

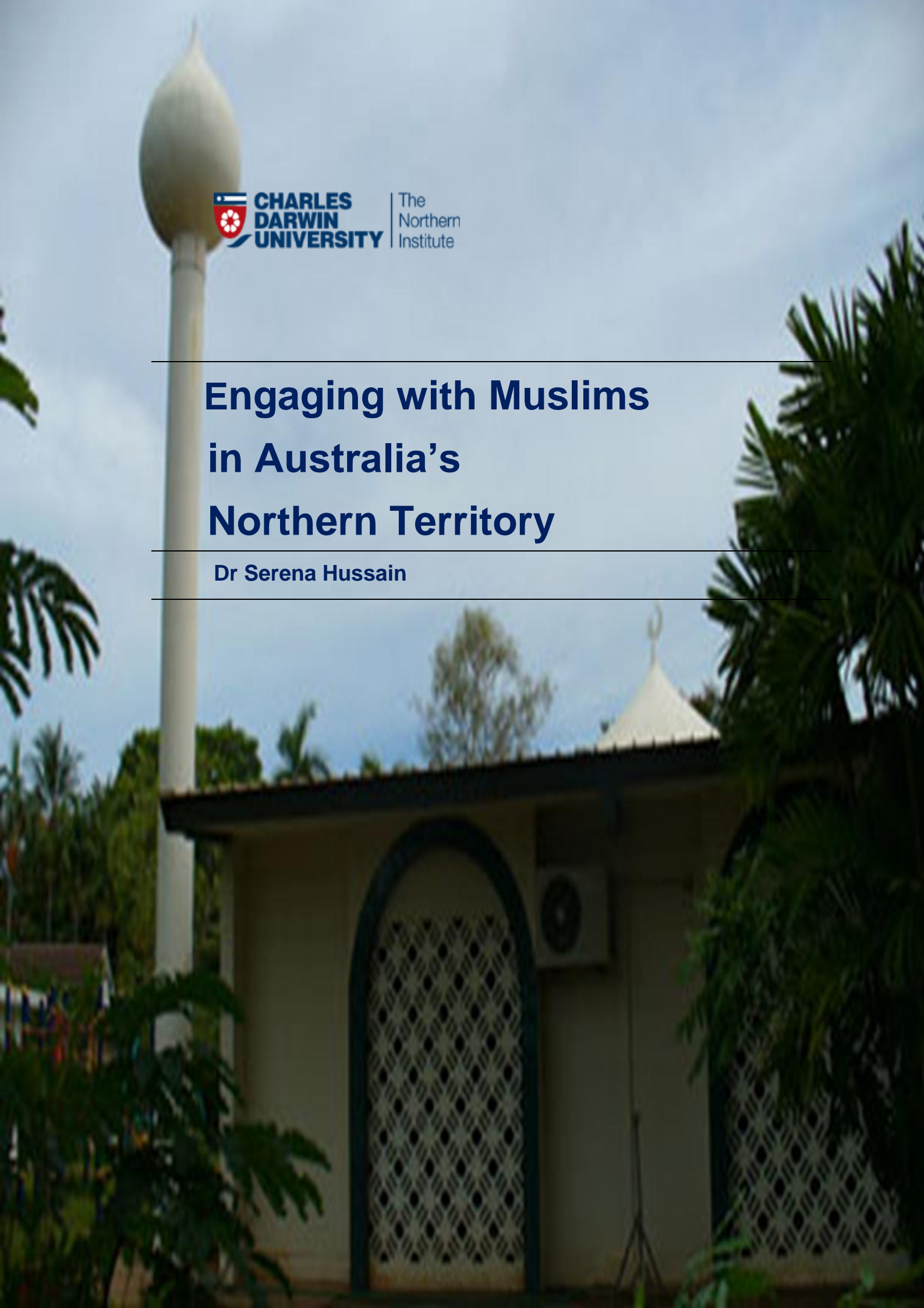


**CHARLES
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Institute

Engaging with Muslims in Australia's Northern Territory

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Engaging with Muslims from Australia's Northern Territory

By Dr Serena Hussain

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Front Cover: Darwin Mosque, provided by the Islamic Society of Darwin
Photo: Mohammad Nurul Huq

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report discusses the findings from a study commissioned by the Department of the Chief Minister's Office of Multicultural Affairs. The research set out to engage with young Muslim Territorians living in and around Darwin and Alice Springs, focussing on social cohesion and community resilience.

The Northern Territory Government (NTG) understands the importance of engaging with youth in order to explore the existence and consequences of disillusionment and detachment with mainstream society. The research for this study therefore focused on exploring feelings of belonging, social exclusion and Islamophobia¹ experienced by young people; and how these impact on ways in which young people view themselves as Muslims *vis-à-vis* wider non-Muslim society. The NTG commissioned a study to explore this using the following terms of reference as research aims to understand:

1. The forms of social exclusion experienced by Muslims through identifying the barriers to participation in Australian social and civic life;
2. How social isolation is experienced by Muslims in the Northern Territory and;
3. How the views and attitudes of Muslim youth are shaped by local and international events

The report outlines findings on how Muslim Territorians deal with the challenges faced by many Muslims communities, as diasporas across the globe, in relation to the current climate of moral panics surrounding Muslim minorities (Roose, 2012); and an evident increase in youth employing religion as a means for political mobilisation (Ballard, 1996; Jacobson 1998).

The research contributes to addressing the gap in knowledge on the experiences of the Territory's Muslim community more broadly. Despite the growing body of literature produced on Muslims in Australia, Muslims living in the Northern Territory have remained largely absent within Australian scholarship, with the exception of studies on the Afghan Cameleers and their descendants (Cigler 1986; Rajkowski 1987; Stevens 1989).

Contextualising the Research: Previous Studies

An increase in interest surrounding Australian Muslims grew as a result of the bombing of the Twin Towers in 2001 and the London transport networks in 2005, as well as events closer to home such as the Bali bombings in 2002, Cronulla riots and recent clashes of Muslim youth with police during a protest in Sydney². Australian Muslims, along with Muslims living in non-Muslim majority countries across the world have become the focus of policy debates surrounding integration (Poynting and Mason, 2008).

