actually understand what occurred... While I don't know the young man personally, I do know many young men at that age and they can be brash, they can be angry, they can be immature. None of those things make him a terrorist.<sup>41</sup>

The actions of the small minority of young men going to fight in Syria and Iraq, and in plotting or carrying out violent acts locally, have arguably served to drive a wedge into Australian Muslim communities. While individually the actions were spectacularly unsuccessful in terms of the "body count" of the attacks, their symbolism has resonated with other marginalized young men and acted as a force multiplier for their Salafi jihadist politics, polarizing communities, and challenging the authorities at home and abroad.

### **Key Social Influences**

Similarly to engaging with the aims, motivations, and targets of these young men, it has not been possible to collect empirical data based on interviews. Nonetheless, a significant amount of data about the men has contributed forming a reasonably nuanced picture of their key social influences.

### **Islam**

For the men examined in this chapter, Islam is clearly at the fore of their identity and political action. Whilst examined as individuals, the men were, to varying extents, also part of wider social networks of likeminded social actors

who believed in the notion of a war against Islam and who held radical beliefs. The key starting point for understanding how Islam shaped their identities is to consider the influence of their teachers.

### Islamic Teachers

The men examined in this chapter likely drew upon many sources, both online and through lectures. However, two centers—the Hume Islamic Youth Centre (HIYC) in northern metropolitan Melbourne and al-Furqan in outer south eastern metropolitan Melbourne emerge as important influences upon the young men.

The HIYC has come under considerable media scrutiny as four young men associated with it, including Bilardi and Dahman, have joined the Islamic State movement.<sup>42</sup> The center describes itself as promoting:

... a safe and friendly environment for the youth of the local community that facilitates and promotes learning, a healthy and active lifestyle, the development of virtuous character and an enlightenment of the spirit based on Islamic principles.<sup>43</sup>

The organization's Facebook site describes it as "... one of the most vibrant Islamic centres in the world."<sup>44</sup> However, the center is closely associated with the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah (ASWJ), a Salafi organization that also has close links with the Islamic Information and Services Centre of Australia (IISCA), led by Sheikh Mohamed Omran, who expelled Abdul Nacer Benbrika. The Auburn, New South Wales Branch of ASWJ, supports radical preacher Sheikh Feiz Muhamad,<sup>45</sup> whose lectures were found in the collection of Boston bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev.<sup>46</sup>

It is instructive to examine the social media posts of one preacher associated with the HIYC, Khoder Soueid. While it is not known whether Soueid had any direct contact with either Bilardi or Dahman, his popularity at the center makes such an exercise worthwhile. A prolific poster on a publically accessible Facebook page, Soueid is primarily concerned with the war in Iraq and Syria and broader Middle East including Palestine and Yemen, and has posted many images of injured and dead children killed in the war to the page. One post, under which sits a photo of a toddler covered in blood states simply, "This is your baby in #Douma. #incaseyouforgot."<sup>47</sup> Another photo of a deeply anguished man next to a pile of rubble states, "This is your brother searching for his wife and children under the rubble in#Douma. #incaseyouforgot."<sup>48</sup> In a January 2015 post he quotes now deceased senior Al Qaeda figure Anwar Al-Awlaki: "The one who insults the Prophet (peace

be upon him) is like the one who looks directly up at the sun and spits at it—his spit falls back on his face.<sup>49</sup>

Posts to the Facebook page on the one hand capture highly emotive images of dead and injured children and their distraught relatives and on the other accompanies these with pledges of retribution and violence. One particularly harrowing post from July 2014 captures this mix precisely. Soueid had posted a short video clip of a father finding the limbs of his children, apparently in the aftermath of an Israeli bombing raid in Palestine. The post states:

HEARTBREAKING: This father lost his 7 children and his wife. He recognized the limbs of his children while searching for them in hospital. I can't even fathom finding your 7 children in pieces. *Ina lilahi wa ina ilayhi rajioon*. This dunya does not belong to us. The blood of our martyrs will not be forgotten. The day of retribution is approaching with the passing of each day.<sup>50</sup>

The subject of such posts may be considered reasonably representative of the wider body of teaching by Soueid and others in a similar position. One might consider the potential impact of these upon young men with little life experience and few reference points. A friend of Haider's would write on Facebook, "He was sick of seeing people being killed, females being raped and innocents being tortured."<sup>51</sup> Yet Haider had not traveled to conflict zones, let alone seen other Muslims killed, raped and tortured before his eyes. It was precisely the imagery represented on such social media sites that was distressing and simultaneously, absorbing.

One other noteworthy theme captured on the page is that of criticism of other Muslims for being co-opted by the government and mainstream media. Soueid wrote in September 2014:

Today the Muslims Love Australia BBQ was held in Sydney. Seeing the photos and videos (including the dancing) was seriously cringeworthy. This need to be accepted as "Austrian" is nothing short of embarrassing. I do not know of any other community that goes to these lengths to prove their "Austrianess" and yet the comments highlight the impossible nature of pleasing and truly being accepted.

The other group of interest is the al-Furqan Islamic Centre, which shut its doors on April 23, 2015 in the aftermath of intense media scrutiny about terrorism links.<sup>52</sup> Numan Haider was associated with al-Furqan from 2012–2014. The center had been the focus of an intensive counter-terrorism investigation in 2012 when police conducted raids on a number of members. Like the Benbrika Jama'ah, the group formed after being forced to leave another mosque (the Noble Park Bosnian mosque). The Imam, Harun

Mehicevic is a Bosnian Australian with a teaching qualification from Deakin University. Like Benbrika, Mehicevic was also a follower of Omran. While he stayed loyal to Omran during the Benbrika split, in 2011 he expelled Omran and his followers from the al-Furqan Centre after a challenge over religious authority and the right to make fatwas. Like Benbrika, Mehicevic also had a wife and six children.<sup>53</sup> The Bosnian Council of Australia chairman Jasmin Bekric stated:

Unfortunately, small groups like al-Furqan kidnap and brainwash our young people for their agenda and purposes . . . We are a bit worried and we are trying to advise and work with our youths to discourage them from becoming involved with groups like al-Furqan.<sup>54</sup>

Importantly, like the Benbrika Jama'ah, members of the group also participated in faux military training activities. One former member of the group reported to a media source that male members of the group would regularly attend camps:

They would do activities like archery and paintball, and they would do what they call clay shooting. They would basically just be practicing with their guns . . . There is also a gym where they do martial arts and they teach little kids as young as five. It's not about health. It's about learning how to fight.<sup>55</sup>

The similarity between Benbrika and Mehicevic persists in their teachings to their followers. In a lecture on March 9, 2013, recorded and disseminated to followers, he discussed the topic of jihad:

Muslim jama'ah must learn how to wage jihad and against whom it must be waged. It must be learned, brothers. This is the basic knowledge. Don't be ignorant on the issue of jihad *fisabilillah* (in the way of Allah) and against whom it should be waged. [Muslims] must learn . . . and everybody's telling you 'don't learn' . . .<sup>56</sup>

In another lecture he stated:

We are loving jihad *fisabilillah* and we dream, *inshallah*, that each of us one day participate in jihad *fisabilillah*.<sup>57</sup>

In an earlier lecture in January 2012, Mehicevic was critical of Australian values and invoked the concept of the Amir and Bayat utilized by Benbrika to demand obedience from his followers:



Australian values are the values of the Kufr (unbelievers) . . . Your religion is not their values. They will not stop fighting you until you give up your religion or are martyred. Be careful what they ask us to say. There is no bayah (pledge) to Kufr (unbeliever). We can only give a bayah to a Muslim leader . . . The (Australian) flag should be a warning to you that we do not belong here. It is a flag of the people of the Cross.<sup>58</sup>

Others associated with the al-Furqan Centre before its closure included Senior ISIS movement recruiter Neil Prakash, who may possibly have converted from Buddhism to Islam as a result of interaction with center members and Junaid Thorne, a radical indigenous Australian who fled Saudi Arabia after the arrest of his brother Shayden for terrorism offenses and who has openly supported the Islamic State movement. Both Prakash and Thorne have stated that they knew Haider personally.<sup>59</sup>

### Islamic Texts

The only person to actively cite texts that might be analyzed was Jake Bilardi. Of the 11 blog entries accessed, many cited the Quran and Sunnah and historical figures in a similar frame to that of the Benbrika Jama'ah, with an emphasis upon those sections justifying violence and acts against non-believers. Justifying the mass slaughter of prisoners, Bilardi cites Umar Ibn al-Khattab: "If a prisoner is brought to you, then kill him in order to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy."<sup>60</sup> It is important to consider the role of Islamic State recruitment movies as a form of text. While not possessing the legitimacy of the Quran and Sunnah, nor of scholars, these texts are targeted specifically at young Muslims in Western contexts and may be considered influential. One key video, released on June 19, 2014 (prior to the deaths of all three men), is titled "There is no life without Jihad." Running for just over 13 minutes, the video is produced to a professional standard and features six men (of whom three are Australian and three British) sitting cross-legged and addressing other young men directly, interspersed with night-time scenes of young armed men in slow motion. The language utilized is vital. Abu Muthanna al Yemeni (British) states: "he [Allah] has made this the best of his lands and he chooses the best of people to come here."<sup>61</sup> Abu Bara' al Hindi (British) invokes the possibility of extraordinary spiritual rewards: "if you sacrifice something for Allah, Allah will give you 700 times more than this" and further:

I know how you feel. I used to live there. In the heart you feel depressed. The Messenger of Allah, Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: The cure

for depression is jihad in the cause of Allah. You feel like you have no honor, but the Messenger of Allah, Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: The honor of a believer is [sic] come with light, the honor of the Ummah is jihad in the cause of Allah. All my brothers, come to Jihad and feel the honor that we are feeling. Feel the happiness that we are feeling.<sup>62</sup>

Australian Zakaryah Raad, known for his role and conviction in a 2012 “sharia” lashing of an acquaintance who had consumed alcohol and drugs, also features in the video. Referred to as Abu Yahya ash Shami, he urges viewers to:

‘look at the disgrace this ummah is going through’ and states that in Iraq ‘. . . the flags of *tawhid* are once again being raised. And the honor to this *deen* is coming back.’ Abu Dujana al Hindi (British) urges martyrdom: ‘Know that if it’s your family, your wife, these people that you claim to love. If you really love them then martyrdom is what you do for them . . .’<sup>63</sup>

A subsequent video featuring Neil Prakash (Abu Khaled Al-Cambodi) is promised at the conclusion of this episode. In this second recruitment video, released in April 2015, Prakash outlines his conversion from Buddhism to Islam and calls upon Australian Muslims to attack:

Look how much your sisters have been violated. All I hear on the news in Australia is this sister was hurt, this sister was hurt. Her hijab was ripped off. But no, you see the brother sitting. And I ask you brothers, when is the time you’re going to rise up and attack them for them attacking you?<sup>64</sup>

In these frames, the language is particularly powerful and significant, seeking to tap into the everyday experiences of marginalized young men. Painful torment, depression, disgrace, violation, and hurt are contrasted with the possibility of honor, happiness, and belonging to the “best of the best.” Vulnerability is overcome with strength. Martyrdom is framed as altruistic and the best thing to do for one’s family, while simultaneously earning the follower great spiritual rewards. Combined with similar teachings from local radical Imams, exposure to powerful imagery and experiences of humiliation, the appeal to young men could be significant. As Sageman suggests, this would be even more powerful, if it resonated with personal experiences such as humiliation and discrimination.

