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Young Muslims of Australia: anatomy of a multicultural success story

MULTICULTURALISM IN EUROPE, as a state policy based on mutual respect and recognition of difference, is currently under siege. In the past year alone, the leaders of Britain, Germany and the Netherlands have publicly declared the failure of multicultural policies. In June 2011 the Dutch government declared that the Netherlands ‘steps away from the model of a multicultural society’,¹ whilst speaking in February 2011 the British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that multiculturalism had ‘failed’ to provide a national vision to which Muslims would want to belong.² In October 2010 Angela Merkel commented that Germany’s attempts to create a multicultural society had ‘utterly failed’.³ Even the former French President, leader of a decidedly non-multiculturalist society, had gleefully stuck the boot in, publicly condemning the policy.⁴ These leaders from the right of the political spectrum have asserted that multiculturalism has not encouraged the integration of migrants, specifically ‘Muslim’ migrants.

Australian Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in Europe and Muslims are clearly seen as ‘joined at the proverbial hip’,⁵ and attacks upon both have dramatically increased in the past decade in the context of the ‘war on terror’ and ‘home-grown terrorism’. This has been the case across western contexts. In the past decade multiculturalism in Australia has faced significant challenges, primarily through efforts to reorient it towards an integrationist model. Under the conservative Howard government, the federal Department of Multicultural Affairs was changed in January 2007 to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and a citizenship ‘pledge’ was introduced. Government ministers consistently went on the offensive against Muslims who they perceived were antagonistic to Australia ‘values’. Former federal Treasurer Peter Costello criticised a ‘mushy misguided multiculturalism’, whilst then government backbencher, Danna Vale claimed Australia was in danger of becoming a Muslim society within 50 years because it was ‘aborting itself out of existence’.⁶ MP Bronwyn Bishop compared school girls wearing the *hijab* to citizens of Nazi Germany.⁷ However, despite significant criticism, the Howard Government never declared the policy of multiculturalism a failure. The election of the Labor government in 2007 saw a political leadership more favourably disposed to celebrating multiculturalism. In February 2011, the federal Immigration and Citizenship Minister Chris Bowen declared the ‘genius of Australian multiculturalism’ and contrasted the Australian system to that of European approaches,⁸ releasing *The People of Australia: Australia’s multicultural policy*. This policy, in explicit contrast to many European national policies, states:

Multiculturalism is in Australia's national interest and speaks to fairness and inclusion. It enhances respect and support for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. It is about Australia's shared experience and the composition of neighbourhoods.⁹

Despite consistent activism from the staunchly neo-conservative segments of the Liberal Party such as Cory Bernardi, who in May 2010 called for Australia to 'ban the *burqa*' and extended an offer to assist Geert Wilders, the outspoken right-wing Dutch politician, should he visit Australia,¹⁰ he has been censured by members of his own party¹¹ and Opposition leader Tony Abbott has declared his support for multiculturalism.¹²

However, it is clear that despite the official commitment to multiculturalism being reiterated in recent times, the cumulative impact of sustained attacks against Australian Muslims in the media and government has had negative effects upon Australian Muslim communities.

Numerous studies reveal a consistent pattern of social exclusion amongst Australian Muslims over the past decade based on the racialisation of religion¹³ by the government, media and wider society. Impacts are reported most notably in the 2004 HREOC report based on questionnaires and interviews with Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne, which found an increase in fear, civic insecurity and a sense of social exclusion.¹⁴ The 2007 Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) report, based on a series of Muslim youth summits, highlights widespread anxiety and a sense of social isolation amongst young Muslims.¹⁵ Most recently, a 2010 University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre report based on focus groups and interviews with Muslim families revealed that, whilst improvements had occurred over the past five years, there continued to exist a sense of marginalisation due to discrimination and racism in public spaces and through the media.¹⁶ However, importantly, a 2009 Monash University study found that whilst scoring slightly lower in the areas of safety and future security, those Muslims surveyed scored higher than Australians in the study in overall personal 'well being' including standard of living, health and community connect.¹⁷ In the context of widespread social exclusion, one organisation more than any other has been pivotal to the development of the presence of Australian Muslims in the public sphere and simultaneously contributed to the development of an Australian multiculturalism based on respect for and recognition of difference. This organisation, *Young Muslims Australia*, based out of a small northern suburban Melbourne mosque, is comparatively tiny, yet is arguably 'pound for pound', the most effective contributor to the development of Australian multiculturalism and Islam in the nation, and possibly across Western multicultural contexts.