A review of Australian studies conducted in the last decade show a clear trend towards the exploration of broad themes which can be summarised as follow:

- integration and community participation in Australian society;
- experiences of Racism and Islamophobia;
- and the presence of extremist or radical views among Australian Muslims.

¹ See 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all' the Commission on British Muslims, published by the Runnymede Trust (1997)

² <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/police-gas-sydney-protesters-20120915-25yrb.html>

Islamophobia

Although examples of Harmony Day demonstrate how diversity is accepted and even celebrated, in recent times the consequences of such diversity have been presented to be at odds with Australian values when it comes to the presence of Muslims. Rooses' 2012 paper on Melbourne Muslims youth response to multicultural Australia describes how in the post 'war on terror' era "Government ministers consistently went on the offensive against Muslims who they perceived were antagonistic to Australian values", and that "numerous studies reveal a consistent pattern of social exclusion amongst Australian Muslims over the past decade on the racialization of religion" (pp. 151 -152). Poynting and Mason (2008) provide an evaluation of recent policy rhetoric about Muslim groups and demonstrate a shift towards more assimilationist positions to social inclusion when discussing these communities.

This is exemplified by a study conducted by Kamp and Mansouri (2010). They employ Critical Race Theory to explore the experiences of Muslim students of Arab descent in Melbourne. Their paper argues that valuing cultural diversity in schools is overlooked when it comes to Muslim Arabs, who frequently report feeling marginalised with the schools system and disconnected to teaching staff.

A particularly insightful study on the reactions of communities to the presence of Australian Muslims in the post 9/11 era is that of Al-Natour's (2012) paper on the response to plans for an Islamic primary school in Camden, Sydney. He writes:

Between 2007 and 2009, opponents of the proposal organised anti-Muslim rallies, wrote protest letters to newspapers, distributed several protest leaflets, attracted the support of politicians, and even places a pigs' head on the proposed site with an Australian flag. While arguing that Muslims have no place in Camden, residents' often contrasted Camden's rural white identity with Sydney's urban and culturally diverse qualities.

Wise's (2009) evaluation of interventions responding to the Cronulla riots describes how there was evidence of moral panic fuelled by a majority dislike of difference and the 'Other'. For example she writes how the emphasis was placed on "training the 'lebs'³ to behave 'more like us'" rather than on the prejudice that exists and propelled the conflict (p.27). Kabir's (2012) paper on the Cronulla riots echoes Wise's findings. **Promoting Integration and Participation**

In addition there have been several investigations into public sector services for, and community level engagement of Muslims. These reports have focussed on inclusion and facilitating greater participation of Australian Muslims in public life. A report by the Centre for Muslim Minorities and Islamic Policy Studies (2006) explored the provision of services available in Cobram to assist new Muslim migrants with social integration in the form of English languages courses, assistance with employment and being accepted by the wider Cobram community through the promotion of multiculturalism.

A 2010 study by the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion at Macquarie University looked at methods used in other countries to encourage greater Muslim political participation in terms of structured political leadership and having a greater say in Australian politics. Tolsma and Zelallos (2009) report demonstrated ways in which Adelaide's already established Muslim communities had contributed towards providing their local communities with services and support. It highlighted the benefits of such community development initiatives for residents in the city.

³ Derogatory slang referring to Australians of Lebanese origin

They described how smaller community led organisation which assisted newer residents with information about government services were perceived as easier for user groups that to “understand the breadth of government sponsored services available to them”.

It is clear from the majority of literature that the presence of Australian Muslims has become increasingly politicised in the current global climate. Overwhelmingly for Muslim respondents in the studies highlighted above, extremism simply did not feature as an aspect of their communities or within their world views. However, amplified feelings of marginalisation within both policy discourse and among some sections of broader Australian society have resulted in an increased level of frustration on the part of Muslims, as well as greater mistrust of Muslims within the mainstream. It is not surprising that those who are interested in community relations and multicultural affairs would find merit in investigating how Muslims, particularly youth, respond to the challenges presented as a result of unprecedented levels of attention, both globally and locally, on their faith community.

2. MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

There are records of Muslim contact with the Northern Territory dated as early as 820 AD. A map of the Sea of Java was produced by Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwaruzmi to include the Cape York Peninsula, Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land (Whitehouse, 1994, p.65).