### Muslim Peers

If friendships and associations can act to reinforce identity and a particular political narrative, it is instructive that considerable difference existed

between the young men. Jake Bilardi may be considered to have been highly isolated from his peers. While it is known that much of Bilardi's initial exposure to Salafi jihadist Islam occurred through his "research," he had also started attending the HIYC. A youth worker at the center commenting on Bilardi stated:

I've never seen him utter a word at the table when I was serving the food, cleaning up the table, nothing. He was the last person I would expect to actually go there.<sup>65</sup>

Another member of the HIYC stated "He used to come here when we had a big lecture. We weren't close to him I didn't see any of the people close to him."<sup>66</sup>

In stark contrast, Numan Haider was highly popular with his peers and his death caused considerable angst among Muslim communities. One acquaintance who had roomed with Haider at a youth camp stated:

He was a gentle soft spoken boy and when I heard the report yesterday about a man who had been shot—when I actually found out he was Numan—I was absolutely shocked.<sup>67</sup>

A conservative, niqab wearing female acquaintance who prayed at some of the same mosques stated:

He was a well-known, humble and shy brother who was just trying to help people. A lot of the community don't believe it because this was not how he was. He was a very quiet person who kept to himself. If he could, he'd help people. He just wanted to seek knowledge. . . .<sup>68</sup>

A friend described him as a "good dude, a really nice guy," while another friend described him as "very well liked in our community."<sup>69</sup> Approximately 300 mourners attended Haider's funeral.<sup>70</sup> Police also speculated that an alleged April 2015 terror plot targeting police and involving close friends of Haider was a "revenge attack" for his shooting.<sup>71</sup>

Very little is known about Adam Dahman's friendships and acquaintances with Muslim communities. An examination of family influences is significantly more revealing.

## Family

When considered in the context of other social influences, familial relationships emerge as important underlying contributors in each of the men examined.

Jake Bilardi was the youngest of six siblings in a staunchly atheist family in Craigieburn in Melbourne's outer northern suburbs. His father had left the family when he was just nine years old and his mother had passed away from cancer when he was 15 in 2012, the same time at which Bilardi converted to Islam.<sup>72</sup> It was shortly after this that Bilardi resumed a relationship with his father. In contrast to the powerfully worded content of his online blogs, Bilardi's father described him as a "shy lonely young man,"<sup>73</sup> who told his father upon their reunion "I've gone Muslim."<sup>74</sup> In a March 2015 Sixty Minutes interview, Bilardi's father John would state:

I would just like everyone to know that the buck stops here with me. He was my son. Um, I knew there was something not right with his behaviour. He had psychological or mental issues that should have been addressed and I feel totally responsible for that. . . . I should have been there for him and he obviously needed help and as a parent I wasn't able to do that.<sup>75</sup>

The issue of mental illness was explored further. On the topic when Bilardi's behavior was most difficult his father replied:

When he would actually arm himself with a weapon and threaten him with a weapon. Um . . . One time that stands out clearly was when he, when my wife at that time was calling out to me, screaming, and I ran in into the room where she was and she was backed up into the corner with Jake, with a pair of scissors. Thrusting the pair of scissors at her. I grabbed him. And as I tried to grab him he turned and thrust the scissors at me.<sup>76</sup>

One media outlet reported a potential mental illness (possibly paranoid schizophrenia), with reference to a post to a public Internet domain:

Since I was about 11 or 12 years old I have felt sometimes like my home wasn't really my home and that it was all a set-up. I live with two older siblings and I sometimes even start to question who they are and believe that they are plotting to kill me.<sup>77</sup>

In remembering his son, Bilardi's father referred to the memory he would rather have: "Jake, the intelligent boy who could have had a bright career . . . that's the memory. That's the memory."<sup>78</sup>

Numan Haider came from a similarly unsuspecting household. His parents had migrated to Australia from Afghanistan when he was seven and settled, after spending two years in Adelaide, in the suburb of Endeavour Hills. The family was described by neighbors as ". . . a normal family. Very polite, nothing out of the ordinary."<sup>79</sup> In contrast to John Bilardi, Haider's

parents did not foresee any potential difficulties. His father, a former public servant in Afghanistan, stated:

We brought our son up, he went to an Australian school from when we came to this country when he was seven years old and we were responsible for him . . . He was a good son, we never had any problems with him so it's so hard for us to cope—we feel half mad most of the time.<sup>80</sup>

Haider's mother similarly stated: "He was my boy, my precious son. He was a lovely person. He used to be so helpful, he used to help me cook in the kitchen."<sup>81</sup> In mid-2014, Haider's relationship with a young Sri Lankan woman (a convert) failed. One friend stated "It was a huge factor in his life. They were living apart. He was very upset."<sup>82</sup> Haider's increasingly provocative public actions appear to have coincided with the divorce. While there is insufficient evidence available to establish that this was a key contributor, there is evidence that other men whose marriages have failed have similarly turned to jihad.<sup>83</sup> Further, it has been established that Haider's parents wanted him to undertake counseling and were seeking to find him a wife.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to both Bilardi and Haider, Adam Dahman came from a family with extensive links to hardline Salafi jihadism. Whilst a friend described Dahman's family as "the nicest people you'll ever meet,"<sup>85</sup> Dahman's sister is married to Ahmed Raad, who was released from prison for his role in the Benbrika Jama'ah in November 2011. As noted in the previous chapter, she staunchly defended her husband as a good Muslim. A member of the family would state about Dahman: "He is doing the right thing leaving his comfortable life to help others."<sup>86</sup>

Ezzit Raad was also convicted of terrorism offenses with the group and is believed to be in Syria or Iraq.<sup>87</sup> A former friend of the Raad family stated:

Through Benbrika they spread this mentality. After they went to jail they all seemed to think they too could preach. They now all take it upon themselves as a duty to preach and recruit.<sup>88</sup>

A member of the extended Raad family, Zakaryah Raad was killed fighting with the Islamic State movement in 2014, while Mounir Raad, who traveled to Syria with Dahman, is also with the Islamic State movement. A member of the extended Dahman family considered that the Raad family was central to Adam Dalman's radicalization:

It starts with them letting you know how you are not a good Muslim. Then they show you what you are doing wrong. Then how you can improve. They

then let you know that you are welcome to come over and join in on nights of lecture and study where they actually start to basically brainwash.<sup>89</sup>

In Adam Dahman's case, it appears that the Raad family, who he met through his sister were a powerful influence upon his development.

### Education

Jake Bilardi allegedly left Craigieburn Secondary College due to bullying for another only to then drop out of school altogether. However, he was considered as intelligent and even referred to by one classmate as an "outstanding student and always would offer a hand when someone didn't know what they were doing."<sup>90</sup> Another stated, "I've seen people befriend him so they can use him for class work." Bilardi himself wrote in his blog "I found myself excelling in my studies, just as my siblings had, and had dreamed of becoming a political journalist."<sup>91</sup> Bilardi's blog displays strong writing and critical ability (irrespective of the content). Like some other men examined within this book, Bilardi appeared to have been bullied at school. One video uploaded to YouTube showed him being "happy slapped" (slapped in the face without his consent to film then uploaded). However, while isolated, he appeared to have a small number of loyal friendships. One friend commented:

Jake was a remarkable man. Strong willed and had a beautiful nature about him when I first met him. Kind and humble, curiosity was one of his best characteristics. The guy's observational skills, before you would approach him or he'd walk up to you, he had already gotten a good glimpse of who you are and what you would be like. Unfortunately, people didn't see such a gifted person. Only a shy, innocent kid where people could see an opportunity to make a laugh and take advantage over him.<sup>92</sup>

One classmate considered: "He was obviously a kid that needed some help or guidance and he thought converting to Muslim was right for him."<sup>93</sup>

Numan Haider finished year 12 at Lyndale Secondary College and was due to start studying electro engineering at Technical and Further Education (TAFE).<sup>94</sup> His older brothers studied pharmacy and engineering.<sup>95</sup> Importantly, several other men who were friends of Haider were arrested for their part in an alleged ANZAC day plot from the same high school in 2015. Adam Dahman, perhaps following the lead of members of the Raad family, dropped out of Northcote High School, though it may be surmised that this was due to encouragement rather than any innate lack of ability.

Importantly, two of the three men were high-school dropouts (and likely did so due to their commitment to Salafi Jihadist Islam). The school system in 2015 is likely unprepared for the possibility of students dropping out due to radicalization, a key area requiring further study.

### Employment

The men examined here were all 18 at the time of the attacks and so had minimal work histories, besides that of jobs taken while they were in high school. Jake Bilardi dreamed of becoming a political reporter:

I always dreamed that one day I would travel to countries such as Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan to cover the situations in these lands. I was intrigued by the conflicts in these countries and I was bent on understanding the motivations behind violent political and social movements.<sup>96</sup>

To this extent, he completed an internship in 2012 with a corporate communications firm called Senate SHJ. The principal of the firm said of Bilardi:

He did some work experience with us, he's a special young man. He was quite a talented writer and a nice young man . . . His idea was to blog away to get into journalism . . . It [the blog] was quite factual, it didn't have an ideological slant.<sup>97</sup>

It might be considered that he was on track to achieve this goal. Numan Haider was working at a Coles supermarket stacking shelves at the time of his death. Prior to this he had worked spruiking fruit at the Dandenong Market, a job that, according to an entry on in online work history, he found challenging:

This work required a lot of patience due to the nature of the job. I had to work long hours, at least 10 hours a day and the maximum break you could have was only 45 minutes.<sup>98</sup>

Little is known about Adam Dahman and whether or not he had an employment history. Less than a year passed between his dropping out of Northcote High School and carrying out his suicide bombing, making it appear unlikely.

Nothing about the employment background of these young men explains the resonance of the Salafi jihadist narrative. There were no failures of businesses and the young men were not involved in crime. Indeed Bilardi and Dahman were not known to police at all and Haider had only come to their attention for outlandish behavior. Potentially revealing the changing make

ups of jihadists further, in late April 2015, a 29-year-old Australian doctor appeared in an ISIS recruitment video. Raised and trained in Australia, Dr Tariq Kemlah had worked around Australia including the Women and Children's Hospital in Adelaide as a Pediatric Registrar. Importantly, whilst displaying a good track record as a young doctor, it came to light almost immediately that Kemlah had a record of heavy drinking and promiscuity prior to his travels to join the Islamic State movement. This suggests, very tentatively, that while experiences of employment (or lack thereof) may, in combination with other factors, contribute to radicalization, it does not do so by itself.

### Western Popular Culture

The young men examined here were extensively influenced by Western culture, particularly the common preoccupations of young men in the suburbs; cars and sport. It is known that both Haider and Dahman "liked cars."<sup>99</sup> Haider played sports at school, while Dahman played Australian Rules Football for Northcote High School before he dropped out and Jake Bilardi co-founded a Football charity called "Soccer for Hope" in Uganda.<sup>100</sup>

However, in stark contrast to the men of the Benrbika Jama'ah and many of the older men who have traveled to join ISIS, these young men did not embody the exaggerated masculine features that are associated with Salafi jihadists such as a thick beard and muscled bodies built through gym workouts and combat sports. Rather, they had what could be considered a "softer" bodily aesthetic. One could compare the description of Jake Bilardi by the Islamic State movement news release as "weak of body,"<sup>101</sup> and students at his school as "not capable of punching his way out of a wet paper bag. He was fragile."<sup>102</sup> Numan Haider was similarly described as a "skinny small boy" that was "quiet, very gentle, very softly spoken."<sup>103</sup> Whilst arguably more robustness is needed to play Australian Rules Football, a classmate described him as "caring and genuine."<sup>104</sup>

Whilst bearing little physical resemblance to members of the Benbrika Jama'ah, the young men all appeared to revel in wearing military-style uniforms. Widespread images of Jake Bilardi feature him in dark or khaki outfits holding a rifle, while Adam Dahman posed in an all-black outfit including a black-hooded jumper, beanie, and gloves. Numan Haider posed in his bedroom with a balaclava and Islamic flag then posted it on Facebook. The uniform, even when homemade, appears to offer a sense of purpose and belonging, indeed, a source of meaning otherwise lacking in their lives.



### Interactions with the State

As far as can be ascertained, none of these men studied had a criminal conviction prior to their actions. Importantly, two of the three men avoided any interaction with law enforcement authorities, enabling them to travel to Syria and then to join with the ISIS movement. It might be hypothesized that Dahman had the counsel of those who had previously been arrested and imprisoned by police, thus gaining from their insight in how to avoid detection. The Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner, Neil Gaughan, stated that the AFP was unaware of Dahman's plans and activities:

This particular gentleman, the allegation is that he went over there and blew himself up. He wasn't known to us and wasn't specifically a target of law enforcement investigation. Impossible to stop that sort of thing occurring.<sup>105</sup>

Bilardi wrote jokingly that he was able to evade authorities because they would never suspect him. In stark contrast, Numan Haider drew the attention of police and government security agencies with overt posturing and openly challenging them through social media and public spectacles. Whilst Dahman kept a low profile overseas, both Bilardi and Haider taunted the Australian Federal Police (associated with counter-terrorism operations). For Haider, who was facing escalating scrutiny, the pressure was significant. A friend commented:

He seemed angry about his passport being taken and he wanted to know why . . . He kept getting harassed by police officers and ASIO. He said he was annoyed by the way they kept chasing him and pulling him over and harassing his family. They were always knocking at his door, asking questions about him.<sup>106</sup>

Ultimately, while Bilardi and Dahman made it to Syria and Iraq, Haider was denied the opportunity. It is instructive, however, that rather than seek to attack Australian servicemen and women, as previous plots have sought to do, he aimed to kill an immediate target—the police officers he believed were targeting him, suggesting revenge was a strong motive.

