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## ATTITUDES OF AUSTRALIAN MUSLIMS AND AUSTRALIAN WIDER COMMUNITY TOWARDS MUSLIM INSTITUTIONS

Ibrahima Diallo

University of South Australia

E-mail: [Ibrahima.diallo@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Ibrahima.diallo@unisa.edu.au)

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### Abstract

Islamic (community) schools and mosques are extremely important sites for religious education, language and culture maintenance and religious rituals and practices for a large number of Muslim Australians. These institutions remained significant and symbolic of Islamic identities despite rampant anti-Muslim sentiments: attacks and threats against Muslim institutions (mosques and Islamic schools) and individual members of the Muslim community and negative media portrayal. Despite these hostilities and tensions, a case study conducted in Adelaide and Darwin shows that the Muslim community holds the view that the attitudes of Australian wider community toward their institutions are mixed with more positive than negative attitudes for which they blamed the media.

**Keywords:** muslim institutions; attitudes; Australian muslim; Australian Wider Community

### Abstrak

Beberapa sekolah (komunitas) dan tempat peribadatan Islam merupakan bagian yang sangat penting untuk pendidikan keagamaan, pelestarian bahasa dan budaya, dan praktik keagamaan bagi hampir semua masyarakat muslim di Australia. Beberapa Rutinitas seperti ini masih signifikan dan menjadi simbol identitas bagi seorang muslim terlepas dari sikap sentimentil terhadap kaum muslim yang merajalela: seperti serangan dan ancaman terhadap institusi muslim (masjid dan sekolah islam), individu muslim itu sendiri dan penggambaran negatif terhadap islam itu sendiri. Terkait permusuhan dan ketegangan yang sedang terjadi saat ini, sebuah studi kasus yang dilakukan di Adelaide, dan Darwin mengemukakan bahwa komunitas muslim masih berpandangan bahwa sikap masyarakat Australia secara luas terhadap institusi mereka bercampur dengan sikap yang lebih positif daripada sikap negatif dari apa yang ditunjukkan oleh media.

**Kata kunci:** lembaga muslim; sikap; muslim Australia; Australian Wider Community

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## Introduction

Islamic schools and mosques are extremely important sites for religious education, language and culture maintenance and religious rituals and practices for many Muslim Australians. These Muslim institutions have gained significance among the Australian Muslims who rely on these institutions for collective religious affiliation as well as Islamic identity constructing despite anti-Muslim sentiments (e.g.: attacks on mosques and Islamic schools and individual members of the Muslim community and negative media portrayal). Given these hostilities and tensions, one would expect the Muslim community to hold the view that the wider Australian community is hostile to their institutions and religion. In fact, it is the opposite: a case study conducted both in Adelaide and Darwin in Australia in 2015 shows that the Australian Muslims hold the view that the wider Australian community has mixed attitudes toward Australian Muslims' most important and symbolic institutions. They indicated that the attitudes of the wider community toward their institutions are overwhelmingly positive among individuals and the negative attitudes are mainly ascribed to the media. This is a case study research in the sense that it uses multiple perspectives to investigate in-depth a complex educational phenomenon in a particular context. As a case study, it also offers "the possibility of generalization from the particular, where studying the particular in depth can yield insights of universal significance" (Simmons, 2009, 20).

The 2016 census indicates that According to the 2016 data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Muslim population represented 2.6% of the total population and Islam the second largest religion in the country after Christianity and before Buddhism (ABS, 2017). The Muslim population is one of the

most ethnically and linguistically diverse religious communities in the country with the Muslim population represented by 183 different nationalities. For example, in 2011, 62% of Australian Muslims were born overseas, whereas only 38% were born in Australia. The Australian Muslim population speaks a range of languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, Persian, and Bahasa Indonesia, to name just a few (Hassan 2015).

Being Muslims and a religious minority in a white, liberal and secular country of Judeo-Christian heritage poses some challenges since anti-Muslim sentiments started after the September 11 tragedy in 2001. These sentiments continued following a spate of terrorist attacks, including the Bali bombings in 2002 and train Bombings in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 respectively. However, these anti-Muslim sentiments culminated in Australia and elsewhere since the violent attacks in France (Paris in 2014 and 2015 and Nice 2016) and Brussels (2016) and the Orlando shootings in the US (2016); just to name but a few well-known tragic incidents. In Australia, these international events combined with a number of domestic events (e.g.: the Lindt café hostage taking that resulted in two deaths in 2014 and the killing of a police employee by a 15-year-old boy in 2015) have contributed to intensifying anti-Muslim sentiments marked by violent attacks and incidents targeting members of the Muslim community and their Institutions and anti-Muslim protests. Regarding the attacks on Muslim institutions, for example, a mosque in Elizabeth, north of Adelaide, was vandalized in an anti-Muslim attack on 30 July 2016 (Henson and Lim, 2016; Keane, 2016). The attackers scrawled such racist graffiti as 'No Muslim' and spray-painted the mosque with the swastika and the neo Nazi 88 code (Henson, 2016; Keane, 2016). In June 2016 in Perth a car outside the Thornlie mosque was fire-bombed and offensive