Young Muslims Australia: a history

Young Muslims Australia was formed in April - May 1988, just prior to the Salman Rushdie *Satanic Verses* protests that swept the globe, bringing Muslim public identity to the fore in Western contexts. The group was formed by a group of second generation

Australian born or raised Muslims, including Ramzi Elsayed and Issam Nabulsi, and operated under the religious guidance of Turkish *Ustadh* Mahmud Kürkçü. The group was not formally structured, nor was it an incorporated body, but rather a 'movement'.¹⁸

Early meetings took place in homes at an informal level before YMA became a formally incorporated body in 1989, commencing a Saturday Madrassa (school) aimed at young Muslims. Attendees came from both Muslim and non-Muslim schools, with lessons focussing upon 'the finer points of etiquette in prayer, dress and fasting in accordance with the Prophetic traditions and scholarship'.¹⁹ Ramzi Elsayed notes that, from the outset, the group had incorporated a broad cross section of the Muslim communities: 'Classes consisted of Turks, Arabs, Somalis together; it was Islam in its pure form'.²⁰ Tasneem Chopra, an early attendee notes:

The knowledge base was new, and therefore fascinating. By far, the best aspect was the diverse cultural background of participants, who like myself, represented children of migrants. We straddled that divide of being Australian Muslims with an ethnic heritage. But because we had all grown up in this country we essentially 'came from the same place'.²¹

Literature examining second generation Muslims notes the increasing salience of Islam as a primary identity in Western contexts as children move away from their parents' ethnic cultures,²² a development to which YMA was firmly at the fore in Australia. The group held their first national camp in 1991 and currently hold four classes a week and three annual camps for young and new Muslims, as well as hosting an online 'YMAtv' website²³ featuring uploaded lessons. As Ramzi has noted, the group has never grown substantially in size nor has it 'progressed beyond its geography'.²⁴ Despite its humble origins and the length of its time in existence, at face value, this organisation seems unremarkable; like any one of hundreds of faith based community organisations in Melbourne alone. To understand the powerful contribution of the group to the development of Australian multiculturalism and Islam and the manner in which it undermines current critiques of both multiculturalism and Islam in western contexts and fosters social resilience, it is necessary to examine those who have been through the organisation and their achievements.

Shaping Australian Multiculturalism and Islam: 'Graduates' of YMA

The following list, by no means definitive, covers just some of the individuals who have developed their understanding of Islam through the YMA and their accomplishments. The list commences by examining the powerful contribution of female 'graduates' and then examines males before seeking to reveal the key contributors to this vast body of work.

Sherene Hassan, a qualified high school teacher, former Vice President and current Secretary of the Islamic Council of Victoria has been one of the most visible public faces of Muslim women in Australia. Highly active in inter-faith activities (a former President of the Jewish Christian Muslim Association), Hassan is possibly most well known



Young boys playing on a field at a YMA camp, January 2011.
Photo by Irfan Yusuf.

standing up for Muslim women in often hostile public debate, including most famously labelling Sydney based Sheikh Taj el-Din al-Hilali's October 2006 comments that women who do not wear the *hijab* are like 'uncovered meat' as 'outrageous', 'repulsive' and 'incredibly offensive'.²⁵ Hassan continues extensive outreach work and is active in challenging negative media portrayals of Australian Muslims.