### Australian Social Space

Despite the numerous differences between the young men, there are important similarities in the manner in which they disengaged from wider Australian public space. Jake Bilardi was described by his father as "as a loner, he had no friends. He spent all his time in his room. All his spare time."<sup>107</sup>

While Numan Haider was more outgoing and very popular, he withdrew in the months before his death, staying out late at night and not returning for extended periods of time.<sup>108</sup> A friend of Adam Dahman noted that:

He was just a typical northern suburbs ethnic bloke . . . was always cracking jokes and was a pretty funny guy. He was confident, especially with the girls. Then suddenly he became this devout guy. He stopped going to school and basically disappeared.<sup>109</sup>

Key to understanding the lead up to the actions undertaken by these men is their apparent rejection of those around them and immersion in a new world of ideas and narrative.

### **Theoretical Application: Field, Capital, and Habitus**

The theoretical application relies upon a wide body of sources across a period of time. Whilst this has its strengths, it also has its limitations, including a lack of control of interview methods, ensuring the quality of data and a rapidly evolving social scenario. Where possible this chapter has relied upon primary sources and the voices of those close to the men, excluding journalistic interpretation. The following analysis seeks, as much as possible; to identify broad themes in the data gathered to reveal the key social influences and interactions shaping “9/11’s children.”

### **The Field of Power and Australian Muslim Cultural Politics**

In remaining consistent with the previous chapter, this analysis conceptualizes fields as “spaces of potential and active forces” and as a “space of struggle that seeks to maintain or change the location of these fields.” Due to the international dimension of the Islamic State movement, the analysis is expanded, locating Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman in the field of both national and international power and to a lesser extent, the field of Australian Muslim cultural politics.

All three young men sought to be affiliated with, and further the progress of, the Islamic State movement thereby becoming actors within the field of both international and national power, where the stakes are shaping the ability to control the political life of nations. Two of the young men succeeded in eluding authorities and traveling to Syria and Iraq while the other was prevented, though was known to be in contact with an ISIS movement recruiter and his actions were consistent with calls for action put out to attack with knives. The actions of the young men are clearly, by themselves, marginal

to the form and physical function of a modern state like Australia and the international community. These actions did not challenge conventional state power or the international status quo.

What these acts do have is a striking symbolic resonance for other young Muslim men, particularly those at the fringes, and consequently, the ability to contribute to a broader challenge. Such acts of extreme violence serve to make possible what was previously unimaginable. In the Australian context, acts of terrorism such as those committed by these young men open the door to future attacks and a cycle of ever more violent action. They license those with extremist views to take the next step. This is where a nascent challenge to the state emerges. Charged with protecting its citizens, the state must and does expend massive resources seeking to uncover such plots. Extremist actors seek to out maneuver the state. As Jake Bilardi stated, "the best method is to simply take a knife . . . this is what scares them the most." Through such asymmetrical and psychological warfare and the promotion of fear, the Islamic State and like-minded groups seek to undermine the political legitimacy of governments and to undermine democratic systems.

In the broader international context, the Islamic State movement is considered a significant threat to the established global order. Their unconscionable approach to warfare—gruesome propaganda videos, mass executions, enslavement and genocide of minorities, and attempts to build worldwide networks have seen a coalition of states, including the United States, Britain, France, Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar, commit forces and/or resources.<sup>110</sup> Further to this, Iraq and the Assad regime in Syria are at war with the ISIS movement within national boundaries. National leaders, seeking to undermine the attempt by the ISIS movement to identify their movement as a State or Caliphate have labeled the group as "Daesh" (acronym of the group's name in Arabic: al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham), or in the case of Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and President Obama, a "Death Cult."<sup>111</sup> Speaking in late April 2015, the Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop considered the Islamic State movement the worst ideology since that of the Nazis and "the most significant threat to the global, rule-based order to emerge in the past 70 years," with this including "the rise of communism and the cold war."<sup>112</sup> The actions of young men such as Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman are essential to the Islamic State movement projecting their image and influence internationally. In this context, they move from marginal social figures conducting minor (though extreme) political violence to key (if replaceable) symbolic players on the international stage.

As individuals, Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman were also highly marginal to power within Australian Muslim communities. Bilardi and Dahman attended

HIYC, though little is known about their activities there. They were not leaders, nor known to be at all influential. Similarly, Numan Haider attended the al-Furqan group under Harun Mehicevic, a group that similarly to the Benbrika Jama'ah, had split from first, a mainstream mosque and then Sheikh Mohammed Omran. These young men were marginal to the field of Muslim cultural politics in Australia, and yet the threat of such violence continues to define the government approach to Muslim communities, often with the net effect of alienating young Australian Muslims who feel targeted and powerless. Indeed ISIS movement propaganda videos seek to capitalize on this, emphasizing the dishonor, humiliation, depression, and violation of Australian Muslims, for which the only cure is stated to be Jihad.

### **Capital Accumulation and Utilization in the Field of Australian Muslim Cultural Politics and the Field of Power**

In tactical terms, the attacks were significant failures. However, unlike the members of the Benbrika Jama'ah, these men were successful in the sense that they were able to carry out their terrorist acts without being apprehended and stopped. Indeed, in the case of Bilardi and Dahman, it took at least some resourcefulness to travel to the other side of the world, make contact with the right people, then join the Islamic State movement (after what is no doubt an extensive vetting procedure). This enabled them to undertake the acts they considered would gain them symbolic capital and honorable recognition amongst their extremist peers.

Arguably the greatest deficit evident amongst the men is their Islamic educational and cultural capitals. Jake Bilardi identified Islam with “the mujahedeen” at age 14 and rarely attended meetings at the HIYC, which despite its Salafi orientation (and individual preachers), has not condoned terrorism. Numan Haider was involved with the al-Furqan Centre almost exclusively, again from his mid-teens. Adam Dahman was exposed to Salafi jihadist rhetoric through his sister's family from his mid-teens. These men had no formal training in traditional Islam, which encourages critical engagement with texts and stands in strong contrast to the reductionist world view of Salafi jihadist politics.

Importantly, in the education realm, two of the men had dropped out, while the other, Numan Haider was undertaking trades training. These men had not had sufficient opportunity to develop professional capital and the organization and discipline that accompanies this. Nevertheless, at least two of the three were hardworking: Haider working long hours at a fruit market and at a Coles supermarket, and Bilardi succeeding at school and developing a soccer charity.

In the area of social capital and resilience to challenges we also see a significant limitation. Jake Bilardi was socially isolated, possibly due to a mental illness, although an active participant in online forums, through which he eventually engaged with recruiters from the Islamic State movement. Numan Haider had a wide circle of friends and family, though withdrew from his family in the weeks leading up to his attack on police officers. Adam Dahman, a popular young man at school, similarly withdrew from school and friendships with non-Muslims prior to his departure for Syria. It appears that this isolation, or quarantining, is an essential feature of radicalization and accompanies a narrative about the inherent evil of wider society.

Despite the lack of social capital that accompanied their shift toward Salafi jihadist Islam, it appears all three men had bright futures ahead of them and had continued their studies at school and tertiary level. They were not involved in criminal activity and whilst Bilardi potentially suffered from a mental illness and lacked social capital, it was likely that outside of a school environment, with adequate support, he would have thrived at university.

It should be noted that more recent events, including the recruitment of a medical professional, suggest educational and cultural capitals are not of themselves sufficient indicators of the likelihood of radicalization. Accompanying the need for a more thorough Islamic education, the development of individual resilience to overcome personal challenges and emotions including grief and guilt appears increasingly important in overcoming a narrative that offers a "clean start." This does not fit strictly within a traditional Bourdieusian frame, though may be considered to encompass the ability to adapt to social challenges, trauma, injury, and guilt that comes with the cumulative development of educational, professional, and social capitals.<sup>113</sup>

### Habitus

The young men examined in this chapter came from disparate backgrounds, across Melbourne, and whilst all the same age, had what appear on the surface to be very different life biographies. The question must be asked: What, if anything predisposed these young men to affiliate with the Islamic State movement and, indeed, to give their lives to it?

In approaching this question it is important to consider the patterns in underlying social influences and interactions that shaped their habitus or "matrix of dispositions," alongside the theoretical frame for understanding motivating factors in suicide attacks proposed by Hassan: Humiliation, Revenge, and Altruism.

It is important to consider that Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman were just four to five years old at the time of the 9/11 attacks and eight to nine at

the time of the London 7/7 bombings (and arrest of the Benbrika Jama'ah); two events that defined a new counter-terrorism approach in the Australian context. They grew up in a hostile social environment where, unlike the older generation of Salafi jihadists (in their late 20s and early 30s), they never had to come to terms with a shift in community perceptions of Muslims. Unlike the Benbrika group who were not only incompetent, but also arguably less committed, these young men were brought up in a world where extreme violence had been normalized. Images of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and terrorism had been broadcast in the mainstream media since they were young. Even more distressing images of suffering had been broadcast by more independent media outlets and were available uncensored, on the Internet. Furthermore, anyone interested could download horrific images of executions and beheadings, often uploaded by Salafi jihadist groups. These young men, only just legally adults, were truly the "children of 9/11."

Humiliation is a central feature of the ISIS movement's attempt to recruit young Muslim men to join their fight and may be considered to be evident on two levels: the personal and the collective. Two of the young men had clearly experienced humiliation at the personal level. Jake Bilardi was heavily bullied at his local high school and was highly socially isolated, while Haider had felt humiliated by police officers stopping him and having been stripped of his passport. It is instructive that he found out police had searched his room while he was not there just hours before his attack.

One need not have experienced humiliation personally to be impacted by the imagery of the humiliation of Muslims in Abu Ghraib or images of the rape and attacks upon Muslim women and children. Even a cursory glance at the Facebook and social media pages of many observant Muslims (in particular hardline Salafi Muslims) reveals images of immense suffering, which may be experienced as a collective humiliation and trauma. The narrative of ISIS recruiters specifically targets the masculinity of young men, asking them how they can enjoy their lives in the West while their brothers and sisters are being humiliated and suffering (thereby also appealing to their altruism). This propaganda questions their masculinity, while celebrating those who do fight and die. This is a powerful theme and one that is continuously reinforced.

Similar to humiliation, revenge is a clear contributing factor to shaping the dispositions of these young men. Bilardi planned an attack on his hometown Melbourne, while Haider launched his poorly planned attack on two police officers, possibly the same two that had searched his room. Too little is known about Dahman to discern a potential revenge motive, though a call for revenge for the treatment of Muslims is a core mechanism utilized in recruitment videos and pervaded the Benbrika Jama'ah, with whom several members Dahman was close.

Altruism is emphasized by Hassan as a key, yet often overlooked, element of suicide attacks. He suggests that the individual is sacrificing their life for something greater. The question at the heart of this topic is whether or not the individual must merely see their action as altruistic and for a noble cause, or whether there is an objective measure of altruism taking their actions into broader social and political context? Participation in Jihad is represented by Islamic State movement recruiters as fighting for all Muslims and Islam and doubtless many of those leaving to fight see themselves in this light. To this extent, participation and altruism are, alongside the experience of humiliation and a desire for revenge, intensely political motivations, centered on empowerment. Both Bilardi and Dahman consciously and willingly gave their lives for a cause in which, irrespective of its merits, they clearly believed. In the case of Haider, thwarted in his attempt to travel to join the Islamic State movement, altruism was arguably less important than his desire to inflict revenge upon police officers for what he considered humiliating treatment.

