Identity and Muslim leadership: the case of Australian Muslim leaders

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Abstract Drawing on data from 30 in-depth interviews with prominent Australian Muslim leaders, this paper argues that the concept of identity could bring together and explain the sources and dynamics of struggles over the Muslim leadership in Australia. The paper will demonstrate that identity definition lies at the centre of competitions and contestations around the Australian Muslim leadership. From within, sub-groups such as Muslim youth and Muslim women contest the incumbent leadership, striving to impose a new image and definition of the Muslim identity in the Australian public sphere. From without, stakeholders such as the Australian government and the Australian media influence the dynamics of the Muslim community leadership by supporting a group of Muslim leaders over others—a process aiming to define who Muslims are in the Australian context.

Keywords Leadership · Identity · Narrative · Muslim leaders · Australia

Introduction

Symbolic power endows leaders with the power to create and legitimise a particular identity for their followers and constituency. Much like 'soft power' (Nye 2004), symbolic power applies rather through persuasion and attraction than coercion and compulsion. Leaders could be characterised as 'entrepreneurs of identity' (Reicher et al. 2005:547) in the sense that they promulgate stories, visions, and definitions through which they could guide, mobilise, or manipulate their followers. Symbolic power plays a significant role in groups that lack bureaucratic organisation and in which members are loosely connected through a shared culture or identity. Good examples are ethnic groups and nations whose solidarity and cohesion rest mostly on a shared history and identity (Smith 1992).

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This paper explains competition amongst Muslim leaders and organisations around the notions of symbolic power and identity. As a corollary, I do not focus on organisational and structural aspects of the Muslim leadership, but discuss them only in relation to discursive and symbolic contestations. I will highlight the different narratives of integrationist and radical Muslim leaders about multiculturalism, democracy, and social integration. This perspective enables us to draw a dynamic picture in which intra-community and external agents interplay to influence the direction, vision, voices and discourses that are taken and produced by Muslim leaders. From within subgroups such as Muslim youth and Muslim women endeavour to produce stronger voices, an attempt aimed at projecting an integrated and women-friendly image of Australian Muslims. From without, the Australian government supports moderate leaders financially and organisationally in order to marginalise radical factions. The commercial media, by contrast, give publicity to radical leaders by a disproportionate coverage of their provocative discourses and actions.

The evidence comes from 30 interviews with prominent Australian Muslim leaders. Through analysing their discourses, I will highlight the conflicting views of Muslim leaders on issues of social integration, multiculturalism, inter-faith dialogues and the characterisation of Islam. I will also report and explain their varied positions towards the role the Australian government and the media play in relation to the Muslim leadership. Prior to that, I briefly discuss the theoretical link between leadership and group identity.

Identity and leadership: a review of the literature

The Social Identity Theory of Leadership (SITL) is perhaps the most developed theoretical effort in analysing the relationship between identity and leadership. The theory has firm roots in the psychological literature, particularly in social identity and self-categorisation theories. In this section, I explain the key tenets of this theory and will attempt to combine it with the sociological literature on representation and symbolic power.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) introduced the idea that group membership affects one's sense of self. In other words, social identity is part of an individual's self-concept derived from his or her membership to a group. According to Tajfel (1981:255), the mere identification with a group spurs in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. To achieve a positive self-image and enhance their self-esteem, individuals exaggerate similarities within their own group and highlight differences between the in-group and out-groups. Social identity theory seeks mainly to explain inter-group conflicts and relationships. The theory was further developed by the self-categorisation theory proposed by Turner (1987), which focused on the psycho-cognitive basis of group formation.

The theory rests on the premise that humans, cognitively, tend to classify objects and people in order to be able to organise the enormous amount of information that exists in physical and social environments (Rosch 1978). In the social world, categories are accentuated through a cognitive process of maximising both inter-group differences and intragroup similarities. Viewing each other as possessing similar characteristics, those belonging to the same category undergo a self-stereotyping process, comparing themselves to an ideal member—or an 'ideal self'—that embodies core group

characteristics, that is, the group prototype (Turner 1987:57). This model has been used to analyse group cohesion, social stereotyping, cooperation, and social influence (Turner 1987).