Tasneem Chopra is the current Chairperson of the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, dedicated to 'improving the situation of Australian Muslim women individually and building their capacity collectively'.²⁶ This organisation is particularly well known and respected for its work with young Muslim women suffering domestic violence and having difficulty accessing wider societal resources. Chopra simultaneously works in the electoral office of federal Labor MP Maria Vamvakinou.

Sarah Sabbagh has been a youth and community worker in Melbourne since 1989 and is the current Director of Benevolence Australia, a Muslim support organisation aimed particularly at women and children which offers educational classes, workshops, camps and, above all, a space for 'Muslims that do not feel represented in the Australian Community'.²⁷ Sabbagh also founded the 'My Dress, My Image, My Choice' initiative supported by the Australian Government and aimed at breaking down stereotypes of Muslim women in wider Australian society.



The Brothahood members all holding up one finger representing oneness, 1994.
Photo by RawBerry.

Monique Toohey is a consultant psychologist and owner of possibly Australia's first specifically Muslim focused psychological counselling service, *Nasihah Consulting*, located in the suburb of Broadmeadows, north of Melbourne. Toohey has been actively involved in developing capacity-building courses for mental health for Muslim women, intercultural training for the Australian Government²⁸ and founding the 'Young Australian Muslim of the Year Awards' (YAMY's), aiming to encourage Muslim youth participation in the wider Australian community.

Manar Etchelebi, a primary school teacher, Life Saving Victoria Ambassador, Girl Guides Coordinator and an executive officer for the Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools, was nominated for her extensive community work in the category of Victoria's 'Local Hero' in the 2008 Australia Day Awards.

Toltu Tufa is a well known activist working a cross-cultural educator and community worker. Tufa is particularly active with Melbourne's small but vibrant *Oromo* community, Ethiopian Muslims that have mobilized internationally to challenge their treatment in their homeland. Tufa has been active in engaging federal politicians in her capacity as President of the Australian Oromo Community Association in Victoria.²⁹

In research on depictions of Muslim women in the Australian news media, Julie

Possetti points out that Muslim women are ‘both highly visible members of one of the most marginalised groups in Western society and the most vulnerable to vilification and media stereotyping, suffering the triple whammy effect of sexism, racism and religious bigotry’.³⁰ In debates about Muslims in multicultural society, Muslim women who choose to wear *hijab* or the *burqa* are often at the forefront, due to their visibility, in debates about a failure of Muslims to ‘integrate’. These women, the majority of them mothers, comprehensively shatter the myth of Muslim women as submissive, compliant to male domination and as somehow subverting Australian and Western society through their presence. They are highly active in their engagement within Muslim communities and the wider Australian society, promoting mutual respect, dialogue and understanding, and can be argued to have had a demonstrable impact.

Muslim men passing through the YMA may be expected to struggle to rival the female examples, yet have made similarly significant contributions. Once again, the following represent just a few of those actively engaging in the Muslim and wider Australian communities.

Ramzi Elsayed, a co-founder of YMA, was the President of the Islamic Council of Victoria, an organisation broadly representing Victoria’s 90,000 Muslim citizens, including during an especially difficult time in the history of Muslim settlement in Australia when in 2008 a group of Australian Muslim men were first convicted for planning acts of terrorism and in 2009 when a second major police operation resulted in the arrest and conviction of young Muslim men in Melbourne. These incidents received saturation media coverage and placed Victorian Muslims under often intense social pressure, yet under Elsayed’s stewardship the organisation was able to simultaneously challenge the nature of counter terrorism laws and yet build a stronger relationship with the Victoria Police and government, guiding the organisation through a potentially catastrophic situation.