Whilst a useful starting point, applying this frame to these young men also has its limitations. In particular it overlooks the role of loss, grief, and a distinct sadness permeating the lives of two of the three men, Bilardi and Haider. It must not be overlooked that Bilardi's conversion to Islam (and radical Islam at that) coincided with the loss of the mother who had single-handedly raised him and his five siblings to cancer. In traveling to Syria and Iraq to fight, Bilardi quickly placed his name on a Martyr's list and the language that permeates his postings is instructive as he refers to "chasing death." Numan Haider was deeply saddened and distressed at the breakup of his relationship, to the extent that his parents wanted him to receive counseling. This breakup, similarly to Bilardi, coincided with his commitment to extremist Islam and in his case, the activities that drew the attention of authorities. It is important to also consider that in the case of Dahman, one man he is likely to have known through his family connections (Zakaryah Raad) had died in an ambush fighting with the Islamic State a month before. In the context of loss, the Salafi jihadi narrative appears to have had a particular resonance for these young men, replacing their sense of helplessness, vulnerability and humiliation with an empowering frame, and equipping them to attack in circumstances where death was almost certain. It might be hypothesized that in a social context where vulnerability may be interpreted and experienced as weaknesses, that this feeling, along with grief and guilt may be washed away by subscribing to an empowering narrative of Salafi jihadist politics. Salafi Jihadist culture and politics may be considered to have its own form of empowering hegemonic masculinity based upon decisiveness, sacrifice and aggression.

There consequently exists a paradox of masculinities between these young men, baby-faced and thin, who have differed starkly to a slightly older generation of young men actively engaged in atrocities and thuggish violence. None of these men are known to have participated in extreme acts of violence prior to their deaths, nor did they take slaves as wives and photographs of themselves with severed heads (known practices for Australian foreign fighters). The men did not display the physical hallmarks of the resistance masculinity that characterized the Benbrika Jama'ah and many of the most well-known foreign fighters, yet were prepared to use their bodies as weapons and sacrifice them in a way that these older, more muscled men displaying overt resistance masculinities are not.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined three young men from Melbourne who have independently conducted suicide attacks. Two of these have been in the form of suicide bombings, while one was a knife attack in an outer suburban police station car park. Whilst the attacks themselves were largely unsuccessful and may be considered tactical failures, they have been exploited by the Islamic State movement for symbolic capital and utilized to encourage more young men to join their ranks.

All the men in this study had significant deficits in Islamic capital, having turned to hardline Salafi groups in their mid-teens and never having been exposed to traditional Islam nor alternative viewpoints. That they were drawn immediately to these viewpoints suggests wider social influences.

Jake Bilardi and Numan Haider stand out as examples of young men who were clearly struggling to find a sense of meaning in their lives. Given the loss of a loved one either to death or the end of a relationship combined with humiliation and disempowerment, both men turned to Salafi jihadist Islam, something with which they had that previously only tinkered with, that was on the margins of the hardline Salafi groups with which they were involved. The Salafi jihadist's narrative emphasizing, so well-crafted through ISIS recruitment videos, reveals insights into the core messages they bought into and the sense of meaning and empowerment they felt, albeit briefly, as "soldiers of Islam." The case of Adam Dahman is more difficult to extrapolate, primarily due to a lack of sources. However, his close association, through his sister, with the Raad family was arguably the likely key contributor. This group had little formal Islamic education and as established previously bought into the Salafi jihadist narrative. Whilst many have written about the grooming of young men, this deprives them of agency in making



their own decisions. The three young men were active in engaging with these fringe groups and made conscious decisions to commit to violence.

Locating and intervening with young men in such circumstances is difficult. However, it becomes clear that established mechanisms and formal traditional Islamic education for engaging young men at the margins having difficulty coping with social pressure such as bullying and emotional issues, including grieving, are inadequate. If, in the case of the Benbrika Jama'ah, the men were considered to be on a downward social trajectory, two of the three young men were on a downward emotional trajectory of hopelessness, humiliation, and disempowerment. They engaged with radical Islam and the Salafi Jihadist narrative in desperation and appeared to be out of sight of larger established bodies that engage with traditional Islam.

This chapter reveals that almost 15 years post 9/11 that the impacts are generational and will continue to last for the foreseeable future.

## CHAPTER 7

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# The Centrality of Hope, Belief, and Upward Social Trajectory

### Introduction

This research has revealed the wide array of potential social influences and the complexity of their interactions in shaping political action by Australian-born Muslim men in Melbourne. This has yielded new insights into developments in emerging trends in Political Islam and how these are shaped by masculinity and societal factors. This final chapter aims to draw these studies together to summarize and discuss key findings. The summary component of the chapter makes explicit the key fields of Australian-born Muslim political participation, the key forms of capital requisite to success within them, the influence of social trajectory on success and most importantly, the key social contributors and interactions shaping different forms of political action. The conclusion aims to directly reveal the substantive contribution of the book, establishing the extent to which the hypothesis is affirmed, discussing the implications of key findings with a particular emphasis upon the future development of Australian (and Western) Islam and multiculturalism, wider applicability of the research, and potential areas for future study.

### Key Fields of Political Action

In seeking to address the primary research question—How do social influences interact to contribute to different forms of political action by Australian-born Muslim men in Melbourne, Australia?—it was vital to consider research subjects in the context of the social fields in which they participated and were acting to achieve political change. There are many potential fields of participation by the Australian-born Muslim men central to this study. Ultimately the greatest advantage was gained by considering these

men as actors in the field of power (the “meta-field” operating as an “ongoing principle of differentiation and struggle throughout all fields”)<sup>1</sup> and the field of Australian Muslim cultural politics. This allowed for a direct comparison between the different studies and the tactics and strategies they utilized and the resources available to them to seek success.

The core theme pervading both these fields was the highly contested nature of power within them and the largely entrenched position of middle-aged white men in the field of power and middle-aged foreign-born men in the field of Muslim cultural politics. Political action by the young men central to this research was consequently aimed not only at challenging these entrenched powers in the present, but also at contesting the future in line with their stated aims. In contesting symbolic capital within these fields (with the ability to influence the development of Australian political life and the future development of Islam) it must be considered that the different political positions within these studies were involved in a symbiotic relationship with one another. This is particularly the case with the project identities that openly critiqued hardline textualist positions, relying upon their oppositional status to improve their symbolic capital in the field.

Ultimately the studies of young men examined reveal vastly different social positions and levels of success within the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics, with project identities achieving vastly greater levels of success in accumulating the capital requisite for success as political actors. This may be attributed to their use of individual promotion tactics and local and national inclusion strategies as outlined by Frisina.<sup>2</sup> This is in contrast to the Benbrika Jama’ah that did not strategize at all and Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman whose actions only have significance after their deaths. It is to an analysis of these key capitals that the discussion now turns.

### **Key Forms of Capital Central to Political Action by Australian-Born Muslim Men**

In considering the key forms of capital to political action by Australian-born Muslim men within the studies, it was necessary to specifically examine those that most directly contributed to “conferring power over the field,” and thus to success (or failure) as political actors.

*Cultural capital*, understood as “privileged knowledge” providing a competitive advantage, was a key form of capital requisite for success as an actor in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. Research revealed that educational, professional, and Islamic cultural capitals were key contributors to success as political actors displaying a project identity, whilst lack of Islamic capital, and in the case of the Benbrika Jama’ah, criminal cultural capital,

contributed to the disposition to assert and practice a neo-resistance identity. These are considered for how they were accumulated and the primary attributes that they bestowed.

*Educational capital* is considered as “institutionalized cultural capital” within Bourdieu’s *Theory of Practice*. Whilst formal qualifications can and did gain improved access to the job market and higher economic capital for those that possessed them (Waleed Aly and Jihad Debab), as important are the attributes that the Victorian education system developed in all the young men displaying project identities that had all finished their schooling. These attributes included the critical thinking evident in Waleed Aly’s dissections of anti-Muslim racism and the lyrics of The Brothahood. These may be contrasted with the largely uncritical acceptance of Abdul Nacer Benbrika and the Salafi jihadist narrative by Jama’ah members. Just one of the men in the previous chapter completed high school. Despite the apparent intelligence of Bilardi in particular, it appears that he was so marginalized within the school system that he looked to other forms of education—largely through online forums with no oversight from trained educators. Other key attributes developed through participation in formal education and exposure the school, environment included creativity in expression, communication skills, resilience under pressure and a level of discipline required to complete assignments and to accomplish the Victorian Certificate of Education.

*Professional capital* may be considered a mix of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital. The accumulation of this capital translates into attributes that were, like educational capital, pivotal for success as political actors by the men displaying project identities. This included organizational ability, confidence, the ability to cooperate and work as part of a team, planning ability to both set goals and work toward them, an entrepreneurial approach to gaining potential supporters and mentors, and the ability to physically present oneself to “match others” appearing physically at ease and non-confrontational. Project identities within this study clearly utilized these attributes to plan to achieve their aims, producing books and written works in the case of Waleed Aly and recordings and concert tours in the case of The Brothahood. Both studies took an active approach to in identifying potential opportunities to meet and work with others that may aid their progress and, importantly, could match the physical dispositions of these people. An examination of photos of young men displaying project identities reveals that whilst all individuals examined have facial hair, this is closely cropped and all dress in contemporary Western fashion. These may be contrasted with the images of Benbrika Jama’ah members with longer beards and their Islamic robes or street wear worn to court by extended Jama’ah members including tracksuit pants and tops. The Benbrika Jama’ah

members not only presented a key point of physical difference, they possessed very little professional experience. As an examination of the groups dynamics revealed, the Jama'ah were clearly lacking in the requisite professional capital and attributes including confidence, organizational ability, ability to work as part of a team and goal setting ability required to plan, orchestrate and work together to achieve a successful terrorist attack, particularly in light of the intensive surveillance in place. Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman were not old enough to work in areas of the labor force where they could develop professional capital.

*Islamic capital* may be considered a mix of embodied and objectified cultural capital. As a faith and influence on every facet of daily life in observant Muslims, Islam is clearly embedded in the “ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individual and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding.”<sup>3</sup> Possession of embodied Islamic cultural capital enables the individual to understand and interpret different Islamic textual perspectives and to convert these into an active political position in the field of power and Muslim cultural politics that they can both promote and where necessary, defend. This includes development of a pluralistic approach, overcoming the desire to claim exclusivity of one’s own view and to impose this on others. In many ways possession of this form of capital is at the heart of the development of Islam as a religion over its history with the variety of jurisprudential traditions and scholarship taking different positions on Islamic practice. Waleed Aly displayed a considerable level of embodied Islamic cultural capital in his engagement with Salafism at the University of Melbourne, first adopting it then drawing upon other Islamic teaching including those of his brother, the Young Muslims of Australia (YMA), and Nurudeen Lemu’s “Train the Trainer” course to challenge its tenets and guide the Muslim Student Association toward a more inclusive posture. Similarly the Brothahood members displayed an ability and willingness to engage and vigorously defend criticisms from hardline textualist Muslims, with this capital developed through their teachers including *Ustadh* Kürkçü and their involvement in the YMA, whilst Jihad also attended the “Train the Trainer” course. The objectified form of Islamic cultural capital refers to the works undertaken by the men examined. Their uncommon ability to convert Islamic teaching into a cultural resource in the form of literature and hip-hop to act as a form of *dawah* in the field of power, breaking down stereotypes and seeking to challenge dominant hegemonies while simultaneously challenging hardline textualists in the field of Muslim cultural politics, was a clear contributor to the success of project identities. In this respect these individuals act as change agents for the development of Islam as a religion in

the Australian and Western cultural context, and as the dissemination of their works reveals, increasingly throughout Muslim majority nations.

Those young men practicing neo-resistance identities displayed a clear lack of embodied Islamic cultural capital in their inability to tolerate and engage with criticism. In the case of the Benbrika Jama'ah, this manifested in their expressing "out group hate" and threatening to "bash" or shoot their opponents. Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman went further than threats, killing or attacking their perceived enemies. Rather than seeking to develop their ability to defend their position utilizing Islamic sources, their teachers fostered the idea central to the Salafi jihadist narrative that violent action and jihad are the only solution to achieving political change. The reliance upon destructive violence was as Kamal considers, inherently oppositional to the "progress of human history"<sup>4</sup> and also reveals the lack of objectified cultural capital within the group. The Islamic State Movement cloak atrocity in legitimacy, representing their leaders and way of life as pious Muslims establishing a Caliphate. Their propaganda, aimed at young Western men, emphasizes brotherhood and belonging, accompanying selective use of texts. They reach out, directly through social media and the Internet to young men and women in their homes with stories of great bravery, belonging, and adventure. Compared to the hard work required to become knowledgeable about Islam (and to slowly build Islamic capital), this narrative offers direct access to rewards; instant gratification.