Based on the self-categorisation theory, Hogg (2001:184) laid out the SITL as follows: inherent in group identification and self-categorisation is 'an intragroup prototypicality gradient', which provides power, status and influence to those who best embody group values and attributes. In brief, leaders are the most prototypical members of a group. The theory is logically consistent and coherent, but cannot adequately explain the complex reality of leadership. The theory paints a bottom-up picture of leadership, assigning almost no agency to leaders. The theory implies that leaders are those group members that fit into the followers' cognitive operation of self-categorisation, while taking little account of the fact that leadership—particularly in the political realm—is always a contested field where leaders often compete with and oust each other (for a critique of the SITL see Reicher et al. 2005).

In contrast to psycho-cognitive approaches, sociologists tend to define identity as narrative (e.g. Giddens 1991; McAdams 1997; Somers 1994). At a collective level, identity is a narrative of group history, characteristics, and vision that fosters group cohesion and solidarity. It is a well-established argument that group narratives are highly constructed and contingent. Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm's and Ranger's (1983) *The Invention of Traditions* demonstrated the process through which European nation-states took form, a process that involved promoting vernacular languages, inventing public ceremonies, producing public monuments, publishing postage stamps, institutionalising sports such as football, worshiping the flag (in the United States), holding national rituals and reconstructing symbols and myths. Alluding to the constructed nature of national identity, Renan (1990 [1882]:11) highlighted the role of selective remembering of history in the process on nation formation: 'forgetting … is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation'.

George Orwell (2007:142) once noted that: 'He who controls the past controls the future'. The interpretability of history provides an opportunity for leaders to exercise symbolic power, a power of 'making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world' (Bourdieu 1991:170). Symbolic power allows leaders to reconstruct group history, introduce enemies, and give meaning to group symbols. The content of group identity is therefore not a given, but is constantly constructed and contested. There are always competing voices and leaders who strive to set and fix the meaning of the shared group identity.

Leaders and spokespeople do not simply transfer the information from inside a community to outsiders, but they create the group through their representations and definitions: 'the possibility of a sort of embezzlement is part and parcel of the very act of delegation' (Bourdieu 1991:206). Laclau (2007) gives an illuminating example of how leaders actively redefine and reshape their constituency's demands, expectations and identity. He considers one who represents a group of farmers attempting to maintain the price of their agricultural yields. When taking the issue to a national political level, where rival political forces and factions compete to set their own agenda, the representative has to reframe the farmers' agenda to align with the norms of the political game at the national level. Depending on the parties involved in negotiations, the representative may have to reinterpret his or her constituency's self-interested demands in line with public

and national interests. Therefore 'there is an opaqueness, an essential impurity in the process of representation' (Laclau 2007:98).

In brief, leadership has transformational capacities, not only through elevating the morale of the followers or through exchanging rewards with them, as Burns (1978) argued, but also through defining their followers and the followers' aims, priorities, and identity. According to Bourdieu (1989:23): 'the power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit is political power par excellence'. Leaders, representatives, and spokespeople exert power over their constituency by creating, reinterpreting, and transforming the collective identity, by setting up images and visions of the future, by positioning the group in relation to rival groups, and by redrawing the group boundaries. Depending on the context, leaders utilise narratives to enhance group cohesion, converge or diverge social groups, elevate followers, and subordinate contestants.

In what follows, I will demonstrate the centrality of identity and narrative in the struggles over Australian Muslim leadership. Leaders of Muslim organisations compete with each other to establish and popularise their own version of 'true' Islam. They, however, have not been left alone in this struggle; external players such as the Australian government and the media also play effective roles in this struggle.

Research method

A qualitative approach was employed through which 30 prominent Australian Muslim leaders were interviewed in 2010 and 2011 (their names are listed in the Appendix). The interviews were semi-structured and took between 40 min to 2 h. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded inductively through Nvivo software, and then analysed thematically. The participants were recruited from Sydney and Melbourne, the Australian cities that host the largest Muslim communities. Some interviewees hold organisational roles in Muslim communities, while others act only symbolically as Muslim spokespeople in the Australian public sphere. The participants are well-known to Muslim communities and some of them are often consulted by the public media over Muslim-related issues. They attend public forums, participate on TV shows and panels, and write in newspapers and on websites. The majority of participants are 'integrationist' or 'moderate', that is, they openly advocate and promote the idea of Muslim integration with mainstream society. A minority of participants are radical or isolationist and do not advocate the idea of social integration. The sample reflects the overall composition of the Australian Muslim communities in terms of gender, ethnicity, and political views.

