

## **Building Mosques, Building Community: Australian Mosque Establishment and the “Muslim Migrant,” 1967-1990**

In twenty-first-century Australia, mosques have proven a critical site for debate and panic regarding migration from the Middle East. Mosques have become a flashpoint for broader concerns relating to migration management, demographic shifts and minority relations. At a time of intense focus on Muslims in Australia, assessing an earlier period's social relations and discourse is important in understanding current perceptions and representations of Muslims in Australia. Adopting a historically-informed perspective allows us to question the process by which we arrived at current rhetoric. When did the notion of the “Muslim migrant” emerge? Which actors and what factors coalesced to create it? Why is this broader category preferred to ethnic or linguistic representations that would differentiate between Australia's diverse Muslim communities? This essay will trace the active promotion of a sense of collective, supra-national identity as “Muslim migrants” among the Islamic community in Australia between 1967 and 1990.

Despite reductionist populist rhetoric indicating otherwise, the history of Islam in Australia extends back many centuries to the early Macassan travellers who seasonally visited northern Australia to harvest *trepang* (sea-slugs) and trade with local Indigenous people.<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, some Muslim communities settled permanently, including Afghan cameleers who navigated inland crossings and

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study on early Macassan contact with northern Australia, see Campbell MacKnight, *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976.) *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976.)

were the first people to regularly practice Islamic worship in Australia.<sup>2</sup> The Islamic community remained small for many decades, with growth hindered by the restrictive White Australia Policy that, in practice, gave preference to European Christian immigrants. And yet, even in the 1971 Australian census, 22,311 individuals identified as Muslim.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the period in focus, it had reached 147,500 – still less than one per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> The Islamic migrant community in Australia became marked by its diversity, in belief, national origin and cultural characteristics. The largest Muslim diaspora in Australia hails from Lebanon, the second largest from Turkey.<sup>5</sup> However, a number of minority Islamic groups and traditional sectarian divisions are also represented. Australia became host to a number of Arab communities, including Iraqis, Syrians and Kuwaitis, with later migrant groups including people from Bangladesh, Pakistan and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup>

There have been mosques in Australia since the first Muslim settlers. The first modest “tin shack” mosques in Australia were built by the Afghan cameleers.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the acceleration of Muslim migration after 1967, however, there existed only a few isolated mosques which did not reflect the settlement patterns of those who arrived in Australia during the period in focus. Mosque establishment provides a discrete arena in which to understand the changing ways in which Muslim migrants sought to

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989): 174-175.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, extracted from Husnia Underabi, *Mosques of Sydney and New South Wales*. (Sydney: Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia, 2014): 14.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Special Feature: Trends in religious affiliation (Australian Social Trends, 1994)*, Catalogue Number 4102.0

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Muslim Australians: their beliefs, practices and institutions*. (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2004): 5-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*, 174-175.

establish their own sense of collective identity as their presence in Australia expanded in the 1970s and 1980s.

Much like the Muslim communities they serve, the mosques established in Australia between 1967 and 1990 are marked by their diversity. Some came to define the localities in which they were built, such as the Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque in Lakemba, opened in 1976, or the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, established in 1979. Both these mosques reflected architectural styles prevalent in Turkey and the Arab world. Many mosques, including the Erskineville Mosque founded by the Sydney Turkish Islamic Culture and Mosque Association in 1976, adopted existing community buildings like churches, while repurposing their interiors to suit their needs.<sup>8</sup> Still more mosques operated out of small houses, in many cases seeking to transform these buildings into identifiable religious sites once financially viable.<sup>9</sup>

Mosques also had a powerful effect on local streetscapes. Where the coalescence of a large Muslim migrant community had the ability to drive mosque establishment, mosques also had the effect of attracting Muslim migrants to the area.<sup>10</sup> A 1988 account of Lakemba and Auburn in western Sydney details the impact of twenty years' sustained Muslim migration to Australia:

Minarets and domes tower above workers' cottages lining the streets of Sydney's western suburbs of Lakemba and Auburn. Butcher shop awnings

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Dunn, "Mosques and Islamic Centres in Sydney, Representations of Islam and Multiculturalism," (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1999): 306.

<sup>9</sup> Peter White, "Muslims, residents in conflict," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 1985, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Humphrey, "Community, Mosque and Ethnic Politics," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Volume 23, Number 2 (1987): 237.

proclaim in English the availability of *halal* meat, which has been specially slaughtered. Signs in video shops are in Arabic.<sup>11</sup>

But while the physical sites and structures of mosques varied, on the whole they reflected shared needs and common purposes. Mosques were utilised by Australian Islamic leaders to help build a collective identity that strengthened the notion of the “Muslim migrant.” In the community debate surrounding mosques, civic leaders among Australia’s new Muslim population sought to promote a supra-national categorisation that was to permeate local and national discussion. But to understand the ways in which the media and Australian politicians came to perceive and present Australia’s Muslim community, it is first necessary to assess the ways in which they projected themselves in the wake of accelerated Muslim migration after 1967.