The only form of cultural capital in which the Benbrika Jama'ah, as a neo-resistance identity, possessed more capital than that of the project identities was in *criminal capital*, the "know-how" to commit a crime, profit from it and evade detection. It is clear from the level of intimate surveillance and the subsequent arrest and incarceration of the group, that even this was not abundant. However, the attributes vital to success in criminal enterprise including distrust, displays of hyper-masculinity, and a polarized "us versus them" perspective clearly permeated the group's embodied dispositions. This meant that rather than the ability to communicate and build personal connections vital to the development of social and symbolic capitals, that this was in fact severely impeded.

*Social Capital* has been defined within this research as the "sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition."<sup>5</sup> Project identities proved significantly more capable of actively "accumulating" social contacts and networks, and eliciting support for their work amongst both non-Muslims and Muslims. Waleed Aly exemplifies this, gaining a wide variety of mentors

largely consisting of white, middle-aged Australian men that shared similar liberal political values. These men ranging from journalists to academics to senior Australian politicians (including a former Prime Minister) have proved vital in mentoring Waleed throughout his meteoric rise to national prominence and in opening new social networks for him. The Brotherhood have also developed a strong level of social capital, particularly with Muslim communities in Australia and throughout the Muslim world, working with international artists from countries including Egypt, the United Kingdom, and the United States and developing an extensive touring schedule that has seen them travel the country and throughout South East Asia. Attributes stemming from the possession of different varieties of capital including communication skills, confidence, an entrepreneurial approach to gaining support, the ability to “present oneself” physically appearing at ease, and non-confrontational and political pluralism have been pivotal to the development of social capital amongst project identities. This contrasted strongly with the neo-resistance identity practiced by the Benbrika Jama’ah. This group actively built “trenches of resistance” and displayed out group hate, seeking to distance themselves from other Muslims and wider Australian society, displaying distrust and suspicion. Whilst from the evidence available we cannot examine into the daily lives of Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman before their deaths, it does emerge that a key component of radicalization is the withdrawal from pre-established social networks and what they have to offer the individual.

*Symbolic capital*, “the recognition and legitimacy given to the group for the cultural capital they have accumulated,” is, as discussed, a key stake in the fields of power and Muslim cultural production. Possessing this form of capital enables the holder to influence public perception and to shape society toward their perception of what the future should be. At an existential level, symbolic capital simultaneously bestows the holder with a level of “honorable recognition” and a sense of importance as an individual living a meaningful and viable life. Accumulating symbolic capital relies heavily on possession of the different forms of cultural capital and social capital and their attributes. These are traits found exclusively in the project identities examined. By contrast, the Benbrika Jama’ah displayed distrust, suspicion, and overt displays of hyper-masculinity, which may be considered antithetical to success in gaining symbolic capital as political actors. The emergence of the ISIS movement has altered this, if artificially. Those fighting with ISIS are lavishly praised by the groups media arm as “real men,” “lions,” “mountains,” “knights,” and “commandos” amongst other terms. Those who die are held up as examples of martyrdom and good Muslims. One fighting knows that should they die, they will be bestowed with such praise. This message is spread primarily through

propaganda videos and social media, which has proven pivotal to reaching younger men. However, it may be argued that outside of this echo chamber of manufactured circles, there is little respect for such actions amongst the broader community of Muslims.

Project identities in this research clearly possessed the competitive advantage in the fields of power and Muslim cultural production. They possessed a far greater amount of the forms of capital requisite for success as political actors, particularly in the realm of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals and key personal attributes they contributed to developing and were capable of utilizing this strategically to improve their position within their fields.

### **The Significance of Social Trajectory and Hope in Influencing Different Forms of Political Action**

In the first chapter, the currency of social trajectory as a consideration in this study was expounded above that of class alone. Social trajectory may explain the apparent socioeconomic proximity of two actors practicing very different forms of identity. In this case, given the clearly established upward trajectory of Waleed Aly and core contributors to this, it is particularly useful to directly contrast members of The Brothahood with members of the Benbrika Jama'ah. These groups shared similar backgrounds both in ethnicity and familial socioeconomic status, with a variety of small business owners and unskilled workers. Whilst it has been established that members of The Brothahood were working stable jobs and owned homes in comparison to the Benbrika Jama'ah who were largely unemployed, at least one of their members, Hesham Habibullah was working only casual unskilled work as a retail assistant and chauffeur at the time of interviews and did not own his own home. Through his interest in body building and occasional displays of hyper-masculinity Hesham also most closely revealed the physical dispositions of Jama'ah members. As an individual that clearly placed his religion above both education and work, Hesham could be considered to most closely resemble members of the Benbrika Jama'ah in socioeconomic location, physical disposition, and religious perspectives.

Despite these similarities, at the level of social trajectory the differences between Habibullah and Benbrika Jama'ah members are clearly defined. Through completing his schooling Habibullah had developed educational and cultural capitals and related attributes that positioned him well to apply for his ideal social work course at university, whilst his Islamic capital had been developed and honed through classes with competent and knowledgeable teachers from a young age. These teachers emphasized pluralism and jurisprudential processes in shaping action. Hesham displayed a level of belief



that he could change the world through positive forms of social engagement not dissimilar to what Shah, Dwyer, and Sanghera referred to as *ambivalent masculinity*, seeking to help others, contribute to the community and in doing so, gaining respect and honorable recognition. Hesham's social capital in the form of The Brotherhood and extended networks combined with these other forms of educational and cultural capitals to enable him to both invest in society as a means of improving it and most importantly, to aspire, hope, and move toward gaining stable employment, building an upward social trajectory, and shaping the world through practising a project identity.

In contrast to Habibullah, members of the Benbrika Jama'ah had developed very little educational, cultural, and social capitals that are key contributors to an upward social trajectory. Group members had almost entirely disengaged from the notion that paid work offered a viable form of social advancement and were clearly in a downward social spiral supplemented by unemployment, welfare, failed attempts at study, and criminal activity. With very few cultural and social resources to draw upon, the men commenced a self-sustained and catastrophic downward social spiral of actions that ultimately led to their arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment.

From these comparisons it emerges whilst possession of cultural and social resources (capitals) is vital to building momentum toward an upward trajectory, it is also important to consider the significance of "hope." Ultimately it is the belief that an individual can act to influence and assert control over their own lives in order to move toward a better future that offers the basis of this hope and accompanying trust. As Hage states, "hope is the way we conduct a meaningful future for ourselves."<sup>6</sup> A lack of hope in mechanisms of social advancement can ultimately, when compounded by low levels of important forms of capital and interacting with the Salafi jihadist narrative, have catastrophic ramifications for both those concerned and wider society.

Having established the key fields of participation, key forms of capital (and associated attributes) to successful political action by Australian-born Muslim men and the significance of social trajectory in shaping different forms of political action, it is possible to discuss the key research question as to how social influences interact to contribute to different forms of political action by Australian-born Muslim men in Melbourne, Australia.

### **The Interaction of Social Influences and Different Forms of Political Action**

Having examined the key fields of political action, forms of capital requisite to success and the significance of social trajectory, it is possible to address the central research question. This element of the discussion considers how

social influences interact to shape very different forms of political action. A direct comparison between project and neo-resistance identity provides a clear perspective into key points of difference.

### *Project Identity*

Project identities have utilized creative and constructive cultural mechanisms to redefine their position and the positions of Australian Muslims and contributed to efforts to transform a social structure centered on white cultural hegemony. Of the many social influences and interactions between these observed throughout the research process the interactions between *Tasawuuf*/traditional Islam, higher education, professional employment, role models, Western culture, and the multicultural State proved most important in the development of these men as political actors.

### *Tasawuuf and Traditional Islam*

An unexpected finding, given the disparate studies chosen was that both those displaying project identities, the men of The Brotherhood and Waleed Aly both developed their initial understanding of Islam through a primary *Tasawuuf*/Hanafi base fostered by the teachings of *Ustadh* Kürkçü and the YMA. Teachings emphasized spiritual introspection, overcoming the *nafs* (ego) and desire to claim exclusivity whilst simultaneously placing a “really strong emphasis on respecting and listening to scholars”<sup>7</sup> central to traditional Islam. This built a respect for pluralism and jurisprudential engagement (Islamic capital) pivotal in the future development of these young men as political actors. The YMA organization embodied these teachings, emphasizing the significance of *dawah* and “service,” and values that have a strong resemblance to what may be termed Australian “civic” values. The organization encouraged the mixing of genders and different ethnicities as far back as the late 1980s, placing the group at the forefront of developments in contemporary Western Islam where faith is the primary marker of identity.

Highlighting the role of family in the transmission of Islam, Waleed Aly was introduced to the organization and its values by his older brother. Members of The Brotherhood came to the YMA independently though Moustafa Debab, like Waleed Aly, became involved with the encouragement of his brother. The YMA fostered and nourished the development of a base of social resilience to racism, group belonging and an empowered conception of the self as a Muslim with an obligation to serve Islam and the wider community. The extent of success of the organization in developing political actors

is not limited to the studies within this book, with a large number of YMA “graduates” actively shaping the development of Australian Islam.<sup>8</sup>

Another unexpected similarity between studies of the project identities was the finding that both Jihad Debab from The Brothahood and Waleed Aly had undertaken the “Train the Trainer” course run by Nigerian Maliki scholar Nurudeen Lemu. This course running intermittently during the period 2001–2011 focuses upon building an understanding of the sources of different juristic opinion and the different chains of evidence utilized to arrive at these. In doing so the courses foster the development of pluralism and an awareness of how Islam develops in local contexts (*urf*). This equipped Debab and Aly with a higher level of Islamic capital shaping Debab’s stewardship of The Brothahood and Aly’s rejection of Salafism and further engagement with traditionalist Islam and adoption of activist scholar role models.

The significance of Muslim women as role models upon project identities reveals the significance of the intersection of gender and religion. For The Brothahood, Muslim women including their mothers, wives, and Islamic teachers were viewed as powerful examples of piety and dignity under immense social pressure and proved a very positive and empowering influence upon these men. For Waleed Aly, despite the preponderance of male influences both Muslim and non-Muslim, his wife was a key influence in shaping the development of his practice of Islam. The enabling and empowering influence of Muslim women upon Muslim men is a phenomenon completely unexplored in the literature examined, and an important emergent finding in its own right.

Cumulatively the Islamic capital fostered through these key influences (and in turn influenced by families) shaped the intellectual and religious growth of the young men of these case studies at a pivotal time in their development and would fuse with Western cultural influences to shape courageous and innovative forms of political action. These influences were both empowering and enabling in nature, and were internalized as such, equipping the young men with the disposition, capitals, and attributes to confront issues of racism, white cultural hegemony, and hardline textualist interpretations of Islam.

### *Higher Education*

Whilst achieving varying levels of success, it is important that all individuals within project identity case studies completed year 11 and 12 of school. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and International Baccalaureate curriculums including compulsory English contributed to higher level critical

thinking skills evident in The Brothahood's lyrics and Waleed Aly's writing whilst bestowing the men with important institutional and cultural educational capitals. Furthermore, the benefit of schools as spaces where individuals can "consolidate their sense of identity and belonging"<sup>29</sup> was clearly evident in the case of Waleed Aly who thrived in the Wesley school environment developing his love of writing, music, and theater while undertaking two international cricket tours. For members of The Brothahood, school was an important site where they interacted with non-Muslim students and teachers and developed social resilience.

The undertaking of higher university level education was a key social influence on the development of capital and attributes necessary to success of the project identities examined as political actors. Jihad Debab's multimedia and subsequent Commerce/Arts degree and Waleed Aly's Law/Engineering degrees were specifically focused upon critical thinking, analytical, and organizational skills, facilitating the entry of these two men to the professional arena and a continuous upward trajectory. In Aly's case this extended to gaining him a position as the ICV media spokesperson and the accompanying symbolic capital. In both cases family members were pivotal. To Jihad, his wife's family was an important influence while for Waleed his parents and older brother were all educationally accomplished and had set an example for him to follow.