The participants were given the choice to be cited in publications by their real names or pseudonyms. With the exception of three, the participants preferred their real names to be used. In the reporting of the data, I use pseudonyms for the three interviewees and italicise their name to distinguish them from real names.

The Australian Muslim leadership and external environment

Australian Muslims make up only about 2.2 % of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b); however, they have been subject to heated public debates

particularly in the wake of the September 11 attacks (Poynting et al. 2004). Public opinion polls show that anti-Muslim sentiments prevail in Australia (Dunn et al. 2008; Markus 2012), due partly to biased media representations of Muslims that often associate Muslims with terrorism, violence, fanaticism, and patriarchy (Brasted 2001; Kabir 2006; Rane et al. 2010).

What these public discourses often neglect is the fact that Australian Muslims are enormously diverse. They come from over 60 countries, following different theological schools, and having various ethnic, political, national and ideological backgrounds. Consequently, the Muslim leadership structure has become as diverse as the fabric of its constituency. Apart from Imams—religious scholars and mosque leaders—there are many organisations that represent Australian Muslims. They include state councils such as the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and the New South Wales Islamic Council (NSWIC); Muslim women organisations such as the Muslim Women's National Network Australia (MWNNA), The Muslim Women's Association (MWA), and the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR); Muslim youth organisations such as the Hume Islamic Youth Centre (HIYC); Islamic education centres such as the Islamic Information and Support Centre of Australia (IISCA) and the Islamic Information and Services Network of Australia (IISNA) in Melbourne; Intercultural Organisations such as the Affinity Intercultural Foundation; ethnic and community organisations such as the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA); political organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia (HTA); Muslim student associations, refugee advocacy groups and many others.

Despite this diversity, Australian Muslims have increasingly felt the need to unite, a need resulting from the intense negative media and political discourses referred to above. This negative climate has motivated many moderate Muslims to become politically active and to present alternative narratives of Islam. This was the case with most participants in this study. For example, Sherene Hassan, Secretary and Board member of the Islamic Council of Victoria, stated that:

> After September 11, I felt compelled to get involved with the Muslim community. Prior to that, I had little involvement with it. I was more concerned with bringing up my children, and with my family and work. I was living in Adelaide at the time, where the Muslim presence was quite limited, and I was very frustrated with the way Islam was being portrayed in the media, and very frustrated with our Muslim spokespeople. So I got involved.

The quote demonstrates the significance of creating a positive self-identity in the face of widespread demeaning attitudes of the majority out-group. Identity is closely connected to the group's 'perceived position' (Cornell and Hartmann 2007:81). Australian public discourses confer a stigmatized and a low-status identity on Muslim minorities, damaging their self-esteem and hindering their social participation. Muslim leaders such as Hassan attempt to change the dominant views and discourses through promulgating alternative discourses. Other participants made similar comments about the motivating impact of media representations on their activism:

Khaled Sukkarieh, Chairman of the Islamic Council of New South Wales: We would not accept any of the things happening overseas, but all of a sudden, we started to hear things, and people were looking at us differently. Pre-2001, people didn't really care, but post-2001, it was a time for action; it was time to show people that we are not like that! [like terrorists!]

Fatima, a Muslim public commentator:

Life has been very different following September 11. The microscope is very closely imposed upon Australian Muslims in a way that it has not with previous migrant experiences. So that's one very distinct factor. Also, the media are focused on and obsessed with the Australian Muslim experience. This has very much informed the way we go about living our lives in Australia.

These quotes illustrate how external agents can influence the internal dynamics of ethnic communities, particularly where a power imbalance between parties exists. The quotes also indicate the saliency of the 'Muslimness' category over ethnic affiliations in dominant discourses. In recent decades, the media and public commentators have increasingly used the term 'Muslim' for people who have immigrated from the Middle East, North Africa, and some Asian countries. In Europe, 'immigrant workers' of previous decades are now called 'Muslim immigrants' (Roy 2007; Yilmaz 2012). This change in the representation of migrants, discursively homogenises Muslims of various origins by playing down ethnic, linguistic, racial, and sectarian differences.