Issam Nabulsi, a co-founder of YMA and the founding director of *desypher*, an architecture planning and urban design firm that bases architectural design upon Islamic design principles that are ‘unapologetically modern’.³¹ This firm has been active in designing Islamic spaces around Melbourne for utilisation by the Muslim communities (including the commission to design Australia’s first Islamic Arts Museum)³² whilst simultaneously, through shaping public space, engaging the wider community. Importantly, the firm has been recognised internationally through their submissions in international architectural competitions and their design of the University of Melbourne Prayer room.³³

Ahmed Hassan is a Melbourne based eye surgeon, who performs and teaches Cataract and Paediatric Eye Surgery to Victorian trainee ophthalmologists. Over the course of his career Hassan has worked with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and volunteered in both Burma and Ethiopia performing numerous cataract operations.³⁴

Waleed Aly became involved with the YMA group at a young age through his older brother.³⁵ Aly has emerged over the past decade as one of Australia’s most prominent

(and youngest) intellectuals, with a vast body of work published across national and international media, legal and literary journals (and the music world in his capacity as a guitarist with rock group *Robot Child*). Aly's seminal work to date, *People Like Us: how arrogance is dividing Islam and the West* seeks to explore the roots of antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims and populates book shops nationally, as well as throughout South East Asia. He now hosts Radio National's 'Drive Program' having previously hosted a nationally syndicated talk show on the SBS network. His additional achievements include being named an ambassador for the United Nations White Ribbon Day for the elimination of violence against women, being invited to the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit in 2008, an invitation from the United States Government to attend President Obama's inauguration in 2009, and being nominated as the Victorian representative for the 'Australia's local hero' award at the 2011 Australia Day awards for his contribution to Australian multiculturalism.

Nazeem Hussain, a qualified lawyer and accountant, is the current Treasurer and media spokesman for the ICV and one half of Fear of a Brown Planet (with Aamer Rahman), winner of the 2008 Melbourne International comedy Festival Best Newcomer Award. Fear of a Brown Planet seek, through the use of humour, to vigorously critique 'white' racism and simultaneously to draw upon the difficulties of being raised in traditional households. Nazeem states

I've always felt that comedy's just the easiest way to be able to engage an audience and be able to get them interested in what you're saying without them feeling intimidated or challenged or . . . a challenge in a way that they, you know, they don't feel excluded from the conversation.³⁶

From their early success the duo toured internationally, including Singapore, London and the Edinburgh Fringe and in addition to their extensive touring schedule, founded together a 'Hip Hop Academy' in Melbourne's western suburbs operating free of charge for young people.³⁷ Hussain has appeared individually on numerous Australian television programs including the high rating *7PM Project* and on an array of national radio stations.³⁸ In November 2011 Fear of a Brown Planet was the subject of an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) *Australian Story* episode. In 2008 Hussain won the Young Australian Muslim of the Year award and in September 2010 won the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Ambassador Award presented by the Governor and Premier of Victoria.³⁹

Similarly to Muslim women that have been involved in YMA, these men have overcome the burden of stigmatisation and social exclusion. Muslim men have repeatedly been cast in the media and wider debate as a potential threat or as at-risk' of radicalisation. As Peter Hopkins has argued, the geographies and identities of young Muslim men in general are usually silenced, often unheard and frequently distorted.⁴⁰ As with female members, these men have shattered prevalent stereotypes, displaying courage and creativity in doing so, and actively contributing to both the Muslim and wider Australian communities. However, lest these individuals' contributions seem like disparate stories, the following cases reveal the centrality of the YMA to their development and activism.

YMA Group Cultural Contributions

The Brothahood is Australia's premier Muslim Hip Hop group. Consisting of Jihad Debab, Moustafa Debab, Hesham Habibullah, Timur Bakan and Ahmed Ahmed, the group formed as a direct result of their attending a YMA holiday camp in 1999 as teenagers, where they performed for the first time. Through the inherently political medium of hip hop, the Brothahood have achieved local success, including the release of their debut album *Lyrics of Mass Construction*, national tours and radio airplay. They were the subject of a documentary broadcast nationwide on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) network. As Bakan states, the use of hip hop was designed to reach a wider audience:

A lot of young kids understand Hip Hop, and they enjoy Hip Hop music, so we thought we'd use Hip Hop music and be able to explain Islam to them instead of them listening to all that bling bling and all the you know, girls and guns and money and stuff that they can't relate to . . .⁴¹

In 2007 the group's single *The Silent Truth* topped the radio station Triple J unearthed hip hop charts.⁴² This success has extended to the international level, with tours of the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia (where they featured on the front page of the *Jakarta Post*) and Malaysia and has involved collaborations with Muslim artists from Britain, the United States and Egypt. From a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds and experiences, the group fuse Western and Islamic cultures and address issues in their music ranging from racism and xenophobia to spiritual temptation and their love of god.