The interaction of higher levels of education with *Tasawwuf* and traditional Islamic teaching proved to be one of the most important interactions of social influences, adding educational capital and its core attributes to the base of Islamic capital, with both acting as empowering and enabling influences upon the other.

### ***Professional Employment***

The employment of Jihad Debab and Waleed Aly in skilled white collar professions was a very important influence upon both studies. With entry to these professions directly facilitated by these men's higher education, the professional capital and attributes developed were able to be utilized toward competing for key stakes in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. Importantly, the extensive interactions with non-Muslim co-workers, clients, and associates could be considered to have further contributed to the plural Islamic perspectives of the men, particularly with regards to non-Muslims, whilst simultaneously building a level of social capital that benefited Waleed Aly in particular. Through his embodied and objectified educational and professional cultural capitals Aly was able to evince a level of support for his project from powerful and prominent non-Muslim men. This has had a

very significant influence on his upward trajectory as a political actor. Jihad's communication skills, confidence, and entrepreneurialism in particular have aided the group immeasurably in their dealings with the wide variety of concert promoters, media outlets and in developing links with Muslim hip-hop artists internationally, impacting their ability to sell their message.

In these studies, professional capital is influenced by participation in higher education and in turn has interacted with the Islamic component of the men's identity, shaping the development of their project and adding exponentially to its chances of success through the development of professional and social capitals, along with its cultivated ensemble of physical dispositions. Professional employment has been a positive force in shaping the development of the group's Islam-based project identity.

### *Western Popular Culture*

Mechanisms for political expression utilized by project identities are firmly grounded in and originate from Western cultures. The Brothahood skillfully wield the inherently political and empowering mechanism of hip-hop in their project (simultaneously promoting themselves through social media such as Facebook) whilst Waleed Aly communicated his ideas in the form of a paperback book, through the print media and in academic journals, whilst simultaneously performing in a rock music band. Project identities have creatively fused their Islamic perspectives with these cultural mechanisms to rapidly disseminate their message to a potential worldwide audience. This level of success is firmly situated in the intimate and indeed embodied familiarity with Western culture displayed by these men. There is perhaps no better example of this than when Hesham Habibullah describes his Islamically motivated facial hair as the "Craig David" look.<sup>10</sup> The interaction of Islam and Western culture evident in these cultural expressions has facilitated a clear example of *urf* and reveals the development of a uniquely Australian Islam.

### *The Multicultural State*

The multicultural State (including specialist Government departments and funded bodies) has been a clear supporter of the activities undertaken by Australian-born Muslim men practicing project identities, directly and indirectly funding both The Brothahood and Waleed Aly and inviting their participation in events that have acted as an enabling influence, increasing their trajectory in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. Examples of direct multicultural State support for these project identities include funding of The Brothahood's 2010 Indonesian tour and Waleed Aly's invitation

to the *2020 Summit*. Indirect support includes the appearances of both The Brothahood and Waleed Aly on State-funded television (ABC, SBS), radio (ABC, Triple J) and funding of bodies organizing talks or workshops including security agencies and multicultural bodies. In the case of both The Brothahood and Waleed Aly, it may be argued that the content of their message and their perceived symbolic capital with Australian Muslims is a key reason for their engagement by the multicultural State. It is significant that the critique by both Waleed Aly and the Brothahood of Australian racism and white cultural hegemony has been tolerated and even to some extent absorbed by the multicultural State. A key question remains as to whether the state has actively sought out alternate and critical voices to seek to facilitate the development of a more thorough and inclusive multiculturalism to increase the opportunities and social trajectories of Australian Muslims, or whether it has merely appropriated the output of these project identities to challenge the potential for “radicalization” amongst Australian Muslim communities. Ultimately the multicultural State can be understood as enabling and empowering project identities irrespective of its reasons for doing so.

Cumulatively these influences interact as enabling and empowering agents, contributing to an upward trajectory based primarily upon possession of Islamic, educational, professional, social, economic, and symbolic capitals and core attributes including social resilience creativity, communication skills, organizational ability, the ability to work with others, pluralism, reflexivity, and critical thinking. These provided the young men with the confidence to act within the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics and bestowed them with an entrepreneurial perspective, enabling them to identify and creatively act upon opportunities.

### **Neo-resistance Identity**

Neo-Resistance identities experienced catastrophic failure as political actors, failing to gain key stakes in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. Far from building a sustainable resistance against “unbearable oppression,” the members of the Benbrika Jama’ah left the trenches and were immediately taken prisoner, increasing the symbolic capital of their opponents. Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman ended up dead, with only the Islamic State movement profiting from their deaths, harvesting them for symbolic capital.

For the Benbrika Jama’ah, the interactions between low education, experiences of unemployment/welfare dependency/unskilled work, and criminal experiences shaped their participation in the group, resulting in their interactions with the law enforcement arm of the State that ultimately arrested, tried, and imprisoned them. For Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman, low educational and

Islamic capitals were key contributors, with none of them developing intellectual autonomy and the ability to think critically. Merged with experiences of bullying, humiliation, and personal loss (Bilardi and Haider), a powerful and influential masculine figure (Dahman) and exposure and desensitization to extreme violence through social media, the conditions for radicalization, and their eventual commitment to violence were clear.

### *Low Education*

In comparison to the project identities, both members of the Benbrika Jama'ah and Bilardi, Haider and Dahman had a low level of education, with the majority having left school prior to undertaking their VCE. This not only limited their exposure to the Victorian curriculum, developing cultural capital and associated attributes, it limited group members' exposure to interaction with non-Muslim students and teachers and consequently, social capital. Low levels of education directly influenced the ability of Jama'ah members to gain skilled employment and likely impacted their confidence, communication skills, and social resilience pivotal to job seeking. In both studies of resistance identities, lower levels of formal schooling and Islamic education simultaneously impacted the ability of the men to critically engage with different sources that made them susceptible to the polemical Salafi jihadist narrative. Low levels of education were a disabling and disempowering influence on both employment and the development of Islamic capital.

### *Unemployment/Welfare/Unskilled Work*

Employment experiences were particularly important for understanding members of the Benbrika Jama'ah. Chapter 5 revealed that whilst ambitious, aspirational, and hoping to find meaningful employment, group members were overwhelmingly unsuccessful in doing so. Unemployment, reliance of welfare, and working in unskilled areas of the workforce offered little chance of improving their social circumstances and indeed as group members were getting older, actively decreased their prospects of doing so, leading to a downward socioeconomic trajectory and extreme form of misinterpellation. It was found that the young men felt excluded from society and that this may have contributed to their adoption of an alternate source of meaning. Where the men of the Jama'ah felt frustrated, excluded, and experienced existential angst, Islam, specifically the Salafi jihadist narrative offered inclusion and belonging, hope, and the promise of a better future. Unemployment, welfare dependence, and unskilled work were clearly very important disempowering

and disabling influences upon this group. This analysis could be very tentatively extended to Haider's experiences spruiking fruit and stacking shelves, though he was also enrolled in further study.

### ***Criminal Activity***

Whilst low education and unemployment, welfare dependence, and unskilled work may be argued to have interacted to shape the disposition to adopt a Salafi jihadist neo-resistance identity, this research revealed that criminal activity and associated attributes including a suspicion, distrust, a polemical world view, displays of hyper-masculinity, and a familiarity with violence were the most significant contributors to shaping the political expression of this narrative in the case of the Benbrika Jama'ah. The emphasis of criminal activity upon immediate gratification in the form of profit may be directly overlaid with the vigorous pursuit of spiritual rewards by group members with little regard for the jurisprudential base of these "rewards" being allocated in the Quran or *Hadith*. These criminal experiences were extremely disabling for the group in developing any form of Islamic capital and debilitating for the group as political actors, contributing to the heightened sense of urgency to act and a non-cooperative atmosphere, making the Jama'ah a highly visible and relatively easy target for State security agencies.

### ***Salafi Jihadist Islam***

As an extension of hardline textualist Islam, Salafi jihadism is fundamentally antithetical to the spiritual introspection of *Tasawwuf* and emphasis upon contextual textual interpretation, jurisprudence, and intellectual exchange inherent in traditional Islam.

For the Benbrika Jama'ah members, this was developed through exposure to the teachings of Abdul Nacer Benbrika. The group adopted a narrative that emphasized the centrality of violent jihad against the West and Australian government due to their support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The group claimed exclusivity for their beliefs, emphasizing the spiritual rewards they would gain for action and valorized those taking part in the wider jihadi struggle, mainly through downloaded texts and videos shared avidly amongst group members. Apart from Shane Kent, group members were not practicing prior to involvement with the Jama'ah. The men were initially attracted to Benbrika's Jama'ah through other Salafi organizations or social networks of family and friends. Recent bereavement appeared to be a key factor in this, with Aimen Joud (father) and Ezzit and Ahmed Raad (brothers) losing family members shortly before joining the group. Despite this, once involved



with the group, emotive pleas from family members to leave the Jama'ah were ignored, demonstrating the success of Benbrika in marginalizing their influence. The Salafi jihadist narrative offered an entirely different reality to that faced by group members in their daily lives. Largely unemployed, relying on welfare or working in unskilled areas of the workforce, the narrative offered them the hope that they might do more with their lives and tied in with the criminal dispositions and hyper-masculinity of group members, allowing them to view themselves as holy warriors. Group members thus bestowed themselves with a sense of honorable self-recognition out of all proportion to their actual position in the fields of power and Muslim cultural politics. Adoption of this narrative offered no chance for the development of Islamic capital due to the emphasis upon action over textual engagement, something that the low initial education levels of group members made prohibitive in the first place. This "royal flush" of interactions was critical in shaping the group members' development of disabling and disempowering attributes that ultimately left them without the necessary resources to challenge their perceived opponents.

The experiences of Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman are similar to the Benbrika Jama'ah in that the narrative offered by Salafi jihadism resonated with their personal experiences and social dislocation. Importantly, as with Benbrika, those teaching influences upon the men were marginal figures within the broader Muslim communities. For Haider and Dahman, these figures were strong male role models who had been ostracized from the mainstream Muslim communities. While Bilardi was primarily self-radicalizing, those he engaged with online also don't appear to have carried any scholarly authority. However, there are also important differences and these relate primarily to their being an actual outlet for participation in Jihad through the Islamic State movement. This movement has been a powerful sense of legitimacy and solidarity for Salafi jihadists around the globe. The distribution of sophisticated propaganda emphasizing belonging, heroism, and adventure in fighting for a Caliphate was simply not around in 2005. These two studies highlight how the narrative has spread from the micro to the macro level and is shaping a generation of men and women for whom extreme violence is not only considered necessary, but is celebrated.

### *The State*

If the State played a significant enabling and empowering role in facilitating the success of project identities through the provision of direct and indirect support, the State displayed its *Janus*-like qualities in its interactions with the

Benbrika Jama'ah. The pressure from the law enforcement arm of the State manifested in policing and security agencies was unrelenting during the investigation including raids, surveillance, and phone tapping. The state pressure on Numan Haider was also immense, with his being surveilled, searched, and freedom of movement curtailed. In both cases, the Federal Government introduced new counter-terrorism laws just prior to the arrests or shooting death. In contrast to project identities, the multicultural State was conspicuous only in its absence. No attempts were made to "reach out" to group members to help them develop a greater sense of inclusion and indeed the only multicultural practice in evidence was the security agencies' utilization of an agent of Turkish background to infiltrate the group and Arabic translators to interpret recordings. This arguably heightened the sense of isolation and insular nature of the group and reinforced their belief in a war between Islam and the West.

### *Grief, Loss, Humiliation, Mental Illness*

In developing a new research approach based on the political nature of identity the emphasis was primarily upon capital possession (or lack thereof). This was premised upon the perspective that individuals engaging in political activity are seeking to shape a field and achieve a decisive outcome in their favor. What was overlooked in this, to some extent, was the impact of human emotion in shaping action. Aimen Joud, Ezzit, and Ahmed Raad had experienced the death of close family members, while Jake Bilardi had lost his mother to cancer. Numan Haider had just left a relationship, a factor that was greatly distressing for him. It is possible that the death of Zakaryah Raad impacted upon Adam Dahman. Whilst the sample size is too small to have larger applicability, it may be suggested that when negative emotions pertaining to grief, loss, and shame interact with a deficit in capital (particularly educational and Islamic capitals) and experiences of humiliation that there is an amplified sense of vulnerability and isolation increasing the likelihood of subscription to the Salafi jihadist narrative, which offers a form of empowerment and an alternate source of meaning.