In response to the above discursive shift, a diverse group of Muslim leaders has become organised in order to produce a unified and stronger voice in the Australian public sphere. Aly and Green (2008:8) claimed that: 'the ethnic divisions within the Muslim diaspora are becoming less significant as Australian Muslims reconstruct their identity based on a notion of supporting each other in the face of a global alliance against Islam'. In recent years we have witnessed a growing number of 'Muslim' leaders and public speakers who work 'across denominational, national, and ethnic differences' (Bolognani and Statham 2013:229). This redrawing of boundaries has much to do with the workings of external agents such as the governments and the media. In what follows, I discuss the role these agents play in reshaping the Australian Muslim leadership.

The Australian government

Since the late 1960s when Muslims began to settle in Australia, the government has played an active role in shaping the Muslim community leadership. With the adoption of multiculturalism policy in the 1970s, the government turned to ethnic leaders for information, political representation, and welfare allocation (Tabar et al. 2003:268). Humphrey (1988) demonstrated the role of the government in consolidating the Lebanese community leadership in Sydney post-1975. Unlike the centralised leadership structure of the Christian Lebanese, Sunni Lebanese had clustered diffusely around village, regional, and religious associations. Numerous Sunni leaders were competing for welfare in order to alleviate the dire socio-economic conditions of their

communities that had arisen from high rates of Lebanese unemployment. To spend resources more efficiently, the government would support those leaders that represented a larger constituency, thereby encouraging a unified leadership structure.

More recently, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and the London bombings, the Australian government took a more active part in moulding the Muslim leadership structure. In 2005, John Howard, then Prime Minister, handpicked a selected number of moderate Muslim leaders to discuss concerns over the radicalisation of Muslim youth. The meeting led to the establishment of the Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG), and became a basis for the development of the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony, and Security (Andrews 2007). In 2006, the MCRG presented its final report, revealing that the government allocated 35 million dollars ($ AUD) to address a wide range of issues in Muslim communities including marginalisation, radicalisation, employment, education and leadership (Muslim Community Reference Group 2006).

The government also facilitated the establishment of the Australian National Imam's Council (ANIC), a moderate body of Australian Imams. The ANIC was formed to harmonise the activities and voices of Imams across Australia (The Australian National Imam Council 2006). Hass Dellal, President of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, who was involved in this project, said:

> How do we actually bring Imams together? My organisation [Australian Multi-cultural Foundation] was the first. The government was very supportive of our idea, because they wanted it as well. We both wanted it, so they approached us to see if we could actually put this together, and we did. We brought together 140 Imams in Sydney at the first national conference of Imams in Australia. That produced some very good advice and recommendations which helped in forming the National Action Plan and the work with the Imams.

Poynting and Mason (2008) reported that the ANIC supported the Howard Citizenship Test, called for the accreditation of all Imams by this organisation, and asked all Imams to deliver their sermons in English. The government also allocated 8 million dollars for training local Imams. These policies aimed to support moderate leaders and marginalise radicals. European governments have devised similar policies at producing 'Euro-friendly' Imams (Haddad and Balz 2008:215). Examining the British government's plans to promote moderate Islam, Glynn (2008:4) argued that the government's measures have 'encroached on the development of Islam itself'. In addition to supporting moderate Imams, the Australian government has encouraged second-generation Muslim youth and Muslim women to enhance their leadership capacities through holding conferences, workshops, and training; for example the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2007) funded and facilitated the establishment of The Muslim Youth Summit conferences.

The above policies have been criticised harshly by radical and conservative Muslim leaders. For example, Hizb-ut Tahrir Australia (HTA) contended that the government wants Muslims to abandon Islamic teachings:

> Uthman Badar, spokesperson of HTA: We certainly have a problem with the government's approach to integration because that is one way despite Islam, it is

despite Islamic boundaries, so when they talk about integration, they want us to leave certain key aspects of Islam and integrate fast.