Mosque establishment in Australia was initiated in one of two ways: either on the basis of shared ethnicity and cultural practice (including language), or by the convergence of a critical mass of Muslims in a locality.<sup>12</sup> Both of these were demonstrated in early religious efforts of Muslim migrants in Australia. Mosques such as the King Faisal Mosque in Sydney’s Surry Hills were driven by the need for an inner-city site of religious worship for Muslims from all backgrounds, whereas some of the early mosques were established by distinct ethno-national community groups, retaining specific cultural or linguistic markers of the individual communities they served.<sup>13</sup> The most prominent example of such mosques were the Turkish-language

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Johnston, “Australian Muslims speak out,” *Woman’s Day*, 18 January 1988, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Wafia Omar and Kirsty Allen, *The Muslims in Australia*. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996): 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn, “Mosques and Islamic Centres in Sydney, Representations of Islam and Multiculturalism,” 310.



mosques (based in repurposed churches) in the Sydney suburbs of Erskineville (1976) and Redfern (1978).

Mosques served as a principal site of identity-creation for new migrant communities in Australia, with attendance at community worship or events at such explicitly religious sites involving self-identification as a Muslim. The shift from majority to minority religious status that came with migration to Australia also informed the ways in which new Muslim communities in Australia negotiated identity in the 1970s and 1980s. A number of sociologists have observed that the change in external community setting is critical to understanding collective notions of identity and being. When communities were transplanted from their traditional, ethnically (more) homogeneous countries of origin, these migrants were forced to renegotiate their individual and community self-perception in relation to the majority grouping, in this case “old” Australians, among whom were many newer groupings of the post-war mass migration.<sup>14</sup> For Muslim communities in Australia, this process had diverse implications: some sought affirmation of their ethnic or national identity, while others, especially smaller community groups, actively looked for self-identification in broader categories – often that of the “Muslim migrant.” Due to a range of factors present within Australia’s Muslim community, both courses of action were evident during the period of study.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, see Adis Duderija, “Identity Construction Among Western (Born) Muslims: Religious Traditions and Social Orientation,” in *Muslims in Australia: the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion*, ed. Samina Yasmeen. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010): 98.

While the Turkish community in Australia grew quickly after the migration agreement of 1967, as a new community grouping it lacked political agency or clout. As recent arrivals, Turkish migrants lacked consolidated leadership structures, financial power or the resources to wield influence in Australian politics, especially at the State or national level. This was common to Australia's Muslims as a whole, and helped drive the creation of a distinct sense of community identity that would eventually allow them to achieve some level of political influence. Within a decade of the arrival of the first sanctioned Turkish migrants in Australia, the potential of "Muslim migrants" as a political force was recognised by many Australian politicians. This was demonstrated by the attendance of political elite at many major mosque openings in the late 1970s. Turkish migrants in Australia also appealed to the shared history of Turkey and Australia, in particular the Gallipoli Campaign of the First World War, which they affirmed by naming the major Turkish-affiliated mosque in New South Wales the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque.<sup>15</sup>

The potential political sway of Muslim migrants as a distinct grouping was magnified by external funding of the Muslim community in Australia, which received growing recognition in the press in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Speaking in 1981, the President of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC; until 1976 known as the Australian Federation of Islamic Societies - AFIS), Dr Mohammad Ali Wang, stated that "it was only at the last election [1980] that the Moslem vote was even noticed. But both parties now realise that there's mileage to be had. This is partly due to recent

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<sup>15</sup> National Trust, "Auburn Gallipoli Mosque," accessed 12 October 2016.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/initiatives/auburn-gallipoli-mosque/>

<sup>16</sup> "Recognition for the Moslems: a new mood in Australia's mosques," *Australian*, 17 February 1981, 7.