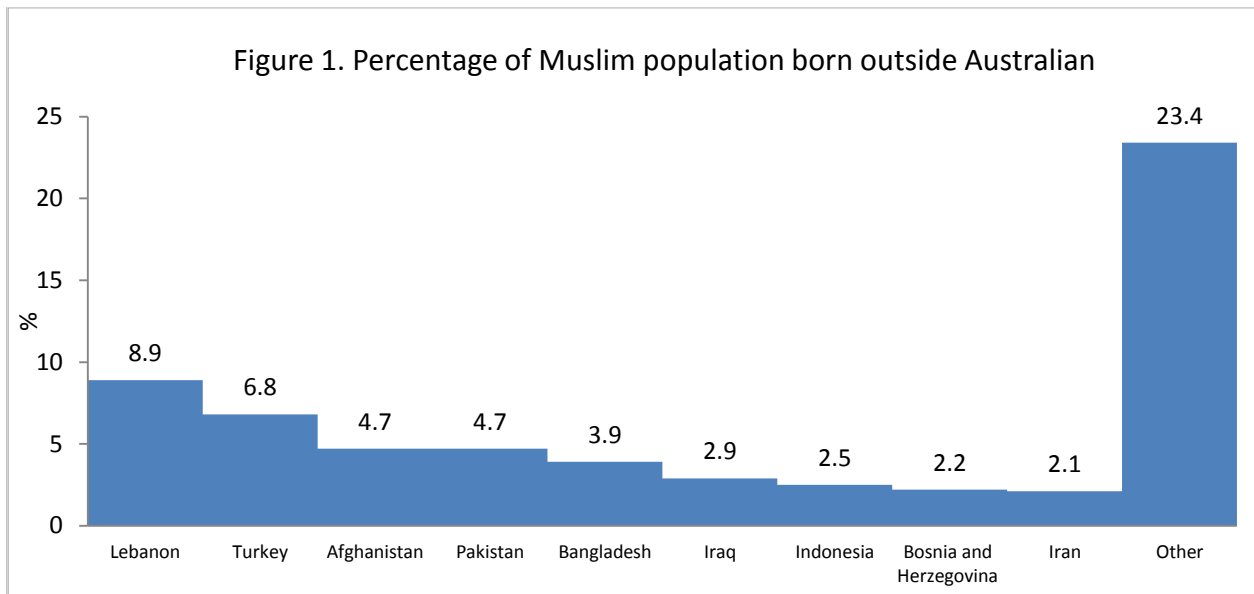
Well documented trade expeditions by the Muslims from Macassar to the Northern Territory coast line from at least the mid 1700's resulted in contact between Muslim merchants and Indigenous inhabitants. Cleland (2002) writes "So significant was the Macassan trade that for many years the British tried schemes to make the northern coast into a second Singapore" (p.4). However this never materialised and as a result of increasingly strict restriction on who should be allowed to enter Australia, the Macassans found it too difficult to continue trading with Australia's northern shores, resulting in a complete standstill by 1907. This ended decades, if not centuries, of exchange between the indigenous populations and the Macassans, which had become so significant that the old Macassan Kingdom included the coast of Australia within its realms prior to the British colonisation and expansion into the north.

Another notable period of Muslim presence in the Northern Territory was that of the arrival of Afghan labourers, hired by the British to build Australia's internal infrastructure, in the late 1800's. These men known as the 'Afghan Cameleers' predominately came from the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan in what is now modern day Pakistan. They made extraordinary contributions to opening up the vast interior of Australia in a relatively short period. An Afghan was one of the first non-indigenous men on record to have discovered the rock of Uluru and subsequently had a well (Kamran's Well) between Uluru and Lake Amadeus named after him.

The Afghans were responsible for building some of the first mosques in Australia, including the Grand Mosque of Adelaide in the late 1800's (Bartsch 2012). Several Afghans married Indigenous women and settled in Alice Springs and other areas in the Northern Territory where their legacy remains. The 'Afghan mosque' in Alice Springs continues to pay homage to this period and several streets, a neighbourhood and a school are named after some of these early Muslim settlers.

Although there were periods of smaller Muslim migration to Australia before the 1960s, it was not until the White Australia policy was lifted that larger scale migration from Africa and Asia began to occur. Today Australia's Muslim population remain numerically small relative to other western nations. The 2011 Australian Census recorded 476,291 respondents who selected Islam as their religion.

Australian Muslims are a heterogeneous population displaying a diverse ethnic and linguistic profile. Figures from the 2006 Census show that approximately forty per cent of Australia's Muslims were born on Australian shores. The countries of birth listed for the remaining sixty per cent illustrates the diverse backgrounds of this faith community.



Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

The Australian Muslim population reflects Islam as a world religion and in doing so encapsulates a variety of socio-economic and ideological variations. It is due to its diverse nature that scholars such as Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001) discuss the difficulty in speaking about a single Australian Muslim community and identity. The geographical separation of this faith group also adds an important variable in understanding the dynamics of Australian Muslim communities, as the findings presented in this report later discusses.

The Northern Territory has the second smallest Muslim population in Australia, as demonstrated by table 1. The size has no doubt contributed to the minimal attention the faith group have received compared to their fellow Muslims in New South Wales and Victoria. Both southern states combined are home to almost 82 per cent of all Australian Muslims.

Table 1: Distribution of Muslims in Australia by State/Territory

State/Territory of residence	Muslim population	Percentage of total Muslim population
New South Wales	168 788	49.6
Victoria	109 369	32.1
Western Australia	24 187	7.1
Queensland	20 318	6.0
South Australia	10 521	3.1
Australian Capital Territory	4 373	1.3
Northern Territory	1 083	0.3
Tasmania	1 049	0.3

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

As indicated by the early contact between Australia and the Muslim world, the Northern Territory has close geographical proximity to Muslim lands in South East Asia. The Territory therefore has an important strategic position for regional relationships with Asia. When the Indonesian President visited Australia in July 2012 it was Darwin and not Canberra that he chose as his base. This proximity has also resulted in Indonesians forming significant contingent of Darwin’s Muslim community.

In addition to Indonesians and Malays, immigrants from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Albania began to set up residence in Darwin from the 1970’s. In 1972 the Islamic Society of the Northern Territory (ISNT) was established and registered as an association with the aim to construct Darwin’s first mosque. Huq’s (2009) historical account of the Islamic Society of Darwin (ISD) describes how the catastrophic Cyclone Tracy of 1974 halted the establishment of the mosque and resulted in several Muslim families moving interstate. It would take another five years to get plans off the ground and in October 1979 the Darwin mosque was open for its first Friday prayer.

In 2002 the Islamic Council of the Northern Territory was established (replacing ISNT). It became the parent organisation for the Islamic societies of Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs and is one of nine state councils of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC). In addition to the Islamic societies are cultural groups which often interject with the Council, particularly for key religious festivals.