They reject the terminology of radical versus moderate Islam, considering it a politically charged discourse purporting to divide Muslims:

Thus we must reject the West's idea of extremism and moderation. We must reject the West's interference in the affairs of our *deen* [religion]. That is why this discussion did not proceed from a *Shar'ee* [Islamic law] standpoint from the very beginning. Rather it is a political stance, used to entrench a direction in the *Ummah* [global Islamic community] suitable for the West. It is [a] discussion that relates to the continuation of the colonisation of people's minds (Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia 2009:3).

These quotes display the role of external forces in imposing, promoting, and legitimising a certain definition of Islam, and in supporting one group of leaders over others. Hence, the Muslim identity is not merely defined internally by Muslims; rather, out-groups influence the process using financial, discursive and political tools. Interestingly, the media play a role almost opposite to that of the government, giving publicity to radical and conservative Muslim leaders. I explain their role in the next section.

The media

In a modern society, the media play a key role in framing and shaping reality. This role has emerged largely because of occupational specialisation, institutional differentiation, and urbanisation, the developments that have limited individuals' capacity to obtain a first-hand experience of reality. Owned largely by private enterprises, the mass media select and prioritise news and topics that attract a greater number of viewers and produce more profit, and 'what sells best is material that is dramatic, shocking and eye-catching' (Brasted 2001:223). The world as seen through the mass media is 'a place of drama and tragedy' (Brasted 2001:223) where crime, fear, disorder, violence, risk, breakdown, disease and tension abound. Regarding immigrants and minorities, the media often highlight cultural differences, crime, and migrants' arrival (van Dijk 2000).

It is therefore not surprising that the media find Muslim radicals well-suited to their agenda. The media seek, capture, report, and further sensationalise news of Muslim extremists because they create public outrage and controversy. Most participants in this study claimed that the Australian media cover radical voices disproportionate to their number and influence. They asserted that the media do not balance their sensational stories of minority radicals with those of the normal life of mainstream Muslims. The result is therefore a distorted image of reality. Sherene Hassan, Secretary and Board member of Islamic Council of Victoria, stated:

I spoke to a group of students in the Mornington Peninsula area. I was speaking to an audience of 200 people and I asked how many of them have a Muslim friend. No one put their hand up. It was 200 people in one room and the only source of

their knowledge about Islam is what they see in the media, and the worst examples of Muslims are those that make it to the media. So it is a real problem that we are being judged by our worst examples.

The quote demonstrates integrationist leaders' concerns over the skewed images of Muslim communities propagated by the media. Similar to Hassan, Ramzy Elseyed, Vice president of the Islamic Council of Victoria, referred to a TV program that showed a Muslim campaigning for the establishment of Islamic law (Shari'a) throughout Australia:

That *60 Minutes* program, that's just one individual—is exactly one extreme individual. In every community you have extremists, you have people who are hardliners, you have people who don't represent, you know, what the wider community thinks …and it is natural that they [the media] want to highlight, polarise and put the spotlight on these individuals. We find it incredible. Some Muslim … still think these people who are on *60 Minutes,* like the [Muslim] man who was—must have been planted by those who have these anti-Islam agendas. They must be! Because where did they get that person from? … Where was his congregation? Did they show which mosque? It doesn't, because he is so marginal.

The quote illustrates the role of external agents in imposing an image on a group, particularly where there exists a power imbalance between groups. Moderate leaders strive to propagate their definition and characterisation of Islam and Muslims; however, the media undermine their efforts by giving publicity and leverage to radical voices, thereby enhancing their symbolic power.

So far I have discussed how group identity is influenced by external players such as the government and the media. Through the above illustrations, I have argued that the leadership dynamics of relatively powerless Australian Muslim communities are affected significantly by the powerful public institutions. In the next section, I turn to the internal workings of the Muslim leadership, claiming that identity definition is the chief ground of competition between the leaders.