Saudi interest in Australia.”<sup>17</sup> As will be discussed further, foreign investment and petrodollars flooding towards the Islamic community in Australia helped mitigate their otherwise socioeconomically disadvantaged position as recent arrivals. Further, given the settlement patterns of migrants from Muslim communities – which tended to centre on a small number of Local Government Areas in northern Melbourne and western Sydney – municipal councils also became conscious of the potential for a voter bloc that could sway electoral results.<sup>18</sup>

AFIC was the leading representative body for Muslims in Australia, and indeed the group most regularly sought as the voice of the growing community of Islamic adherents in Australia. Emerging out of an earlier body established in 1963, AFIC was formalised in 1976 with a consolidated umbrella structure that brought together the various State Islamic organisations as well as subsidiary groups. It would be cynical, however, to suggest that Muslim leadership efforts towards the consolidation of a group identity from 1967 onwards such as those of AFIC were entirely a means to political ends. A number of more altruistic causes helped bring together disparate Muslim migrant groups in Australia, including concerns for religious maintenance in a minority religious setting, restoring Islam permanently in Australia and also the numerous community functions that mosques served. All three of these concerns merit consideration given their interwoven nature with the early establishment of mosques in Australia.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Humphrey, “Is this a mosque free zone? Islam and the state in Australia,” *Migration Monitor*, Number 12 (1989): 12.

Foremost among the priorities in Australian mosque-building was religious maintenance. This concern was a driving force particularly pertinent for the small early migrant communities who arrived in a nation almost completely lacking Islamic institutions. Prior to the accelerated Muslim migration that was initiated in 1967, a few active Muslim communities operated mosques in Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane and Canberra (the first three relics of the earlier Afghan presence, the latter supporting the diplomatic community), but these mosques were in no position to respond to the concentrated arrival of new Muslims in other cities. Religious maintenance remained enduringly important in the wake of second-generation migrants from the late 1970s onwards. Mosques were perceived as pivotal to affirming Islamic faith among young people, and many parents feared that without them their children would lose both their religious identity and their cultural heritage.<sup>19</sup> In order to counteract such possibilities, a Russian Muslim migrant suggested in 1974,

[E]very individual must do his best to create a very strong and competitive [M]uslim organisation and erect grand mosques in the best art of Islamic architecture. To achieve all this we need capital which is not really a big problem provided we are properly united.<sup>20</sup>

Mosques were evidently associated not only with individuals' religious devotion, but also communal identity. The strength of this conviction relies partly on the many functions that mosques assumed in Australia for the Muslim community. Across the world, mosques have traditionally served a number of capacities, and importantly are

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<sup>19</sup> Ahmet İçdugyu, "Migrant as a transitional category: Turkish migrants in Melbourne, Australia," (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1990): 284.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammad Ajayoglu, "Our Future in This Country: a story of two incidents," *Australian Minaret*, Volume 9, Number 2 (1974): 3.

used by communities for the education of children.<sup>21</sup> In Australia, the mosques established by the burgeoning Muslim community usually ran classes for children, often focusing on linguistic and religious instruction.<sup>22</sup> The first Australian school founded on Islamic values did not open until 1983, and so the majority of migrant families relied on mosque education to instil cultural and religious practices that were seen as otherwise lacking in the minority religious setting.<sup>23</sup> It is little surprise then that Muslims arriving in Australia after 1967 saw the presence of a mosque as synonymous with religious education and spiritual maintenance.

A further concern intimately interwoven with the history of Islam in Australia was an awareness of the longer history of a local Muslim presence. Beyond abandoned outback corrugated “tin-shack” mosques, a few isolated sites reflected Australia’s early Muslim communities, including the Central Adelaide Mosque (built 1888), Perth Mosque (completed 1905) and Brisbane’s Holland Park Mosque (opened 1908).<sup>24</sup> This concern for Australia’s vanishing Islamic history was outlined in an AFIC directive quoted in a 1979 *Sydney Morning Herald* article:

These programs are absolutely essential and need urgent implementation if the Moslems of Australia want to avoid a repetition of the history of earlier Moslems who came from Afghanistan ... and who disappeared with little or no trace.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003): 109.

<sup>22</sup> “Faisal Mosque and Islamic Center,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 12, Number 3 (1978): ii.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Jones, “Islamic Schools in Australia,” *The La Trobe Journal*, Volume 89 (2012): 37.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony Johns and Abdullah Saeed, “Muslims in Australia: The Building of a Community,” in *Muslim Minorities in the West: visible and invisible*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2002): 202.

<sup>25</sup> James Cunningham, “Day by day, more and more answer the call of Islam,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1979, 7.

This prospect was again echoed a decade later in a 1988 edition of the *Australian Minaret*, demonstrating the enduring anxiety among Australian Muslims of obscurity and religious insignificance:

If we do not wake up soon our mosques may well end up as cinemas and fast food restaurants just as many of the early Afghan built mosques have already become garages and museums.<sup>26</sup>

While numerous Muslim leaders emphasised throughout the 1970s and 1980s that their intention was not to proselytise,<sup>27</sup> it was nevertheless considered problematic that where Islam had briefly made its mark it had subsequently been lost in Australian culture – all except for a few isolated surviving communities.<sup>28</sup> “New” Australian Muslims were determined that this would not happen again. The establishment of formal structures and sites of settlement such as mosques would add permanency to their situation and remove the connotations of transience associated with being a migrant community.