It is also to consider the significance of mental illness as a shaper of participation. Jake Bilardi very likely suffered from a severe mental illness, whilst court records reveal that a number of members of the Benbrika Jama'ah had symptoms of depression and anxiety. Jama'ah associate Izzydeen Atik was reported to have had a mental illness. Further, all three young men—Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman—engaged in acts that may be considered suicidal. None of these men were known to have been receiving any counseling or treatment for their behavior before their actions.

These men were all excluded from the mainstream and deeply unhappy. As Hage writes of the process of misinterpellation, a process of “shattering” had indeed occurred and Salafi jihadist Islam offered a space of belonging and anti-racism ideology “*par excellence*.”

It may be maintained that the acts undertaken by the young men examined were inherently political and aimed to achieve a political outcome. However, the emotional and cognitive functioning of these men and its interaction with the Salafi jihadist narrative is an area requiring further study.

### Summary of Key Social Influences and Interactions

In the Benbrika Jama’ah, the interaction of low formal and Islamic education, unemployment, welfare dependence, unskilled work, and criminal activity contributed to a downward social trajectory, causing frustration, exclusion, and existential angst. The disabling attributes developed as a result of the lack of educational capital, unemployment, and criminal activity including poor confidence, communication skills, a low level of critical ability and social resilience, withdrawal from social networks, distrust, in the case of the Benbrika Jama’ah expressions of hyper-masculinity, and familiarity with violence. Whilst the Salafi jihadist narrative expounded by Benbrika offered group members a hope in their ability to gain spiritual capital, when combined with these aforementioned attributes the outcome was not only debilitating on the group in developing any form of Islamic capital, it was disastrous upon their future prospects as their plans to take political action were decisively defeated and group members were imprisoned.

The attacks by Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman occurred almost a decade after the Benbrika Jama’ah were arrested and charged with terrorism offenses. They reveal significant insights into the evolution of the Salafi jihadist narrative into a more powerful force amongst young men through social media and the Internet. These young men, who had grown up in post-9/11 Australia, had only ever known Australia and Western nations to be at war in Muslim nations and social hostility. There was no need for them to adopt the resistance hyper-masculinity of the Benbrika Jama’ah that appears to permeate a slightly older batch of jihadists, as their anger was internalized. Indeed, apart from Haider’s last weeks of overtly political activity, they had learned to hide this in a context where Australian law enforcement agencies are on the lookout for such actions. Lacking in formal and in particular, Islamic educational capital, and likely desensitized to extreme violence through its broadcast over the Internet, these men were not equipped with the intellectual tools to mediate the extremist message nor the mechanisms by which to deal with grief and loss causing vulnerability or the anger (caused by

humiliation) that had built up in them over a period of years. Ultimately, this confluence of social factors would lead them to the extreme acts of violence that they are now known most for.

A comparison of project and neo-resistance identities makes very clear that project identities had internalized enabling and empowering influences within their “matrix of dispositions.” These had a very significant role in their upward trajectory both socially and as political actors. This shaped their hope and belief in Australia as a place where one could be both Muslim and Australian and saw them seek, through creative and innovative cultural mechanisms, to constructively contribute to the development of both Islam and Australia through taking political action. These dynamic forms of cultural innovation and political engagement speak to the development of Islam in the Australian context. In direct contrast, neo-resistance identities were deeply influenced by disabling and disempowering social influences and interactions that cumulatively contributed to their downward spiral as social and political actors. In the midst of this spiral, the Salafi jihadist narrative offered an alternative source of hope and belief where these men could remodel themselves as warriors, bestowing upon themselves a sense of dignity and honorable recognition lacking in their daily lives and gaining them rewards and meaning that were non-existent in their everyday existence. This research project has many potential implications for understanding the development of Islam in the Australian context. These are expanded upon in the final section of this book, the conclusion.

## Conclusion

This book has drawn together four examples of exceptional political action by young Australian-born Muslim men from Melbourne, examining each in detail and comparing the key social influences and interactions shaping different forms of action. The available evidence supports and confirms the hypothesis that young Muslim men displaying project identities and engaging in constructive political action through acts of cultural production are likely to possess significantly higher levels of capital (including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals) that enable them with greater levels of confidence and empowerment to act in their fields than young Muslim men displaying neo-resistance identities engaging in acts of destructive political violence (terrorism). Social factors in interactions influencing the accumulation of this capital included the form of Islam practiced, educational and employment experiences, Western cultural influences, and interactions with the State and governmental institutions. Less important factors shaping political action included families, who were supportive and

loving in all case studies, and perceptions of the media. Greater levels of Islamic, educational, professional, and Western cultural capitals possessed by young Muslim men displaying project identities assisted them in exercising critical choice to interpret and negotiate competing textual interpretations and circumstances including conflicting textual interpretations and power imbalances. These bestowed them with important attributes including an entrepreneurial perspective, enabling them to identify and act upon opportunities for empowerment. Research has revealed that Australian and Western cultural influences are indeed interacting with Islamic influences to produce new manifestations of religious practice that in turn shape actions.

An additional emergent not incorporated into the original hypothesis yet that flows logically from a consideration of Pierre Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* and his larger sociological project is the centrality of **upward social trajectory, recognition, and hope** as shapers of constructive political action. As stated in Chapter 3, for Bourdieu, sociology is capable of "producing awareness of the mechanisms that make life painful, even unlivable"<sup>11</sup> and in "bringing contradictions to light."<sup>12</sup> The application of the theoretical construct and the vast differences in social trajectories between project and neo-resistance identities made clear a correlation between the hope that one could improve their life chances and gain a level of honorable recognition and the form of political identity displayed. The men of The Brotherhood and Waleed Aly clearly felt and lived this hope through their projects, whilst the men of the Benbrika Jama'ah and Bilardi, Haider, and Dahman strongly appeared to have lost hope in their ability to do so. To this extent this research has contributed to making "generally known the social origin, collectively hidden of unhappiness in all its forms, including the most intimate, the most secret,"<sup>13</sup> whilst highlighting the very positive contribution that can be made by Australian Muslim men when opportunity and hope combine. An analysis of sociopolitical context and, in particular, demography reveals that Australian-born Muslims are concentrated in closer proximity to the experiences of those young men practicing neo-resistance identities. Exceptionally high levels of unemployment, higher rates of poverty, low rates of home ownership, and under representation in the professional sphere combined with political under-representation reveal the tentative and fragile nature of everyday life for many Australian-born Muslims with potentially dire consequences for their hopes for upward social mobility. It is important not to overlook the significance of mental health and well-being in this equation. There appears to be few social influences and key interactions to shape the development of project identities, yet many potential contributors to the adoption of alternative narratives peddling hope, an upward spiritual trajectory and rewards. This research consequently has numerous potential interrelated implications

for understanding Australian-born men (and more generally Western-born Muslim men) and the development of Islam in the Australian (and wider Western) multicultural context.

## Implications

### *Engagement with Marginalized Australian-Born Muslims*

Islam in Australia, as the historical analysis reveals, is in its nascent stages as a significant proportion of the wider community. It has been just 43 years since the adoption of multiculturalism and the mass migration of Muslims to Australia. Whilst Muslim institutional politics remains controlled by foreign-born, middle-aged men, the field of Muslim cultural politics remains far more heavily contested, with symbolic capital and the ability to shape how Muslims think and act the key stake. This research has revealed that the multicultural State has actively engaged through Government policy and decision-making; those Australian-born men that have practiced project identities, and in particular, have actively critiqued hardline textualists and terrorists. This involved direct funding and indirect support through the provision of a platform and recognition of their views. However, in the case of neo-resistance identity where group rhetoric was inflammatory and disputed the legitimacy of the State, multiculturalism was effectively “missing in action” with those young men that had lost hope and adopted an alternative narrative offering honorable self-recognition, hope, and a source of meaning. The reasons for this lack of engagement are not as clear cut as many critics of multiculturalism may argue. Both hardline textualists such as Yassir Morsi, an outspoken critique of Waleed Aly and the “liberal secular Muslim” and theorists including Ghassan Hage argue that multicultural policies are purely an extension of State power and reproduce the power of white elites.<sup>14</sup> Given the direct manner of funding and opportunities and emphasis of the Government on project identities commitment to Australia, this may appear to have some resonance; however, it is not so clear cut.

Project identities fostered by the State have not been co-opted. Multicultural policies of engagement with project identities have actively engaged with the critical dimension of these perspectives, evidenced by the engagement of Waleed Aly by security agencies after his critiques of “hairy chested sloppiness”<sup>15</sup> and funding of The Brothahood’s Indonesia tour even with their lyrics critical of racism and promotion of Muslim consciousness. Australian multiculturalism has proven itself capable and ready to engage with less than completely subdued, compliant political Muslim political identities even if emphasizing the pluralistic dimensions of their work.

If the reason for a complete lack of engagement with neo-resistance identities is not purely about a concrete refusal to engage alternate political perspectives then other answers must be sought. The proposed answer has two dimensions. The first is simply that engaging socially marginalized young Muslims is difficult, challenging work requiring the timely process of establishing grassroots contacts and trust, made more difficult by the inherently distrusting, suspicious nature of groups expressing “out group hate.” Multicultural engagement policies that could have assisted their transition into studies or other assistance aiding upward social mobility completely missed the men of the Benbrika Jama’ah and Jack Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman with potentially catastrophic outcomes. As Hage has argued, Islam for these young men has played a part in the lives of these men that multiculturalism has not been able to. Multicultural engagement strategies need to be recalibrated. Significantly higher rates of unemployment and poverty and experiences of disillusionment and discrimination, integration difficulty, identity issues and potentially, mental illness suggest that a proactive approach to education, employment opportunities, mental health, and well-being are pertinent places to start. The second component emphasizes the inherent tension between the multicultural and the securitized dimensions of the State. Of those men who had been identified as potentially planning an attack (ironically in the case of the Benbrika Jama’ah through the strength of multicultural policing strategies),<sup>16</sup> all were treated only as terror suspects with no regard to alternative mechanisms for early and preventative intervention. Here the massive emphasis on security and “counter-terrorism” (and subsequent funding under the Howard Government) with political capital to be gained from arrests displaying the Government as “protector,” completely outweighed the potential for multicultural approaches to engage these young men and offer alternate opportunities and hope. One mechanism for doing this might be the engagement of successful members of Muslim communities to mentor those identified as highly marginalized. This would cut out the middle (primarily) men who dominate the institutions that distribute multicultural and anti-radicalization funding, delivering interpersonal guidance and inspiration from others who have made it. Another key would be to treat the mental health and well-being of young Muslims as a national public health crisis. A decade and a half of public pressure, surveillance, and the stresses associated with this has likely resulted in significant negative impacts upon many members of Muslim communities, yet almost nothing is known.

In its current approach, the state is treating a symptom rather than a root cause of “radicalization” amongst Australian-born Muslim men. The emergence of young men such as Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman

suggests that the power of alternate narratives is not going to become less potent whilst social disparity, a lack of opportunity, hope, and a failure of multiculturalism to reach those men most disenfranchised remains. The possibility of multiculturalism as an enabler and Islam as a constructive presence in Australia appears to depend upon greater engagement.

### ***Constructive Political Engagement Requires Hope, Belief, and Investment***

Building upon the previous implication, it is argued that in addition to multiculturalism, the social and life circumstances of Australian-born Muslims must be urgently addressed. Australian-born Muslims currently constitute 38 per cent of the Australian Muslim population and this will likely continue to increase as a percentage. This group must believe in the potential for a better life and upward social mobility that extends beyond the current set of social problems of endemic unemployment, poverty, and criminal activity. Equality of opportunity requires not only racial and religious discrimination legislation, but active grassroots multicultural research and the development of programs to aid entry to education, stay in school programs and jobs with opportunity for career progression, and accompanying higher incomes. Furthermore, educational capital must be able to be converted into professional and economic capitals. Young men caught into a downward social spiral must not see welfare and criminal activity as their only options to make a living.