Identity definition: a ground for competition

Despite attempts by a group of Muslim leaders at organising a concerted and united Muslim voice, the voices coming out of Muslim communities remain separate, fragmented, and sometimes contradictory. Holding dissimilar ideological and political beliefs, Muslim leaders present Islam strikingly differently. Moderate leaders portray Islam as peaceful, pro-democracy, pluralist, and tolerant, and characterise Muslims to be law-abiding citizens that support democracy, multiculturalism, and freedom of religion. These narratives purport to mitigate hostile public views and facilitate Muslim integration into mainstream society. Most participants in this study described Islam as compatible with Australian culture and to be no hindrance to social integration. For instance, Randa Abdel-Fattah, a prominent Muslim writer, maintained:

In my view, freedom of religion for Muslims is not just about being able to pray at work, or fast, or have access to halal food. In Islam our obligations go further. We are obliged to strive for social justice, to speak out against tyranny and autocracy, to protect the weak and oppressed, to obey the laws of the land we live in, to protect the environment, to ensure the welfare of animals. All such duties are arguably able to be pursued in a democratic society, and so I believe that a good Muslim will make an ideal Australian, in terms of the virtues of responsible, ethical citizenship.

Similarly, Berhan Ahmed, an African-Australian community leader, held:

When we talk about Muslims and Islam we have to be clear. Islam as a religion is broadly accepting most values that we use in this western society—most of the values. Islam gives freedom in every sense of [the word] freedom.

Moderate narratives convey the idea that, by and large, Muslims have immigrated to Australia in search of a decent life, and to prosper socially and economically; they have not come to disrupt, but to live. Ordinary Muslims wish to be seen as law-abiding and respectful citizens while remaining loyal to their faith. Moderate leaders consider religion to be an important part of Muslim identity, but do not consider it to be incongruent with Western culture. They emphasise that religion is only one part, and not necessarily the salient part, of the majority of Muslims' identity; for ordinary Muslims religious and ethnic identities are inextricably linked. While these leaders acknowledge the existence of Muslim radicals in their communities, they assert that the radicals represent a tiny minority of the Muslim population.

In Australia, there are currently numerous moderate organisations that promote the above narratives. They include states' Islamic Councils (e.g. Islamic Council of Victoria), Muslim women's organisations (e.g. Muslim Women's Association), Muslim Youth Organisations (e.g. Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth), Muslim media (e.g. Muslim Village website), non-governmental organisations (e.g. the Australian Multicultural Foundation), and several other community organisa-tions, refugee advocacy groups, and university student associations. Moderate leaders play a vocal and visible role in the Australian public sphere.

Markedly different from the moderates, radical leaders put forward uncompromising discourses. They view moderate leaders as being co-opted by Western governments to plant an apolitical and Western-friendly Islam. Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) exemplifies such radical groups. Having dozens of branches across the world, the Party aims to unify Muslim nations under a pan-Islamic state. They are religiously conser-vative and politically radical, but invoke non-violent methods to achieve their goals. Uthman Badar, Spokesperson of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia (HTA), claimed that Western governments try to impose a minority mentality on Muslims in order to tame them. In reaction, the HTA remind Muslims, regardless of where they live, to belong to a single religious community (*Ummah*):

We don't accept this narrative of minorities. Yes, as a matter of fact, we [Muslims in Australia] are the minority here, but we don't look at Muslim *Ummah* [we should!]: Muslims in Europe, Muslims in America, Muslims here and there, as if

they are separate entities. Muslims are as one Muslim *Ummah*, wherever they are. So in that regard, yes, we are a minority here, but we are part of a community that is part of a very powerful *Ummah*.

Consequently, the HTA regards efforts at promoting local versions of Islam—for example, American Islam, British Islam or Australian Islam—a Western agenda to split Muslims. They discourage Muslims to vote in elections because, according to Uthman Badar, 'Islam does not allow, does not encourage direct participation in the secular political framework'. Instead, they invite Muslims to be politically active outside the system by participating in rallies, meetings, demonstrations and the like. Differentiating between the ideas and the 'method of pushing' the ideas, Uthman Badar claimed that a 'vast majority of Muslims' agree with the HTA'S ideas; nevertheless, he held, many Muslims do not follow the Party, because it 'necessarily means coming into direct struggle with governments' and requires 'a level of sacrifice'. By 'sacrifice', Uthman Badar meant being subject to constant monitoring by intelligence organisations. He asserted that those Muslim leaders who advocate secularism are indeed the minority.