A third instigator of mosque establishment in Australia were the important community functions that they served. Mosques provided a discrete physical venue in which migrant communities could engage in practices outside Anglo-Australian cultural norms. It was in these sites that Muslim communities were able to gather and mark the pivotal ceremonies and rituals associated particularly with births, marriages

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<sup>26</sup> “Australian bicentenary and the Muslim,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 20, Number 3 (1988): 36.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Ajayoglu, “Our Future in this Country: a story of two incidents,” 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989): 174-175.

and deaths.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that the celebration of the various Islamic festivals varies greatly between different countries of the Islamic world: for example, *Eid al-Fitr* – the preeminent Muslim celebration which marks the end of *Ramadan* – takes distinctly national forms. In the context of migrant communities, however, such celebrations had the effect of bringing Muslims of diverse traditions together in ways that would usually not occur in their countries of origin.<sup>30</sup> *Eid* festivities at the major mosques welcomed and encouraged attendance by Muslims of all ethnicities, with the universal Islamic language of worship, Arabic, acting as a unifying factor for those of diverse linguistic backgrounds. Familiar and understood by adherents, classical Arabic of the Qur'an formed the basis of the majority of worship, save for sermons.

It has been observed in migrant settings that “the greater the differences in culture that exist between the country of birth and the country of residence the greater the likelihood that patterns of religious attendance will be maintained as a significant part of a person’s religious identity and practice.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the vast cultural chasm between the countries of origin of most of the Muslim migrants in Australia and existing Australian cultural characteristics (despite being diversified by post-war migration from continental Europe) was a driving force in mosque establishment and attendance, given that mosques were a place of convergence at which migrants could practice traditions that were foreign to the majority of Australians.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A. K. Nur Muhammad & E. Keskin Lowrie, “Mosques in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 11, Number 2 (1977): 22-24.

<sup>30</sup> Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> John Malcolm Armstrong, “Religious Attendance and Affiliation Patterns in Australia 1966 to 1996: the dichotomy of religious identity and practice,” (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2001): 139-140.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Humphrey and William Shepard, “Australia and New Zealand,” in *Islam Outside the Arab World*, ed. David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg. (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1999): 281.

Significantly, the construction of a collective sense of Muslim identity through mosque establishment was driven by the migration and settlement experiences of groups who sought to establish these community hubs. As has already been observed, mosques were critical sites in the lives of Muslim migrant communities, and the establishment of a mosque as a physical, social and community structure promoted a sense of permanency in settlement. Indeed, the establishment of mosques in Australia can be directly linked to a shift in the self-perception of migrants. This can be seen in the situation of the Turks, whose mass arrival in Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a turning point in Australia's migration patterns. Many early migrants from Turkey in the late 1960s probably did not intend permanent settlement,<sup>33</sup> and anticipated temporary, employment-based migration more akin to the *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) model adopted by Germany.<sup>34</sup> The initiation of concerted mosque construction in the 1970s indicates that these attitudes had begun to shift.<sup>35</sup> Mosque establishment – even for mosques that repurposed existing buildings – was a significant financial commitment for migrant communities, which lacked much spare capital. To build or open a mosque necessitated significant effort, as is demonstrated by repeated calls in the *Australian Minaret* for community assistance in funding individual mosque projects.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Teoman Fehim, "Turks may not want to stay in Australia," *Canberra Times*, 9 May 1968, 18.

<sup>34</sup> The final agreement between Australia and Turkey adopted the term "worker" instead of "migrant" – it was intended and understood by most Turks that they would return to their native country, although scholars agree that most ultimately remained in Australia. See Hatice Başarın and Vecihi Başarın, *The Turks in Australia: celebrating twenty-five years down under*. (Melbourne: Turquoise Publications, 1993): 1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Gary Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994): 57.

<sup>36</sup> For example, *Australian Minaret*, Volume 10, Number 3 (1975): 2, and *Australian Minaret*, Volume 20, Number 3 (1987): 60.