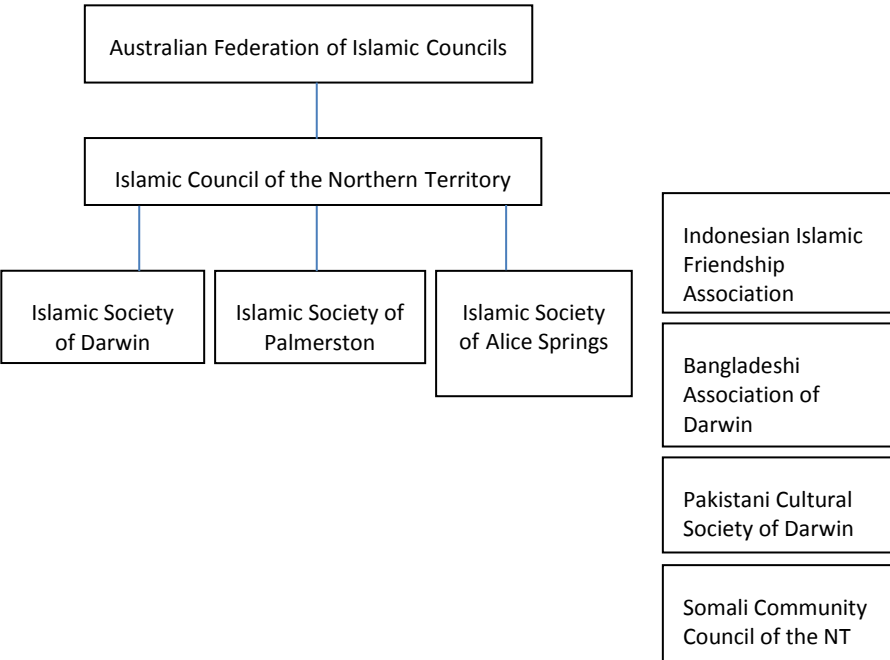


Figure 2: Islamic and Muslim cultural organisations in the Northern Territory

Although the Northern Territory is home to a modest number of Muslims compared to other states, the community has grown from the initial twenty families, who were involved in establishing the Islamic Society of the Northern Territory, to approximately 1600 residents according to the 2011 Census. The community is made up of over twenty-five ethnic and linguistic groups, including indigenous Muslims. Most of the families described in Huq’s account are well into their second and even third generations on Darwin soil. At present both Darwin and Alice Springs have one Mosque respectively. However there are plans in place for a new Mosque to be built in Palmerston.

Table 2: Religious Affiliation of residents in Greater Darwin

Religion	Population	Percentage
Buddhism	2,970	2.46
Christianity	62,643	51.95
Hinduism	1,296	1.07
Islam	1,345	1.12
Judaism	105	0.09
Other Religions	2,028	1.68
No religion	32,065	26.59
Religious affiliation not stated	18,133	15.04
Total	120,585	100

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Experiences of Muslim Territorians

During the section discussing recent literature on Australian Muslims it became clear that comparatively little is known about the opinions and experiences of those living in the Top End. One key study that did make attempts to do so was the Northern Territory Youth Forums, conducted in 2006. A series of workshops were run with Muslim youth in Darwin and Alice Springs as part of the National Muslim Youth Summit initiative. A summary of the discussions from the forum were published by the NTG⁴. The workshops were described as “a consultative forum with the main focus being to raise awareness of issues faced by young Muslims in the Northern Territory” (p.1).

Participants discussed issues related to four broad themes: employment and education, the media, identity and women’s issues. The report describes how participants felt Australians could see past their religion and Muslims could flourish under the Australian spirit of being given a ‘fair go’. However young people expressed difficulties with being able to visibly express an Islamic identity through commonly associated symbols, such as the hijab in the Territory. They described feeling self-conscious partly due to their smaller numbers and sticking out but also as a result of increased prejudice in the post 9/11 era. Similarly some participants reported feeling

⁴ See ‘Report on the NT Islamic Youth Forums: 8/9 April Darwin and Alice Springs’ published by the Northern Territory Government.

hesitant about fully expressing their political opinions in case they were misinterpreted as extremist.

Some participants described coming into difficulties when needing to pray at work or during school hours. Although one female student stated that the hijab had been banned at her school the majority of respondents discussed how religion was accommodated within their schools. Despite this when it came to obtaining employment, participants did believe that their religious affiliation had impacted on being offered jobs due to employers prejudices.

Women who attended the forums expressed how there were widespread misconceptions about their choice to wear a hijab, being undereducated and general oppression faced as Muslim women by their communities. They discussed how stereotypes needed to be challenged and were encouraged by the opportunity the forum had provided to emphasise expression such concerns.

Participants discussed frustration regarding the coupling of the nouns 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' and 'terrorist' within the mainstream, despite violent extremism being carried out by members of other faith and ideological groups. Participants felt this further isolated Muslims by linking them with terrorism and that they felt burdened by having to remind others that 'not all Muslims are terrorists and not all terrorists are Muslims'.

A series of recommendations were made from the material gathered at the workshops. The recommendations are also listed in the aforementioned document. In many respects the research for the 2013 study outlined in this report acts as a follow up to the 2006 forum due to its engagement with Muslim youth in the Territory. Several of the themes raised by the earlier study were also present within the recent conversations with both youth and community members.

3. ABOUT THE STUDY

The research for the 2013 study, *Engaging with Muslim youth in the NT*, took a community engagement approach. It was vital that existing relationships between the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and Muslim communities in the Territory were maintained and respected throughout the research process. Opting for a community engagement approach allowed for transparency between OMA and the community in discussions regarding the aim of the project and how it would be executed. The methodology provided community members with a forum in which they were able to also address related issues deemed important to them and their community.

A meeting was set up with members of the Management Committee of the Darwin Mosque to discuss the project and introduce the Chief Investigator, Dr Serena Hussain, for the study. The Committee acted as gate keepers for the community which was particularly important in reaching out to parents of young people who took part in the research. Gaffney (2005) and Thomas (2010) describe how engaging with research communities in this way is critical for 'getting underneath' complex and sensitive topics, such as those explored by this project.

Methodology

In keeping with the community engagement approach the research was keen to encourage community members to discuss the topics under study in their own vernacular. The primary method for investigation was qualitative, including one to one and focus group interviews. Focus group research involves organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences on a topic. This form of interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same subject. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation (Belzile and Orberg, 2012).

Research participants fell within the two broad categories of **young people** and **community leaders or elders**. The young people who took part in the study were aged between fourteen to thirty years. Community leaders were defined as such based on roles of influence, leadership or responsibility they have within the community.