As another example, the Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamm'ah Association of Australia (ASWJAA) represents an ultraconservative Muslim group that defies moderate discourses. Similar to Wahhabism—the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia—the ASWJAA promotes gender segregation, discourage Muslims to socialise with non-Muslims, and recommend traditional clothing and growing beard. They work to consolidate intra-community relationships at the expense of intercultural communications. Abu Ayman, the founder of the ASWJAA, asserted that his organisation represents 70 % of Australian Muslims and that the ASWJAA is 'the most influential Islamic organisation in Australia' (Schwartz et al. 2004).

These examples demonstrate the significance of identity definition for Muslim leaders of various factions. The majority of Australian Muslims are politically inactive and silent (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011)—a state that allows the leaders to speak for them. The competitions and contestations, however, are not confined to narratives, ideas, ideologies, and discourses. Sub-groups are also competing to gain a higher ground and make their narratives heard. Within Muslim communities, sub-identities such as gender, age, and ethnicity struggle to find a greater level of representation in the community leadership, set their definitions of the Muslim identity, and to influence how the community is viewed by outsiders.

Intersecting identities: gender and age

Social identities crosscut each other. Each gender, age, class, race, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity could at times become the salient part of one's identity. With regard to community leadership, these sub-identities often become sources of contestation and destabilisation. Among these categories, I will provide a brief illustration of gender and age identities in relation to the Muslim leadership.

In recent years a growing number of Muslim women have been acting as Muslim spokespeople in Australia, a trend that is partly a reaction to the dominant discourses about women's status in Islam. Despite the gradual rise, Muslim women are still

underrepresented in leadership positions. Female participants in this research criticised Muslim men's patriarchal attitudes, considering it to be a serious hindrance to the formation of gender-neutral community leadership. Referring to the ongoing exclusion of Muslim women from mosque committees in Sydney, Zubeda Raihman, Treasurer of the Muslim Women's National Network Australia, stated:

> For example, the *Muslim Women's National Network of Australia* did a survey of about 16 mosques in NSW, and we asked the simple question: "Do you have women represented on the mosque committee?" I see out of them only a handful— just a few said that women were represented on the mosque committee.

The female participants believed that women' marginal role in the community reinforces the public's attitudes about women's place in Islam. This is because leaders incarnate, personify, and embody group values through their social attributes such as gender and age.

Muslim youth also struggle to make themselves heard in the community leadership. Around 40 % of Australian Muslims were born in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a); however, first generation migrants still hold a strong grip over leadership, particularly in Sydney. Some of the participants complained that the incumbent older leaders are reluctant to hand over the leadership to the younger generations. For example, Monique Toohey, a Muslim activist, stated:

> We have to carry leaders out in the coffin for them to give up leadership. This is a very traditional view of leadership like Asian and Arab views: when someone dies, the next person comes in, but that can't work here. Unless you are showing results you will be ousted.

The quote demonstrates the association of age with being Australian; the older generations are viewed as being attached to foreign cultural norms while the youth are seen to be culturally Australian. Similarly, *Fatima* pointed out that Muslim youth do not identify with first-generation Muslim leaders because they are 'mainly men, very Arab, very traditional in their viewpoints'. She claimed that there is a 'disconnect' between these leaders and young Muslims. Kuranda Seyit criticised the incumbent first generation leaders' for holding onto positions, but he surmised that the demographic shift will change the equation soon:

> You have to remember that the new generation of Muslim Australians, who were either born here or came here as babies, and grew up and were educated here, they don't have the baggage of their parents. They don't have the emotional and cultural baggage that has caused some of the divisions. So a lot of young Muslims under the age of 30 don't know about the differences between Turks and Lebanese, or whether Iranians and Iraqis don't get along, or whether there is a problem between Bangladeshis and Pakistanis—they don't care about that. They all see themselves as Australian Muslims and they see a common cause in working together, developing

youth programs, developing welfare programs, doing Da'wa [invitation to Islam].

Here again we see the association of age with Australianness, that is, the Muslim youth are detached from their parents' original countries, and define themselves in the context of Australian society. This theme has also been confirmed by other studies (Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia 2010). Many young Muslims are worried that current Muslim leaders lack 'sufficient English language skills and a sound understanding of Islam in a modern context' (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007:17).