For most Muslim migrants to Australia, the migration experience involved a transformation from mainstream religious grouping into a minority community.<sup>37</sup> This became a powerful force in mosque establishment. For people transplanted into a foreign country with little that was familiar in the landscape or built environment, mosques represented familiarity and constancy in an otherwise alien setting. Most of the purpose-built mosques of the 1960s and 1970s architecturally reflected those in the countries of origins of migrants.<sup>38</sup> They incorporated the key elements distinctive to mosques in their homelands, including minarets, arches and domes. The concerted inclusion of minarets, despite having no practical utility for calls to prayer, reveals the importance of such symbolic features to these diaspora communities.<sup>39</sup> An example of this trend is the now-heritage listed Auburn Gallipoli Mosque in Sydney,<sup>40</sup> designed by architects David Evans and Leyla Guven in a style reminiscent of classical Ottoman architecture.<sup>41</sup>

Mosques were also intended to bring together the diverse and disparate organs of the Islamic community in Australia. Without such central venues, it was thought that Muslim unity in Australia would be undermined. A 1974 edition of the *Australian Minaret* editorialised on the initiation of building at the Umar bin Al-Khattab Mosque in Preston, making links between those involved in its construction

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<sup>37</sup> Duderija, "Identity Construction Among Western (Born) Muslims: Religious Traditions and Social Orientation," 103.

<sup>38</sup> Bouma, *Mosques and Muslim Settlement in Australia*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Unlike in most Muslim-majority countries, minarets in Australia are not permitted to broadcast the call to prayer (known in Arabic as the *adhan*) five times a day. This means they are largely decorative.

<sup>40</sup> Josephine Tovey, "Turkish mosque joins honour roll of Australian heritage buildings," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 2010, <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/turkish-mosque-joins-honour-roll-of-australian-heritage-buildings-20100423-tj4b.html>

<sup>41</sup> National Trust, "Auburn Gallipoli Mosque."

and the establishment of the first mosque at Medina by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. The importance of mosques to the Islamic faith was reinforced:

Building of a mosque is no ordinary matter. Mosque is the heart of Muslims. Muslim [*sic*] without a mosque are a people without a heart; they do not form a community. A body without a heart is dead. One can easily understand the remark made by a Muslim visiting Australia: He said: I see that there are a considerable number of Muslims in both Melbourne and Sydney, but I don't see a community in either place. We should know why.<sup>42</sup>

The authors of this piece, AFIS President Dr Abdul Khaliq Kazi and Dr Shabbir Ahmed Tariq, editors of the *Australian Minaret*, were clear in their intent: the Muslims of Australia had to erect mosques – it was essential to community-building and to creating a sense of collective identity. The simultaneous construction of a sense of collective identity and of mosques is crucial for understanding *how* and *when* self conceptions of “Muslim migrants” as a distinct entity and group were created and perpetuated in Australia.

Existing secondary literature has often ignored the agency exercised by Muslims in Australia in the construction of their group identity from 1967 onwards.<sup>43</sup> Literature like the *Australian Minaret* and other internal publications demonstrate that AFIC, the peak body representing Muslims in Australia, was actively involved in promoting a sense of community identity. Much like Benedict Anderson's “imagined communities,” Australia's Muslim leadership sought to bring disparate peoples

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<sup>42</sup> “Reflections,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 9, Number 3 (1974): 2.

<sup>43</sup> Authors like Humphrey, Akbarzadeh and Dunn focus primarily on exogenous projections of a collective supra-national identity among Muslims in Australia.

together over a common notion, albeit religion rather than nationalism.<sup>44</sup> Print media like the *Australian Minaret* were a crucial component of such efforts, complementing as well as promoting the construction of mosques. *Australian Minaret's* reach was demonstrated by the multilingualism of many (although not all) editions, operating to coalesce migrant groups from different countries around a single identity of the “Muslim migrant” in Australia.<sup>45</sup>

The efforts of Australia’s Islamic elite to present and promote a cohesive community identity, evident in the *Australian Minaret* by the beginning of the 1970s, were accompanied by the activities of a number of parallel and subsidiary organisations.<sup>46</sup> Given the often localised nature of migration (for example, chain migration, particularly common among Lebanese migrants), AFIC and the *Australian Minaret* were to some extent competing against prior links between migrants, based on ethnicity or nationality. These alternative organisations often advanced their own notions of community membership, such as a shared origin or a common native language. Such bodies were on the whole able to operate alongside and complement the work of broader entities like AFIC, but nevertheless the competing demands of collective identity promoted by membership of multiple organisations are worthy of further examination.

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<sup>44</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. (London: Verso, 2006.)

<sup>45</sup> See “Editorial,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 8, Number 2 (1973): 2, which aims to “publish some material in Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian and Turkish” as well as “Call for articles for the Minaret,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 13, Number 3 (1980): 26, which invites readers to “submit articles for publications ... in English, Arabic, Turkish, Malay or Yugoslav languages.”