As well as interviewing members of the established community, participants from 'transient' groups were also recruited to take part. These included overseas students and recent migrants, such as refugees. It was recognised that such young people may not be actively involved within the mosque community or have regular interaction with the established wider Muslim community in Darwin.

In addition to the focus group with young people from Alice Springs, attempts were also made to interview members of Afghan (Ghan) diaspora and indigenous community who self-identify as Muslim.

Over the course of three months, twenty-four participants were interviewed in either small groups or individually within the two cities. Those who took part in the study comprised of nine ethnic groups and identified themselves as being of Pakistani, Afghan, Indonesian, Indigenous-Afghan, and Bangladeshi, Indian, Congolese, Ethiopian and Fijian heritage.

Research participants were recruited using information sheets providing details of the project, describing what would take place during the interviews and information on who to contact if interested in taking part. The information sheet was given to Muslim youth in the community through the mosque committee, other community leaders and distributed by students at Charles Darwin University. Taking part in the research was voluntary and participation was self-selected. Snowball sampling was also used to gain access to participants, particularly on campus.

Most interviews lasted between one to two hours on average. The longest interview lasted three hours and a half. All interviews took place in a locations commonly frequented by participants such as the mosque, university or cafes. The interviews were semi-structured and as a result allowed participants to discuss topics in any order as well as raise issues which were not covered on the interview schedule. The questions on the schedule acted only as a guide in order to ensure that the research aims were explored during the conversations taking place.

All interviews were audio recorded for transcription. Participants were informed of the following before the interviewed commenced:

- All discussions are confidential and participation is anonymous
- Taking part is voluntary and individuals have the right to change their mind at any stage
- They may also withdraw any data derived from their participation up until a specified date
- The audio files will be kept on a password protected computer, only accessible by the researcher
- All audio files will be erased once they have been transcribed

As described, the primary method for data collection was qualitative interviewing. The data derived from the interviews was also supplemented with field notes through participant observations during the attendance of community events, such as seminars and lectures organised by the mosque and other predominately Muslim organisations.

Once transcribed the material from the interviews were organised into themes. Several common themes emerged from the analysis which indicated saturation⁵ regarding the certain topics, however other less commonly discussed issues were also found and these tended to be related to specific backgrounds of the participants, for example gender specific or period of residence in Australia. The findings were presented back to a sample of participants to allow for further discussion before compiling the final report. This is an important part of the community engagement approach which allows research communities to remain involved in the entire research process.

⁵ See Frost *et al.* (2010) Pluralism in qualitative research: the impact of different researchers and qualitative approaches on the analysis of qualitative data, *Qualitative Research*, 10 (4)

4. FINDINGS

An overview of the findings from the study is provided in this section with an emphasis on the research aims set out in the introduction. The research does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions due to the sample size of participants in the study, however it does provide an important insight into the opinions and experiences of Muslims living in the Northern Territory.

Organisation

The Muslim communities of Darwin and Alice Springs are multi-ethnic. Unlike many cities in Australia both have one main mosque which is not characterised by a dominant ethnic or national affiliation. For several decades Indonesians and Pakistanis were the most numerically large of all the city's Muslim groups and in order to ensure no national affiliation crept in it was decided, by the Islamic society of Darwin, that neither an Indonesian nor Pakistani Imam should be recruited for the mosque. However this policy is no longer strictly observed given the Bangladeshi heritage congregation has grown in recent years and the current Imam is from Bangladesh (Huq, 2009). One participant in the study expressed her concerns about the new mosque in Palmerston essentially becoming a 'Bengali' mosque if measures were not put into place.

The mosques in Darwin and Alice serve as important community hubs for all ethnic groups. As a result communities have developed a culture of tolerance regarding differing ideological approaches to religion. For example an overseas student described how he was surprised to see men praying at the mosque wearing shorts and how in Indonesia this would be considered improper. However in Darwin, people were considered more tolerant of various cultural interpretations of Islamic practice, reflecting Islam as a world religion, rather than as a single world view.

As a result of this multi-ethnic nature, no single ideological position was seen to dominate or be imposed. For example, Tabliqi Jamat, Barelvis and Deobandis all use the mosque as the central place of collective worship, as participants described:

I think having one mosque forces everyone to compromise and I think that's why there is harmony here – there has to be.

I mean you may all be parting along your own ethnic communities here but in the end you have to all come together to perform your religious duties, unlike say Sydney or Melbourne.

A key consequence of the multi-ethnic nature of the community – and importantly the mosque – is the difficulty in propagating what would be considered radical views among the congregation.⁶ There were two examples given by participants of how what one called 'extreme' and another referred to as 'radical' views were quickly rejected among regulars

attendees of the mosque. When prompted further both participants interpretations of 'extreme' actually reflected what can be best described as an ultra-orthodox theological or 'strict' position rather than one of violent extremism.

In addition both the cities' mosques are run by management committees. The committees play a crucial role in the administration of the mosque, as well as of an authoritative body who 'police' the mosque. As a result it becomes difficult for radical views to find a platform within this space.

The committee in Darwin has provided a consistent presence within the community and several members have remained on the committee for the entirety of their residence in the city. Therefore even when Imams leave and new ones are recruited, a consistent framework in the form of the committee remains, resulting in a swift challenge to extremist views should they appear among new comers.

There are high proportions of professionals and individuals with university level education among the Muslim populations of both cities. This also impacts on the parameters for what is considered acceptable within the mosque and wider community in another important way. Although there is no definitive evidence of correlations between socio-economic status and extremist ideological interpretations among Muslims, the communities in Darwin and Alice Springs demonstrated a commitment to their professional identities and it was clear that many saw their primary reason for migrating to Australia as accessing professional opportunities. This resulted in largely positive attitudes about Australia as a place to get ahead. The high proportion of professionals led to a high propensity for integration within the local work force and as a result regular interaction and exchange with non-Muslim colleagues.