Addressing the social problems of endemic unemployment, poverty, and criminal activity may be some of the most critical work to be undertaken in the 40-year history of Australian multiculturalism. Accomplished with energy and robustness it has the potential to encourage empowerment amongst Australian Muslims, encouraging the development of vital educational and professional capitals with a potential flow on to the development of Islamic capital and to foster hope, belief, and investment in society. A failure to do so will in all likelihood see the continuing adoption of alternative narratives of hope offering alternative means of self-actualization and honorable self-recognition, contributing to a self-perpetuating cycle of “radicalization.”

### **The Emergence of a Uniquely Australian Islam**

A core defining feature throughout the history of Islam and its spread across the globe is its flexibility to develop based on local context. Through fusing with local cultures and interpretation based on *ijtihad*, Islam has successfully become integrated with local customs and cultures from North Africa to South East Asia and as literature and the case studies reveal, increasingly



in the Western context. This process, a form of religious “natural selection,” has seen those forms of Islam most suited to a particular environment largely thrive whilst those mismatched are marginalized and have little impact on the development of the faith.

This research makes it clear that the *Tasawwuf* and traditional forms of Islam and characteristics displayed by project identities are immeasurably better suited to the Australian social context than the Salafi jihadi narrative and those characteristics displayed by neo-resistance identities. Project identities are achieving widespread and active support amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. Rather than seeking to reject Western influences as resistance and neo-resistance identities do, project identities actively fuse Australian and Islamic influences in innovative and courageous ways, displaying a broad set of characteristics indicative of the positive potential for the emergence of an “Australian Islam” including:

- practice of a multicultural Islam across ethnicities;
- positive influence by, respect for, and comfort with women as independent, educated wage earners;
- familiarity with and comfort fusing Australian and Western cultures and Islamic practice in areas including music, literature, clothing, and physical appearance;
- confidence and assertiveness interacting with government as Muslims in a professional capacity;
- the promotion of pluralism and willingness to critique Muslims seeking to impose their perspectives on others;
- an entrepreneurial approach to locating space and opportunities for expression, displaying high levels of social resilience to take the risk of rejection in order to achieve goals; and
- A positive belief in and sense of service to Australian society.

If multiculturalism engages with Australian Muslims to develop opportunity, hope, investment, and belief, these characteristics are likely to be further integrated into the political basis of Australian Islam. However, these attributes must be allowed to develop organically. That is, governments and the media must resist the urge to apply inordinate force in dealing with views considered antithetical to mainstream values. Whilst cheap political capital may be gained from making statements about “banning the burqa” or Muslim men as potential “terrorists,” these may also have the net impact of pushing all Australian Muslims into a defensive position, forcing project identities to join with resistance identities in defending the faith from attacks. Further,

this bestows what may often be marginalized Muslim voices with a level of symbolic capital that may increase their support base.

Islam has shown over a period of over 1,400 years that it will adapt and evolve based on those practices best suited to the local context and has the potential to contribute to these contexts socially. The success of the young men practicing project identities reveals that where opportunity, hope, belief, and investment define the base of Australian Muslim experiences, that this robust, yet fundamentally politically progressive Australian form of Islam will flourish.

### *Benefits from Engaging with Political Islam*

As all case studies make clear, Islam as a political presence in Australia is very likely to become a permanent contributor to shaping the nation's future. Due to multiculturalism, Australia is very well placed to draw not only upon the contributions of Muslim citizens across all spectrums of educational, artistic, and professional endeavors, but as importantly, their collective Islamic capital. This may be beneficial on two key levels, the international and the domestic.

With Australia's immediate proximity to the world's most populous Muslim nation Indonesia and almost one billion Muslims in the Asia Pacific region,<sup>17</sup> engagement with Islam and Muslims is only going to increase diplomatically, economically, culturally, and socially. Australian-born Muslims have not only made sense of differences with, but also the similarities between Western liberal democratic and Islamic values. As engagement with the Islamic world and Muslims increases, Australia is well positioned to draw upon the contribution and Islamic capital of its Muslim citizens to bridge the cultural gap with the prospect of considerable geo-strategic, economic, and cultural benefits. It is only through robust debate, contestation, and open argument that Islam in Australia is able to come to terms with the question of what it means to be an Australian Muslim in practice. In building upon the previous implication, it may be argued that rather than seeking to stunt debate it should be encouraged and researched.

The second level of benefit from a robust political Islam is the highly important contribution made through the level of introspection afforded by Australian Muslim critiques of racism, white cultural hegemony, and foreign policy. Whilst the Australian government has been quick to denounce the perspectives of perceived "radicals," if taken seriously, the critique emanating from Australian Muslims and this robust political Islam can provide compelling insights into both the limitations and positive potential of Australian multiculturalism and society. Whilst Australian Muslim voices are amongst

many seeking to express political perspectives, listening to, and actively engaging with, their critiques as part of a process of national introspection may improve the positive potential of multiculturalism.

Key findings and implications open numerous areas of potential further study. The following lists those considered most important.

### *Masculinity and Political Islam*

Masculinity has been a pervasive theme in this book, and these studies of young men engaged in political action have shown how social influences simultaneously shape the form of Islam young men engage with (and how), as well as their masculine disposition. There were clear examples for this relationship in the case of Waleed Aly, a highly educated male from a middle-class background who had cultivated a professional masculine disposition that enabled him to connect with influential white Australian men (Hegemonic masculinities) and the Benbrika Jama'ah, men from working class backgrounds who embodied protest or "resistance" hyper-masculinities that immediately identified them as outliers who appear threatening to wider society. However, in contrast to what may be expected, members of The Brotherhood, who adopt performative resistance masculinities, expressed constructive "project identities." Jake Bilardi, Numan Haider, and Adam Dahman did not on appearances embody a neo-resistance identity (quite the opposite), conducted suicide attacks.

The project identities studied seemed significantly more capable of dealing with stressful situations, particularly when this may cause a sense of vulnerability and feeling of weakness or isolation. They were also more capable of opening themselves up to criticism through their creative work, revealing a level of security and confidence not evident in those studies of neo resistance identities. Neo-resistance identities appear to have responded to feeling vulnerable, isolated and 'weak' with a show of force. The Salafi Jihadist narrative, emphasizing individual action, sacrifice and empowerment offered the opportunity to become strong in the face of weakness.

It becomes clear that engaging with Muslim men on the basis of physical dispositions and on the basis of religious observance is deeply flawed. Yet this continues to the present. In engaging with Muslim men, it is vital that governments, media, and scholars move beyond physical expressions of faith, or a lack thereof, to *listen* to what they have to say. If they did, this study suggests that the ability to follow the core tenets of their faith without discrimination, find meaningful and stable work with the possibility of an upward social trajectory, and make a better life for their families and loved ones would be the key preoccupation of young Muslim men. These are arguably the most

effective mechanisms for the development of honor, recognition, and respect. Whilst this sounds relatively very simple, an immense amount of work is yet to be done to achieve the conditions for this.

### **Areas for Further Study**

The following areas of potential future study are not exhaustive. They represent important starting points for exploiting the contribution of this book.

- Having identified key drivers to political action amongst both project and neo-resistance identities these may be utilized to inform a large scale quantitative survey focused upon “Muslims in the middle”; less observant and politically active Muslims. This may make it possible to gain into the current location and potential future political tendencies of Australian Muslims.
- The tension in the State approach to Australian Muslims between multiculturalism and the law enforcement or “coercive” dimension of the State may be explored. This could focus specifically upon the question as to what point multiculturalism “retreats” and security approaches take over, and how Australian-born Muslim men may be better reached before being made subjects of the coercive arm of the State.
- A broader study of key social contributors to disabling influences including early school leaving, unemployment, welfare dependency, and imprisonment amongst Australian-born Muslim men would provide key areas for action by the multicultural State.
- An inquiry into the mental health resources available to young Australian Muslim men and a study of well-being is urgently required. This research suggests that when combined with the Salafī jihadist narrative, that emotions of grief, shame, guilt, and anger (through humiliation) are key contributors to violent political action.
- The relationship between family and Islamic teachers needs to be better understood. In all cases, families clearly loved and wanted the best for their sons, yet in the case of the Benbrika Jama’ah their influence was peripheral. An understanding of how this occurred may provide insights into the constructive role families can play in influencing the development of Islamic capital.
- A greater exploration of the influence of Muslim women upon Muslim men in the Australian context would reveal in greater depth the role of women in Islam and its development in Western contexts. This is currently not understood in sufficient depth.

- Further work should be undertaken to understanding how Australia may draw upon the Islamic capital of Australian-born Muslims to benefit engagements with Muslim nations, organizations, and movements internationally and to recognize critiques domestically.
- Greater knowledge about the content and general levels of support for intra-Muslim community debates about the place and future of Islam and multiculturalism in Australia and the West.
- At a theoretical level further work may be undertaken to develop the role that social trajectory plays in the accumulation and utilization of different forms of capital and the impacts of this within the habitus.

### Concluding Statement

Undertaking this research has been an immensely challenging, yet rewarding task reliant upon building trust and cooperation with the men interviewed and wider Muslim communities in Melbourne. In addition to addressing the research aims, it is intended that this work bring attention to the key issues facing Australian Muslims, simultaneously challenging the discourse of Australian-born Muslim men as potential terrorists, criminals, and misogynistic oppressors purely on the basis of their being Muslim. In addressing the key research questions, this book proposes that multiculturalism, combined with social opportunity and hope, can contribute to the development of a highly constructive, positive manifestation of Islam fostering the development of mutual respect, belief, and investment in society, individual personal, and community growth and possibility. The Australian nation can take full advantage of the courageous and creative contributions of Australian-born Muslim men and women both in the present and into the future.

# Notes

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## Chapter 5

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## Chapter 7

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## Listening Device Transcripts

### **2004**

- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 9 September 2004, (No Timings).
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 9 September 2004, 20:37:03–20:47:20.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 10 September 2004, 23:19:10–23:41:00.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 12 September 2004, 16:13:00–16:38:33.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 17 September 2004, 14:45:20–15:10:40.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 19 September 2004, 15:57:00–16:54:50.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 21 September 2004, 16:26–16:53.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 22 September 2004, 17:20:25–17:54:50.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 22 September 2004, 20:33:50–20:46:55.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 24 September 2004, 16:58:50–17:12:15.
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- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 27 September 2004, 17:42:45–17:59:30.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 18 October 2004, 17:25:30–17:56:20.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 19 October 2004, 22:16:47–22:30:15.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 13 November 2004, 20:09:00–20:24:23.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 19 November 2004, 21:58:15–22:30:00.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 29 December 2004, 13:26:15–13:55:20.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 29 November 2004, 22:02:55–22:20:30.
- R. vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 5 December 2004, 17:11:33–17:48:30.

**2005**

- R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 1 January 2005, 22:49:30–23:20:20.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 5 January 2005, 14:21:55–14:41:54.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 10 January 2005, 22:59:42–23:24:18.  
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 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 5 February 2005, (No Timings).  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 8 February 2005, 20:42.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 10 February 2005, (No Timing) LDT.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 23 February 2005, 20:51:15–21:02:15.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 19 March 2005, 14:25:00–15:32:30.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 26 April 2005, (No Timing).  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 15 April 2005, 20:20:00–20:24:00 p.2653.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 30 April 2005, 21:16:50–21:25:10.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 11 May 2005, 21:16:10–21:21:50.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 17 May 2005, 20:40:35–20:55:50.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 21 May 2005, (No Timings).  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 11 June 2005, 21:40:25–21:45:00.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 17 June 2005, 18:08:30–18:52:15.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 19 July 2005, 19:09:50–19:57:45.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 9 August 2005, 19:23:20–19:28:30.  
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 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. LDT, 2 November 2005, 00:02:30–01:28:20.

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- R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 10 August 2004, 13:53:13.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 1 October 2004, 15:06:20–15:08:48.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 21 October 2004, 09:57:46–09:59:36.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 31 December 2004, 14:21:37.  
 R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 31 December 2004, 18:08:38.

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- R vs. Benbrika and Ors. PIT, 11 January 2005, 20:02:05–20:06:46.  
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