<sup>46</sup> For example, I. Dellal, “Message to Muslims of Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 6, Number 3 (1971): 2: “Muslims of Australia let us aim, work and pray for unity and brotherhood between us.”

One of these bodies in particular warrants significant further attention: the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA), which opened one of Australia's most significant mosques, the Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque in Lakemba, in 1976. Founded in 1962, the LMA grew significantly in the late 1970s after the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, which drove many Lebanese to migrate to Australia. (While Australia already had a sizeable Lebanese population, the vast majority of earlier Lebanese migrants were Maronite Christian.) Representing a major bloc within Australia's Muslim population, the LMA's significance was unmatched among Middle Eastern migrants to Australia; it not only came to carry significant political clout through the influence of the mosque in Lakemba, but also held sway in local, State and national elections.<sup>47</sup> The influence of the LMA carried the potential to undermine the endeavours of AFIC to unify disparate migrant groups based on religious identity rather than ethno-national identity.

Of the diverse migrant communities in Australia identifying as Muslim, by the end of the 1970s only two were large enough to carry any significant political and social influence on their own: the Lebanese and the Turkish. Once its numbers in Australia rose after 1968, the Turkish community in Australia set up a number of strong organisational structures, assisted largely by the Turkish state.<sup>48</sup> The active involvement of the state Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) in building mosques and providing religious leaders for the Australian diaspora undermines any comparison with the Lebanese in Australia, who did not rely

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Humphrey, "Community, Mosque and Ethnic Politics," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Volume 23, Number 2 (1987): 237.

<sup>48</sup> Humphrey and Shepard, "Australia and New Zealand," 283.

on Lebanese state support.<sup>49</sup> The LMA was certainly very powerful as a peak body when Lebanese migration was at its height in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, the power of ethno-national based groupings was diluted by subsequent generations (second- and third-generation migrants): namely, those lacking lived experience of their home country.<sup>50</sup> The power of these organisations waned once Australian-born Lebanese became the majority of the community. For most Muslim migrant groups in Australia, the religious component of their identity had growing salience, and brought them closer together with other Muslims in Australia regardless of national origin.<sup>51</sup> This is demonstrated by the increasingly diverse attendance of mosques – particularly those founded on shared nationality or ethnicity rather than convergence of a critical mass of Muslim adherents. During the 1980s, the Turkish and Lebanese mosques came to serve Muslim migrants from a range of backgrounds, reflecting the diversifying patterns of immigration by Muslims to Australia.<sup>52</sup>

The agency of Australian Muslims in promoting and sustaining strong Islamic ties that superseded alternative structures and groupings cannot be removed from the involvement of external parties, in particular foreign states. This narrative is best explored through the lens of mosque establishment. A growing sense of a transnational Islamic identity became prevalent during the international Islamic revival that emerged in the 1970s. Gulf petrodollars (chiefly from Saudi Arabia)

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<sup>49</sup> “New Imams Arrive,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 20, Number 3 (1988): 4.

<sup>50</sup> This interpretation runs contrary to Michael Humphrey, “Islam, immigrants and the state: religion and cultural politics in Australia,” in *Religion in Australia: sociological perspectives*, ed. Alan Black. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991): 177; however, is aligned with Duderija, “Identity Construction Among Western (Born) Muslims: Religious Traditions and Social Orientation,” 103.

<sup>51</sup> Dellal, “Message to Muslims of Australia,” 2, and “Editorial,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 14, Number 1 (1981): 2.

<sup>52</sup> Evidence includes changing mosque listings in *Australian Minaret* that shift from languages such as Arabic or Turkish to the shared *lingua franca* of English.

financed Islamic religious interests worldwide, especially mosques and schools of a putatively universal nature – as distinct from nationalist or pan-Arab. Aided by increasing ease of travel and communication as well as media distribution, a universal Islamic identity began to take hold. The increasingly discernible phenomenon in Australia, particularly in relation to mosque establishment, was representative of this global trend rather than an exception to it. Traced internationally by scholars like John Esposito, Yvonne Haddad and John Voll, notions of universal Islam resonated with Muslims around the world.<sup>53</sup> Emerging in part from political Islamist roots taking hold in the Arab world, pan-Islamism and the religious patronage it engendered reached as far as the mosques of Australia.