Salam Cafe was formed by members of YMA including Toltu Tufa, Ahmed Hassan, Waleed Aly, Nazeem Hussain and Jihad Debab. The show commenced in 2005 on the community Channel 31 television network, before being syndicated nationally in 2008 on the SBS network. The show may be considered amongst the first in a western context to feature an entirely Muslim cast and production crew (prior to the move to SBS). Featuring a non-segregated panel, the Australian born cast infused light comedy with social critique and in the process sought to break down stereotypes and engage a wider non-Muslim audience. The show's popularity was highlighted by its nomination in 2009 for a Logie Award, Australian television's highest prize.

These actors represent a broad spectrum of ethnic and class backgrounds with widely varying ownership of economic and cultural capital. Individually they have made significant contributions to the development of multiculturalism and Islam at the national and even international levels, occupying a vacuum of Muslim representation in Australian public life and promoting, often with great creativity and courage, mutual respect and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. Cumulatively, these actors and the YMA have indisputably shaped Australian multiculturalism and Islam and had an impact at the cultural level internationally, projecting an engaging and positive image of Australian multiculturalism and Islam. It must be considered how such a small, suburban based organisation could make such a contribution; an examination of the group's Islamic teachings and values provides important insights.



Sh. Mahmud Kürkçü (left) speaking with Sh. Ahmed Abdo at a YMA camp, January 2011.
Photo by Irfan Yusuf.

The Spiritual Emphasis of YMA

The primary figure in YMA throughout its existence has been Turkish born Mahmud Kürkçü as the group's spiritual guide and leader. Experience from interviews reveals that *Ustadh* Kürkçü is held in the highest regard by his students, both current and former, and possesses great humility, neither seeking nor desiring the political limelight. Mahmud Kürkçü is of the Sunni Hanafi school⁴³ and teaches a highly spiritual (and non-political) form of Islam known as *Tasawwuf* (Sufism), adopting a narrative and contextual approach to understanding the hadith and the character of the Prophet rather than strict literalist interpretations.⁴⁴

Tasawwuf is a branch of Islamic knowledge focusing upon spiritual development. Early scholars in this tradition focused upon abandonment of material 'worldly' objects in an effort to become closer to God. Abdullah Saeed describes the origins of the approach as focused upon questions 'regarding the knowledge of God or human existence and its relation to the divine'.⁴⁵ 'Surfi's believed that the true meaning of the Qur'an was spiritual and 'impossible to understand through "superficial" arguments over points of law or theology'.⁴⁶ The key to *Tasawwuf* is hence the effort to 'purify the heart', focussing upon development of the self,⁴⁷ overcoming one's *nafs* (emotions, worldly desires, ego).⁴⁸ Hesham from the Brotherhood explains:

... it suppresses the ego whilst building up your awareness of yourself and your self awareness in God. And I think it's done a lot for us as people... it's sort of embedded in our mentality, in our ideals ...⁴⁹

This spiritual development was central to the YMA. Ramzi Elsayed claimed that 'a strong spiritual grounding was the best legacy you can give' and that everything was (and is) about a connection to God and with a focus on pleasing God:

YMA treats the spirit, it is the merciful Islam. Islam is not aggressive and something others should fear; A believer is one that when others look at him should be reminded of God.⁵⁰

In addition to the development of the self and 'purification of the heart', aiding the individual in developing an awareness of their posturing towards inherent self interest and aiding them to overcome it, *Ustadh* Kürkcü fostered the development of strong social values. In a lecture titled 'The value of youth and urgency of repentance' he states the importance of respect for others no matter how one is treated:

As long as they do not ask you to commit any shirk [to join partners with God], or to do the *haram* [forbidden] or command you to do the haram, you must be good to them and treat them right, no matter how they treat you your Islamic duty, Islamic obligation, is to treat them properly and respectfully, period.⁵¹

Such teaching clearly contradicts the notion that Muslims are bent on 'waging jihad' to subordinate and conquer the West, and serves as an important base for imparting values.