In brief, leaders' social attributes such as gender and age have a bearing on how the group is viewed by others. This motivates the sub-identities within the group to struggle for a greater representation in the leadership. Muslim women want their community to be and to be seen as egalitarian; therefore they push for a gender-neutral leadership structure. In a similar way, Muslim youth want their community to be regarded as Australian, a desire that requires a greater representation of second generation Muslim in the leaderhsip. The Muslim women and youth want to establish narratives and discourses that display Muslims as integrated into the Australian culture.

Conclusion

An important aspect of group leadership is to define the content of the shared identity and to draw boundaries between the group and its relevant out-groups. In this paper, after a critical review of the SITL, I put forward a sociological account of identity leadership and illustrated its dynamics in the context of Australian Muslim communities. The sociological model allowed the examination of competitions between Muslim leaders over defining the true Islam and characterising Muslims. It also allowed the exploration of the role played by externally located agents—the government and the media—in influencing the internal dynamics of Muslim leadership. In the end, I demonstrated the contestations over leadership positions by social sub-identities based on gender and age.

In studying Muslim leaders, this paper turned its focus from organisational analysis to discourse analysis. Therefore, little account was taken of struggles over material and organisational resources. Muslim leaders' competitions and conflicts are not primarily over material and organisational resources, but over non-material and symbolic resources—discourse and identity. Moreover, in contrast to the conventional theories of leadership that focus on the relationships between leaders and their followers, this paper explored the interplay between intra-community and external forces, and discussed the ways these forces give shape and direction to the Australian Muslim leadership.

Australian Muslims live as a minority community among a majority non-Muslim population. Their social life has been seriously affected by local and international political issues especially over the past two decades. Under public scrutiny, they have had to constantly define who they are, to which Muslim leaders have offered conflicting responses. Their disagreements, conflicts and competitions, however, are not

merely of religious nature, but are, more importantly, of sociological nature. Their religious and theological disputes, as shown in this article, have been overshadowed by the realities of preserving faith in a predominantly secular society, and by the influence of public institutions such as the state and the media. These social and political factors are shaping the internal leadership dynamics of Australian Muslim communities.

Appendix: List of participants

Abdo, Maha: President of Muslim Women's Association

Abdel-Fattah, Randa: Writer and public commentator

Ahmed, Berhan: African-Australian community leader and Chair of the African Think Tank

Atila, Omer: Executive Advisor at the Australian Intercultural Society

Abu Ayman: Founder of *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamma'h Association of Australia* (*ASWJAA*)

Badar, Uthman: media representative of *Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia*.

Cleland, Bilal: A prominent historian of Islam and Muslims in Australia and former Secretary of the Australian Federation of Islamic Council (AFIC) and Secretary of the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV).

Chopra, Tasneem: President of the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria.

Chowdhury, Nayeefa: founding Director of an Internet-based Islamic information service (Light of Islam.net) and active in Muslim student associations and the Bengali community in Australia.

Cooper, Aziz: Prison Chaplaincy Co-ordinator at the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV).

Dellal, Hass: President of Australian Multicultural Foundation since 1989.

Elsyed, Ramzi: Vice president of the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV).

Hassan, Sherene: Secretary and Board member of the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV).

Kimmie, Nazid: A prominent Muslim artist, poet and writer

Mehboub, Amjad: former president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC).

Morsi, Yassir: President of Victoria's Muslim Student Associations.

Patal, Ikebal: President of Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC).

Raihman, Zubeda: Treasurer of the Muslim Women's National Network Australia.

Saral, Mehmet: co-founder and President of the Affinity Intercultural Foundation.

Seyit, Kuranda: founder of the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations (FAIR).

Shkembi, Nur: Arts Officer at the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV).

Sukkarieh, Khaled: Chairman of the Islamic Council of New South Wales (ICNSW).

Sukkarieh, Omeima: Manager of the Auburn Community Development Network, and a nominee for the Australian of the Year 2011.

Toohey, Monique: A Muslim activist

Trad, Keysar: President of the Islamic Friendship Association and former Director of the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA).

Woodlock, Rachel: A Muslim public commentator

Yucel, Salih: A former Imam and a lecturer at Monash University.

And three Anonymous participants:

Kamal: A leader occupying high organisational positions within Muslim organisations.

Sara: A Muslim public commentator.

Fatima: A Muslim activist and public commentator.

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