The most prominent sponsor of Australian mosque-building efforts after the wave of Muslim migration that began in 1967 was Saudi Arabia. The *Australian Minaret* detailed two visits (in 1974 and in 1976) of Dr Ali Kettani of the World Muslim League (WML – sometimes also identified as the Muslim World League or the World Islamic League),<sup>54</sup> a Mecca-based organisation directly aligned with and funded by the Saudi Arabian state apparatus, on a fact-finding mission to Australia to investigate the formal structures in place for Muslims in Australia.<sup>55</sup> Saudi Arabia subsequently funneled about \$1.2 million through the WML in support of Islamic institutions in Australia, and to sponsor *imams* for a number of mosques.<sup>56</sup> The

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<sup>53</sup> For example, see Yvonne Haddad, John Voll, & John Esposito, *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991.)

<sup>54</sup> In Arabic, the organisation is titled *Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*, lending itself to multiple translations.

<sup>55</sup> “A set-up of Muslim organisations in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 10, Number 3 (1975): 4 and “AFIC President’s Report submitted to Dr. Kettani on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1977 at his second visit to Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 11, Number 3 (1977): 13.

<sup>56</sup> “Saudi Arabian donation to mosque projects in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 10, Number 2 (1975): 8.

crucial role played by the WML was consistently reaffirmed at mosque openings across Australia. A photo of Sheikh Muhammad Safwat al Sagga Amini, a representative of the WML, alongside opposition leader Gough Whitlam appeared on the front page of the *Melbourne Age* on 4 October 1976 – a reminder of the \$250,000 in funding that the WML directed towards building costs for the Umar bin Al-Khattab Mosque in Preston.<sup>57</sup> The presence of the WML was noted at a number of other mosque openings too.<sup>58</sup>

The mosque in Preston is one of several that received funding from the WML, in addition to a number of funded positions for *imams* and religious leaders across Australia. By the mid-1970s, AFIC was open in revealing that the “Saudi Arabia[n] Government had promised to donate \$1.2 million towards Mosque Building Projects throughout Australia.”<sup>59</sup> The Saudis were not the only group participating in the propagation of Islam in Australia; the Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Libyan and other governments also put money into Islamic institution-building in Australia. Evidence of this foreign involvement can be found in the very names of some of Australia’s most prominent mosques of the time period. The mosque in Sydney’s Surry Hills was named for King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (reigned 1964-1975), in recognition of the approximately \$156,000 given to assist building costs. Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain also provided supplementary funding for

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<sup>57</sup> “Whitlam’s salaam wins his mosque audience,” *Age*, 4 October 1976: 1.

<sup>58</sup> The WML also contributed funding and attended the openings of the Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque in Lakemba and the King Faisal Mosque in Surry Hills. “Lakemba Mosque: the largest Mosque in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 12, Number 2 (1978): ii.

<sup>59</sup> “Saudi Arabian donation to mosque projects in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 10, Number 2 (1975): 8.

the mosque in Surry Hills.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, while any hint of the connection has now disappeared from contemporary publications by Islamic organisations in Australia, the Iraqi-funded mosque in Greenacre that was opened in 1987 was originally called the Saddam Hussein Mosque.<sup>61</sup> The name appears to have been abandoned some time during the Gulf War or its immediate aftermath, and is unsurprisingly absent from the annals of Muslim presence in Australia.

The countries funding Australian mosque establishment were explicit in their motivations. Dr Abdullah al-Zaid,<sup>62</sup> who led a Saudi delegation to Australia in 1974, explained that the Saudis were interested in the “religious rather than material needs of the Islamic community.”<sup>63</sup> This manifested itself almost exclusively in mosque funding and the provision of salaries for *imams*. The Muslim community in Australia framed this external support in the language of migration, suggesting that the tenuous economic situation of migrant Muslim communities made it difficult to establish permanent religious structures without outside help.<sup>64</sup>

While some foreign funding was directed to diaspora communities from their state of origin (notably the case for Turkish migrants), most money was not connected with directly supporting diasporic communities in the conventional

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<sup>60</sup> Rory McGuire, “Islamic world keeps an eye on Aust Moslems,” *Australian Financial Review*, 5 March 1980, 8.

<sup>61</sup> “The Rise of Islam in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, January 1988, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Sometimes also identified as Abdullah El-Zaed or Abdullah Al-Zayed.

<sup>63</sup> “Islam Could be Self Sufficient in Australia,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 11, Number 4 (1977): 26.