Young People, Integration and Politicisation

The young people in Darwin had very positive attitudes about the city and living in Australia more generally. There was evidence that acculturation had taken place among Australian born Muslims as a consequence of being one minority group among many migrant groups. Darwin, often dubbed Australia's most multicultural city has not experienced the level of residential clustering of post 1970's migrant groups in the same way as other metropolitan locations. This has led to local school populations comprising of children from several backgrounds, with no dominant ethnic minority group.

Although evidence suggests this does not necessarily occur as a matter of course, in Darwin's case the multi-ethnic migrant profile has led to greater propensities of inter group friendships and exchange among the city's young people. It is worth pointing out that such exchange need not occur with the ethnic majority – in this case white population, but between different ethnic minority groups – of which there are well over sixty (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Young people described how Australia allowed Muslims to practice their religion and in many respects viewed it as more accommodating towards Muslims than other western nations:

Compared with other countries like France who banned the hijab, Australia is quite welcoming because at the end of the day Australia is based on immigrants, you know the true Australians are the indigenous. Migrants are all of us, even the majority have come from Europe – they are migrants too.

The multi-ethnic nature of the Muslim community and the multicultural nature of Darwin more generally, were discussed as the main reason the city is believed to be a good place for Muslims to live.

All the Muslims sort of get along with each other here, when you compare it with places like Sydney and New South Wales, see you get the Lebanese area and the Indian area and the Pakistani area, and even the mosques over there are like a Turkish mosque, an Iranian mosque, a Pakistani mosque, so Muslims have a good position there, they are in society, however they aren't united like we are here.

However young people in the study did describe some conflict between being Australian and being Muslim in a post 9/11 'war on terror' era due to Australia's support of US foreign policy in the Muslim world. When asked about the consequences of foreign policy in Muslim lands – such as the large number of civilian deaths caused by US drone attacks one participant described:

Yes of course there is frustration, we always think why is this happening, why can't it be stopped? In a way Australia is at some point powerless to stop the might of the US. You know the US has strong ties with Israel so the US will support Israel over the Palestinian issue. And this has a chain reaction, so with the UK and many Western nations will back them because they are allies. So what possibly can you do? You at some point have to think well this is just the way it is.

This is a common position many young Muslim people living in the west describe. Among the young people in this study however there were no discussions about wanting to leave Australia as a result or not participating fully in Australia due to feelings of disillusion with Federal policy.

I was born here, and most of us here we would stay in Australia. This is our home. Maybe my dad or uncle when they retire they might go back to Pakistan for example, because they are more comfortable there rather than any other reason. But I wouldn't because this is my home and I'm happy living here.

Opinions about the recent Sydney riots and similar protests elsewhere were discussed with the young people in the study. There were very similar opinions about the way the protests played out and strong views about their counter-productive nature. During three focus groups the same point regarding how the Prophet of Islam would react to attacks on his reputation during his life time were used as examples for why the protests should not have occurred. It was believed that the publicity only served to drag the issue out.

There were mixed feelings about whether protesting was useful at all, with some participants stating that in theory they would protest whereas others felt they would not but instead lobby a local politician if they felt very strongly about an issue affecting their community. The young people described how they felt able to do so and that politicians were accessible to them. Therefore it was clear that they believed in the local political process rather than feeling excluded by it, as Muslims.

Presence of Racism and Islamophobia

As stated, Darwin is a multi-ethnic city yet racism is a prevalent feature for many. In addition the diverse and largely middle class profile of the Muslim community has not rendered Darwin immune to the pandemic of anti-Muslim sentiment experienced across the globe. A nationwide survey headed by Professor Kevin Dunn called the 'Challenging Racism Project' found that approximately 17 percent of Territorians surveyed admitted to harbouring racist views, compared with the national figure of 12.3 percent. The survey found that 37.1 percent of respondents expressed anti-Muslim sentiments, followed by 22.8 per cent declaring anti-Indigenous opinions. Both anti-Asian and anti-Black African views ranks lower with 12.3 percent and 19.8 percent respectively, demonstrating that Islamophobia was the highest form of prejudice expressed among respondents.

Several young people interviewed for this research described experiences of racism. A number of examples were discussed within groups. In addition it became clear that many such incidents were directed at participants as Muslims, echoing findings from the 2006 youth forum which highlighted a discomfort on the part of Muslim youth to express an Islamic identity for fear of discrimination.

The overseas students in the study were the most vocal about anti-Muslim discrimination. Other participants, particularly younger men who had lived in Australia for several years (or were born in Australia) tended to brush these experiences off as ignorance. 'Shrugging off' racist abuse is a common reaction by young people who learn to accept it as an inevitable part of their lives. However those who have not grown up experiencing such abuse often find it shocking and difficult to come to terms with.

One student in the study described how she was speaking Indonesia with friends on a bus when a local woman began swearing at the group of females for being 'terrorists'. She also described how she is often asked why she wears a head scarf and is spoken to in a condescending manner as a result of her outwardly Muslim appearance, rather than being treated as an educated woman.

The overseas students described how cartoons and depictions of the Prophet were found on campus. One picture, for example depicted of a man in a turban with the words the prophet Muhammad and paedophile written on it. Students removed the pictures only to find them replaced the following week. They described how this went on for some time. One male student discussed how he was afraid to tell the university authorities about it in case they branded him an extremist.

Such examples demonstrate how Islamophobia exists and that overseas students in particular have been the target of explicit anti-Muslim prejudice. This must be challenged and taken seriously by the university in particular, which has a duty of pastoral care towards all its students.

Participants in Alice also described similar accounts of derogatory comments made about Islam. One young man who worked in a mechanics workshop told the group about harassment he had been prone to whenever any reference to his religion was raised in his workplace. For example when he wanted to pray he described how his colleagues told him his religion was 'shit'.

Others however felt that their experiences of Islamophobia had improved as a result of moving to Alice Springs. One participant described how he was more comfortable wearing a beard compared with living in Melbourne, where he felt it had been frowned upon in his last place of work. Similarly, others described how colleagues were more respectful of all 'difference' because it is difficult to retain professional people in Alice Springs and they were respected by others for contributing to the local area.