YMA Core Values

It is clear from an examination of just some notable graduates of the YMA that there is a consistency in their approach based on community service and fusing Islamic and Australian influences to challenge racism in innovative, creative and often courageous ways. The YMA mission statement provides an insight into these values:

YMA is an Australia wide youth organisation, dedicated to learning and living the Islamic way of life here in our beautiful country of Australia. We aim to be people of benefit, not only towards ourselves, but to all of creation.⁵²

Embodying values of service to the wider community, the organisation has sought to build character, identity and connection through service, and in so doing, to grow spiritually.⁵³ Toltu Tufa described the philosophy of the YMA as simply 'all about service; giving, giving, giving',⁵⁴ whilst Tasneem Chopra declared YMA values to be based on respect, achievement and positivity, that the YMA for her 'was always about the community at large and driving your spiritual well being to be the best person you could be'.⁵⁵ Service to others as a core theme combined with a sense of belonging offered by the group, contributing to the development of an extended support network. Timur Bakan claimed:

I think they're doing a fantastic job because they bring the youth together, get the youth on camps and we'll paint the mosque, we'll go to festivals and ... you know, sell food, make some money for the mosque ... When you go there you see all the

guys all your friends, you talk, you laugh, you go out for dinner, it's not just for religion it's actually to build up an environment for yourself as well, you know, to be with the right people.⁵⁶

Waleed Aly attended YMA youth camps and outings with his older brother and was exposed to the service ethos that defined the organisation and its more spiritual orientation, forging a greater sense of identification with other Muslims: 'It was fun, they were a good group of people . . . getting people together as a community, imparting religious awareness and religious education'⁵⁷ To Moustafa Debab, it was the ability of the group's leaders to relate to other Australian Muslims that made the YMA successful;

The thing is, YMA were never really old Arabs come from another country, they were young Aussie Muslims. . . and they used that and they used that knowledge. . . .⁵⁸

Importantly, the activities of the YMA are not segregated along gender lines. Young Muslims were encouraged to mix and camps were one of the most common means for young Muslim men and women to get to know each other.⁵⁹ Several of those interviewed laughingly referred to YMA as the Young Marriage Agency,⁶⁰ as many couples had met through camps and activities.

The YMA stands apart from many other organisations in Melbourne working with young Muslims. The contextualist approach, emphasis upon developing the spiritual self, overcoming the ego and treating others with respect and development of character through service embodied in the YMA approach contrasts with the strict 'black and white' literalist perspective of many other organisations adopting what one interviewee instructively labelled 'the *haram haram, haram, halal, halal, halal*' approach. These larger organisations have a very strong emphasis on obeying rules and teach a politicised literalist Islam that often stands at odds with wider Australian societal standards, for example strict enforcement of gender segregation.

Explaining YMA's Success: planting the seed, fostering social resilience

It is the strong commitment to community service and spiritual base of the YMA, with its emphasis on overcoming the *nafs*, that may be considered the basis of the organisation's success in fostering the development of social resilience and creativity in the face of an often hostile social environment. Young participants, at a vital stage in their development internalised these values, equipping them to navigate complex social terrain. Jihad Debab illustrates how the social environment cultivated by the group and spiritual nurturing contributed to this:

I think what YMA does very well, and what it did for me, was give you a really good introduction to what Islam is, what it is all about. It gives you good grounding. It's not uncommon I would suggest, for people who have had some exposure to Islam through YMA, they may not be that practicing in their adolescent years but they'll usually come back, even if they don't come back to YMA, they usually come back and will be pretty serious Muslims because they kind of had that seed planted . . .⁶¹