<sup>64</sup> “Visit of Dr M. Ali Kettani on factfinding visit from Saudi government,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 11, Number 3 (1977): 14.



national sense.<sup>65</sup> It was far more aligned with supporting Islam in Australia, and can be linked to the broadest interpretations of *umma*. Such efforts were being replicated across the world as part of broader transnational Islamic impulses during the 1970s and 1980s. The *Australian Financial Review* commented in 1980 that overseas aid for mosque establishment was “large enough to show that overseas Moslems are interested in the welfare of those in Australia.”<sup>66</sup> Advancing Islam in the farthest corners of the globe through mosque-building was partially funded through *zakat*, or the giving of alms for the needy, poor and also for causes associated with propagating Islam. Ostensibly, the money was donated with the intention of promoting Islam generally among Muslim communities in minority situations, and for the most part was not associated with particular sectarian or theological perspectives. (There are substantiated allegations that this has changed in recent decades with the increasing prominence of sectarian-based patronage of mosques outside the Islamic world.)<sup>67</sup> Rather, it was intended to strengthen Islamic unity both in Australia and as a more global phenomenon (*umma*).

A powerful influence on identity-building among Muslim migrants in Australia were the international events of the 1970s and 1980s, when political and religious turmoil had significant ramifications for Muslims living in Australia. The far-reaching consequences of the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, the

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<sup>65</sup> “Dr. Kettani’s Visit,” *Australian Minaret*, Volume 11, Number 3 (1977): 12 declared: “there should not be any string [*sic*] with foreign aid,” suggesting that it should not be bound to national or ethnic background nor sect or ideology.

<sup>66</sup> McGuire, “Islamic world keeps an eye on Aust Moslems,” 8.

<sup>67</sup> “Mosques hooked on foreign cash lifelines,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 November 2002. <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/11/24/1037697986285.html> and Michael Humphrey, “An Australian Islam? Religion in the Multicultural City,” in Saeed and Akbarzadeh, *Muslim Communities in Australia*, 39.

Lebanese Civil War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and numerous incidents of terrorism were felt by Australian Muslims, particularly when such international events resonated directly with discourse perpetuated by domestic Muslim communities. Islamic organisations such as AFIC were regularly asked to comment on such events, seemingly confirming their connections with far-off Muslims. This was never more evident than during the Gulf War, which bore witness to a surge in attacks directed at those perceived to be Arab or Muslim migrants.<sup>68</sup> Especially in the wake of upheaval in their countries of origin (or rather, in many cases, countries that were associated closely with Islam), Muslims in Australia sought to portray themselves as a cohesive unit. A report in the *West Australian*, however, denied that the Muslim community identified “with the religious fanatics of the Middle East, whose warring leaders they claim betray the ‘brotherhood’ of Islam.”<sup>69</sup>

During this time the performance of an overarching unity was a key characteristic of the Islamic community in Australia and directly contributed to the mixed messages relating to sectarian divisions in a migrant and religious minority setting. Gauging the extent to which top-down rhetoric from community leaders promoting *umma* in Australia influenced the wider Muslim community is challenging. While AFIC attempted to speak for and represent all Muslims in Australia, in practice it struggled to represent cohesively an unwieldy and often haphazard collection of many different groups. Indeed, on the whole it was local

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<sup>68</sup> Committee on Discrimination Against Arab Australians, *Documentation of incidents of harassment of, and racism towards, Australians of Arab descent and Arab Muslims*. (Sydney: Committee on Discrimination Against Arab Australians, 1990): 5.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Sinclair-Jones, “WA Muslims blend in well,” *West Australian*, 12 July 1989, 72.

communities and groups that battled to establish mosques, rather than AFIC.<sup>70</sup> The struggle to establish mosques is one that also contributed to notions of collective solidarity as “Muslim migrants.” Humphrey and Shepard have suggested that among the Muslim community in Australia, “solidarity [was] engendered by the struggles to build mosques.”<sup>71</sup> The Islamic community in Australia found some unity in being the outsider, which was often perpetuated by negative community and local government responses to applications to establish mosques.

With a variety of factors in play, it is difficult to navigate the internal adoption of a sense of group community identity as Muslim migrants with complete clarity. What does emerge, however, is that Muslim leadership both within and outside Australia was firmly trying to promote a supra-national sense of unity and community among the different Muslim groups present in Australia. While there were competing community groupings (such as the LMA), the notion of the “Muslim migrant” as a self-identifier took hold, especially in relation to mosque-building efforts. Scholars have largely ignored the agency of Australia’s Islamic leadership in identity-creation efforts. While it may prove a more compelling narrative to suggest, as many have, that the essentialisation of Australia’s Muslim communities was entirely driven by external forces such as the oft-condemned media and the political elite, this essay seeks to present a more nuanced representation of the period of accelerated Muslim migration to Australia. Muslim community leaders increasingly sought, especially from the 1970s, to project the notion of a cohesive and united group of “Muslim migrants,” with such efforts commonly centering on mosques and the functions they performed.

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<sup>70</sup> Humphrey and Shepard, “Australia and New Zealand,” 282.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 282.

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