Several participants described how even at institutional levels there is a lack of unawareness about very basic tenets of the Islamic faith and how this can impact on social inclusion. One student gave an example of how he wanted to attend an event and be part of the Christmas celebrations at the university:

I think they (the university) need to be more aware, for example last week they had the faculty Christmas lunch on Friday and of course we have to go to Friday prayers, its obligatory for Muslim men. But of course we would have loved to attend the Christmas lunch and to me I thought - this is one way that they could have been inclusive but no – they (organisers) didn't even give it a thought.

Limitations of Living in the NT for Muslims

Muslims in both Alice and Darwin described feeling isolated from other larger Muslim communities because of their physical location. This was far more pronounced for those in Alice Springs however.

The young people here felt that there was very little for them to do as Muslims who do not 'pub or club'. Being able to celebrate festivals with friends and family elsewhere in Australia was described as being particularly difficult given that Islamic festivals are not recognised as public

holidays in Australia (in the UK for example it is illegal for employers to deny Muslim employees time off for Eid ul Fitr and Eid al Adha).

The Muslim community in Alice Springs is also largely professional but as a result of the perceived isolation from the rest of Australia the community was described as transient in nature. However other participants described how the size of the Alice Springs Muslim population had led to a genuine sense of community, everyone knowing each other and young people developing a strong sense of camaraderie that they felt could be difficult to find elsewhere as newer migrants.

Participants described Alice Springs as a good place to be as a Muslim or indeed any professional migrant due to an actual need for skilled workers on the part of the local population. Others also described how Muslims were not new to Alice Springs and the cameleers had left a legacy that resulted in the local population respecting what Muslim immigrants had contributed historically.

The Alice Springs mosque has not had a formal Imam for several years. It was clear that the difficulty in attracting an Imam was viewed as particularly problematic and the community felt this was an issue they need assistance with to resolve. Similarly, it was felt that young people in particular would benefit from the presence of an Imam and were missing a crucial part of their development by not having regular contact with a reliable Islamic teacher. Nevertheless the community spirit present in the city has led to a 'pulling together' in order to not only serve their faith group but the wider Alice community wherever they can. Those who had permanently settled in Alice were very proud to call it home.

Learning about Islam

During the interviews young people were asked about where they accessed their information on Islam. They described their families as being the primary source of information about religion, followed by the mosque. This did not however necessarily mean the Imam himself and this shift depending on who the Imam at the time is.

It was clear from conversations during the study that a previous Imam (who served from 1995 to 2009) played a significant role in educating young people in the city. One respondent described him as a 'role model' and another as his 'Idol'. Most participants described a genuine sense of loss when the Imam left Darwin for Canberra, echoed by Huq's (2009) accounts. It was made clear that his presence was pivotal for youth education and encouraging participation in wider Darwin community life. Shortly after the events of 9/11 the Darwin mosque began a series of Islam awareness events in order to engage with the wider Darwin community and provide a platform for dialogue and exchange. This is a far more achievable feat for a location with a smaller overall population size and a single organised Islamic society.

However both the youth and elders spoke about how the overall presence of young people at the mosque had declined in the last few years. There were a number of reasons discussed with the prevailing opinion being that there were not as many organised youth activities at the mosque as in previous years.

The internet now provides young people with a wealth of information about Islam. Many of the young people described using Google searches to help answer questions they had and occasionally accessing Islamic websites. All web recourses mentioned are mainstream websites such as 'Islam QA'. None of the young people described using online chat forums for information purposes. The primary reason given was that they did not appeal to any of the young people in the study who described preferring to spend their time on other activities.

Media and 'the Muslims'

All participants agreed unanimously that the media was extremely sensationalist in its reporting of anything relating to Muslims. There was wide spread frustration about this, and it was believed that the media cause many of the misconceptions that lead to the prejudice Muslims face in their daily lives. One respondent explains:

People in Alice don't really know much about Islam because there aren't many Muslims here. It's not like they wouldn't have the chance to learn about it. So here the only place the average person hears about Islam is through the media. So the way the media portrays us Muslims does have a direct impact on us because when somebody meets you they have all these ideas about you already. For my personal experience peoples perspectives change once they looked at me and got to know me. Once they meet a Muslim physically I think their perspective changes. And most of them were surprised when they found out I was a Muslim because they didn't know this first so they didn't expect me to be. Like people ask me, are you Muslims? And I say yes, and then they'll ask are you a practicing Muslims? And I say yes and they are surprised. But after they know this I can see they respect it. But if you left it to the media people would only have negative views about Muslims.

Participants felt that even the local news outlets such as the NT News had on occasion reported in very irresponsible ways when it came to Muslims. It was strongly suggested in one focus group that the newspaper make attempts to report a more balanced view with the occasional 'good news' story about Muslims living in the Northern Territory.

Women

Women have played an active role in the Darwin mosque, both in terms of attendance and on its management committee. The inclusion of women in decision making roles has been one of Darwin's greatest successes as a Muslim community. Two of the female participants described how the previous Imam had set wheels in motion for encouraging both young people and women to actively engage in mosque life. This is not an achievement to be downplayed, as it is extremely unlikely many committees across the country would be able to boast the same level of female participation in the running and decision making of their mosques. However one participant described how in recent times it has become difficult to keep up momentum for women who may come across more misogynistic views due to the changing nature of the committee, which is democratically elected by members of the community.

According to accounts from a female Indigenous Afghan participant, women played a role in the upkeep of the Alice mosque also. She described how both her brothers and sisters would regularly attend to the maintenance of the gardens and exteriors during their youth.

As stated in the earlier 2006 study women who wore hijab were more likely to feel as though they are targets of discrimination and abuse. As a result women may be disproportionately targeted for harassment. One participant described how common it was for her as a woman who wears the hijab to come across comments and judgement:

I like to socialise a lot, I'm very active and part of lots of groups, not just with Muslims but with all people. And they say 'why do you wear this one?' (the hijab) and I laugh and say because I'm fashionable and I like to colour coordinate as many accessories as possible. Others say 'don't you feel hot with your scarf?', and I say no I've been wearing it for years and I've always lived in a hot country.