Ahmed Ahmed claimed very similarly to his fellow group member:

I think it's the nurturing that the YMA gave us as young people and it takes us back to that spiritual development again. When you actually teach someone and help you practice, you plant a seed in fertile soil alright, no matter what you do, it wasn't forced upon, you come back . . .⁶²

Waleed Aly similarly stated that 'what they do quite well is give you a kind of motivation to be Muslim . . . they're good at creating within you an affection for Islam which is a good approach because it's different [than] in creating in you fear'.⁶³ It is this 'seed' or 'motivation', specifically the development of the spiritual element of Islam and emphasis on overcoming the ego or *nafs*, that has arguably proved the most vital element to the group's success. Young Muslims, due to the intensity of the focus upon their very existence, could be considered very likely to bear the psychological scars of a society that simultaneously demands their conformity and integration and yet refuses it through institutionalised racism, a process referred to by Ghassan Hage as mis-interpellation.⁶⁴

These incidents of racism and denial of opportunity often result in what Greg Noble refers to as a lack of 'honourable recognition' and are injurious to both the individual and collective psyche. Michael Humphrey takes incidents of injury as 'moments of crisis which challenge self identity and cultural life'.⁶⁵ The actual instant at which the injury is received may be considered a pivotal moment for identity construction, where 'cultural meaning' is up for grabs.⁶⁶

Noble notes that amongst men a lack of recognition and respect (with consequent injury) can result in displays of a highly performative 'hyper masculinity'. This emphasises displays of physicality and toughness. Manuel Castells may label these 'resistance identities', resulting in 'the building of trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society'.⁶⁷ In Muslim women these injuries may manifest in other ways, taking either an activist stance, displaying a hyper performance of their Islamic identity evident in the *burqa*, or resulting in their withdrawal from a Muslim identity entirely.

Members of YMA identified in this research have all experienced various forms of racism and discrimination on the basis of their faith, yet far from taking these paths, have been highly innovative, creative and active in constructing a dynamic positivist response, capable of engaging Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Young Muslims Australia offers a sense of belonging and community to young Australian Muslims, inspiring them to develop their knowledge and faith. YMA teaching and values specifically train participants to overcome the *nafs*, to overcome the desire to claim exclusivity and to commit to service and engagement with both the Muslim and wider Australian communities. Because these values are inculcated at a young age, they may be argued to be internalised and inscribed in their habitus, their 'matrix of dispositions', shaping the individual at the conscious and unconscious level in their daily lives and steering them towards making a societal contribution.

Conclusion

When experiencing racism and hostility these individuals, rather than reverting to aggressive posturing or expressing hate in kind, display significant levels of social resilience, drawing upon the teachings of Tasawwuf Islam and values and social resources they have available to challenge this racism in creative and innovative ways. The success of individual YMA members in education, in the workplace and in wider society has resulted in an upward spiral for all members of the group, as they tap in to each others' social networks and leverage from their successes to further their own contributions. These contributions fuse Islamic and Australian influences, developing both Australian Islam and multiculturalism and making a significant mark on the national and international stage. This fusion of Australian and Islamic cultures is what has contributed to the development of pluralistic forms of Islam well suited to their local context. Similarly, at a national level, it is possible to draw upon the collective contributions of Australian Muslims to continue to build a dynamic and modern Australia, well suited to take advantage of future challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Few organisations in Australia (and probably the world) can boast the remarkable cultural output of YMA for their size and resource base. Yet to boast is precisely the opposite of what this organisation seeks to do. The YMA, based on its spiritual teachings and emphasis on personal growth, overcoming the *nafs/ego*, treating others with respect and commitment to community service, will in all likelihood continue to make a very quiet yet powerful contribution to the benefit of Australian society, Islam and the wider international sphere for many years to come. In continuing to do so, YMA will continue to comprehensively challenge the ill-founded notion that Islamic and Western values and cultures are incompatible.