But you know it just makes me think I want them to see me with this (hijab) on, you know they ask why do you wear it? And I say it's a matter of choice, because there are many Muslim women who don't wear it, so I explain it's my choice. You know recently a man pulled my scarf. I was waiting for the chemist to open in the morning, so sat outside. I felt something pull at my scarf from behind and when I looked I saw it was a man. I thought to myself this person is probably uneducated and ignorant. But I don't want to hide away, I want to be active and show people I am confident enough to communicate even wearing this.

Stereotyping of Muslim women remains an issue despite recommendations made by the previous report. Combating this form of religiously motivated harassment requires serious action if the Northern Territory is to provide a safe and fair environment for its communities.

Transient Youth and Recent Arrivals

Young people in the study who had both recently settled in Darwin, or who were passing through as students, described how the local Muslim community were both welcoming and accepting and provided an important source of support and care. One participant described how when he arrived from Indonesia as a student he had no contacts in Darwin but very quickly found friendship through attending a local Indonesian community event. This is can be crucial, particularly for students, who feel that other support networks are absent.

There is no student Islamic society here the University. For me it was great because there are lots of Indonesians here but, what if you are a Muslim from another place that doesn't have a community here like Algeria or Somalia? In my previous university in the US they had student community engagement programs where they set up contact with overseas students and the local community, including the mosque. I think this university don't recognise that it can be an important for new Muslim students. Here they assume that students will do it yourself (engage with the local Muslims).

The report by the Tolsma and Zevallos (2009) on Adelaide's Muslims described how the established communities provided a source of social capital through access to services and information. Likewise the Darwin community were described as a valuable source of social capital by providing similar support to young people moving to the area, both in terms of pastoral care but also practical guidance and information on accessing housing and services.

5. SUMMARY

There has been a well-documented increase in negative attitudes about Muslims and Islam as a result of global events. The Northern Territory Muslim's community has also experienced this backlash, more often in subtle and implicit forms. However, this has not resulted in the community withdrawing from mainstream society and young people felt very strongly that they belong to Australia and the Territory.

The communities of Darwin and Alice Springs see themselves as largely professional and middle class. It is not surprising that their children also have what would be described as very mainstream, middle class aspirations. The structural inequalities that have been highlighted by scholars exploring Muslim communities in other western contexts do not feature as a significant variable in youth marginalisation within this context (Abbas, 2012, Hussain, 2008).

Extremist views were seen as particularly alien to the interpretations of Islam that young people in the Territory share. Although many other localities in the Western world have chosen to address forms of social isolation by providing interventions around religious extremism, it is clear that this not required in the NT. In many respects the finding mirrors Dunn's (2012) paper in which he describes how the anxieties surrounding the presence of Muslims maintain a cycle of mistrust that ultimately threatens minorities adopting Australian values by risking further their marginalisation.

The role of mosques within communities varies greatly from place to place. This is particularly the case when it comes to their interaction with youth and women. The research with young people demonstrated how a period of positive, engaging and 'society affirming' leadership and religious tuition from an Imam and committee can have lasting impacts on youth. In addition opening up community leadership to women provides an important block to widespread misogyny. By doing so the ICNT set itself up as a model of good practice and should ensure the maintenance of such approaches. Their efforts in this respect should be particularly well noted for both safe guarding against social isolation and promoting inter-community relations for the common good.

Research Aims Revisited

This study set out to explore clear research aims, as put forward in the introduction. In relation to research aims one and two - *to understand the forms of social exclusion experienced by Islamic young people through identifying the barriers to participation in Australian social and civic life; and to understand the forms of social isolation experienced by Islamic young people in the Northern Territory* - it was clear that although the young people valued the multicultural nature of the Territory and felt part of society, the existence of anti-Muslim views within the wider community impacted on their lived experience and does require attention in order to ensure greater social inclusion. In addition the University must understand how this form of discrimination plays out on campus in order to support its Muslim students, particularly those from overseas.

A considered approach for dealing with religiously motivated discrimination must be adopted. Public sector organisations, particularly those working with minorities and Muslims should make efforts to understand Islamophobia and how it impacts on young people and communities. The report by the Runnymede Trust, 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all', would provide a good introductory recourse on the subject.

Another concern when exploring social isolation is the disenfranchisement of individual Muslim youth from mainstream faith communities. Discussions with youth and community members demonstrated that there was no need for concern regarding young people's vulnerability in this respect. It was clear that the community provide a strong counter-narrative to radical views and stringently orthodox interpretations of Islam as the common ideological framework for the mosque.

The Northern Territory Government should continue to maintain an open and honest relationship the Islamic Council of the Northern Territory (ICNT). Likewise the ICNT are encouraged to continue to engage with community leaders from all sectors of local society to promote interfaith and cross cultural dialogue and exchange, as it has hitherto successfully done so.

Communities in Darwin and Alice must remain uncompromising on allowing a platform for radical and misogynistic interpretations of Islam within their mosques. This is particularly relevant to geographies like the Northern Territory which have greater propensities for transient populations.

The community in Alice Springs expressed clear difficulties in obtaining an Imam for their mosque. It is recommended that the community are supported in the task of finding suitable religious leadership. Consulting with the current Management Committee on avenues to rectify this should be explored.

Research aim three set out to *understand how the views and attitudes of Islamic youth are shaped by local and international events*. The research found that although young people had an awareness of international events they were not politicised at a local level as a result.

There have been calls for fairer and more representative media reporting of Muslims. Writing workshops with local journalist could be employed to encourage and equip young people who are interested in providing a more balanced voice on issues relating to their communities by contributing to media outlets in Australia.

A report by the Centre for Muslim Minorities and Islam Policy Studies entitled 'Political Participation of Muslims in Australia' provides recommendations on how Muslims can be encouraged to participate more fully within local and national political structures. It is recommended that young people who are interested in doing so should be supported with knowledge and provided with opportunities to engage fully in leadership and decision making processes.

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