anti-Muslim messages written on the adjacent Islamic school (Weber and Roberts, 2016; Le Messurier, Joel, and Bruce, 2016). Before these two incidents, other similar violent incidents occurred in the country. In Queensland, the Holland Park mosque and the Logan mosque were vandalized and disrespected with a pig's head dumped on the grounds. The Mareeba Mosque in Queensland was also vandalized in 2014 (Aston, 2014; Edwards, 2014). In Perth, in 2014, Hamlyn (2014) reported that two mosques and an Islamic education center were also vandalized and profanities and anti-Muslim lines sprayed-painted on the walls of these institutions. Besides, these attacks on mosques and schools, there were also threats to mosques, including threat letters sent to the Lakemba mosque, the Minto mosque and the Auburn Gallipoli mosque; all three in NSW (Aston, 2014).

The Australian Muslims also experienced other forms of attacks besides those perpetrated against important and symbolic pillars for Australian Muslims. There have been personal attacks on Muslim individuals, including verbal abuse and hate speeches. According to Aston (2014) "there have been at least 30 attacks on Muslims – Mainly against women wearing the hijab – in the three weeks since the police anti-terror raids and threats by Islamic State put relations between the Islamic community and the mainstream Australia on edge". To support this view, Aston mentioned the cases of a "woman who was threatened with having her hijab torn from her head and set alight; a cup of coffee was thrown through the car window of a woman driving in a hijab, and in Sydney a woman was spat on and had the pram carrying her baby kicked" (Aston 2014).

Besides these anti-Muslim sentiments, there are other issues that have put Islamic education institutions on the front pages. These included, among others, the allegation of mismanagement

of funds in Islamic schools followed by accusation and counter-accusation between the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and stated Islamic schools (e.g.: in Brisbane, South Australia, and New South Wales) (Branley, 2015). The Australian Islamic schools have also been on the news for a range of concerns over their curricula, including the scrapping of music and arts classes, for maintaining gender segregation, for focusing on the Koran in science classes and for forcing all teachers (Muslim and non-Muslims) to wear the hijab (Littlely, 2103; Markson, 2016).

There are also studies that have focused on a range of other issues faced by the Muslim communities in Australia. A study by Hassan (2015) shows that Australian Muslims face, among other issues, social, economic and religious prejudices. This study also found that the Muslims face discrimination in employment, housing, and income. There is also a significant body of studies on the attitudes of the wider Australian community toward the Muslim communities (e.g., Lentini, Halafoff, and Ogru, 2011; Abu-Rayya and White, 2010; Dandy and Pe-Pua, 2009; Mansouri and Trembath, 2005). All these studies found negative attitudes toward the Muslims community and Islam. For example, Dandy & Pe-Pua (2009) looked broadly at attitudes to multiculturalism, immigration, and cultural diversity by comparing dominant and non-dominant groups in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. The results of their study "show a preference hierarchy with New Zealanders and British as the most liked, and Arabs, Muslims and Lebanese are the least liked target groups" (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2009, 44). In addition to highlighting negative attitudes towards Muslims, their findings 'point to the highly negative representation of Muslims in Australia as the current targets of racism and xenophobia" (Dandy & Pe-Pua 2009, 44). Lentini,

Halafoff, and Ogru (2011) discussed the mainstream Australians' perceptions of Muslims in the context of "few hostile interactions - but also minimal contacts comparatively - between so-called 'mainstream' Australians (largely those of Anglo-Celtic and other European descent, and/or who identify with Judaeo-Christian beliefs or have no religious affiliation) and Australian Muslims" (Lentini, Halafoff, and Ogru, 2011, 409). According to this study "a combination of domestic and international events that occurred since the present century began has caused an increase in - or perhaps more accurately has created a perception of tensions between a portion of mainstream Australian and Australian Muslims, and has placed the latter under public scrutiny" (Lentini, Halafoff, and Ogru, 2011, 409).

As shown in this discussion on the context and background of the lived experiences of Muslims in Australia, it is evident that Muslim Australians face serious anti-Muslim attitudes such as personal physical and verbal attacks against members of the Muslim community, profanation of Muslims' most sacred institutions (mosques) and most important learning institutions (Islamic schools) and negative attitudes as evidenced by the academic and non-academic research discussed before. The next section discusses the attitudes of the wider Australian community towards their institutions according to the Muslim community despite tensions, hostilities, negative attitudes and attacks against Muslims and their institutions.

## Method

This study was qualitative in the form of case study. To capture the heterogeneous Muslim population both in Adelaide and Darwin in 2015, self-administered questionnaires and taped-recorded interviews were used. The recorded interviews were

conducted on one-on-one and with focus groups using semi-structured questionnaires as prompts. In Darwin, all data were collected at the Mosque Open Day. In Adelaide, in addition to the data collected at the Mosque Open Day, data was also collected at Islamic community schools. A substantial number of self-administered questionnaires were submitted to the members of the Muslim community through a community leader who has regular access to the Muslim community.

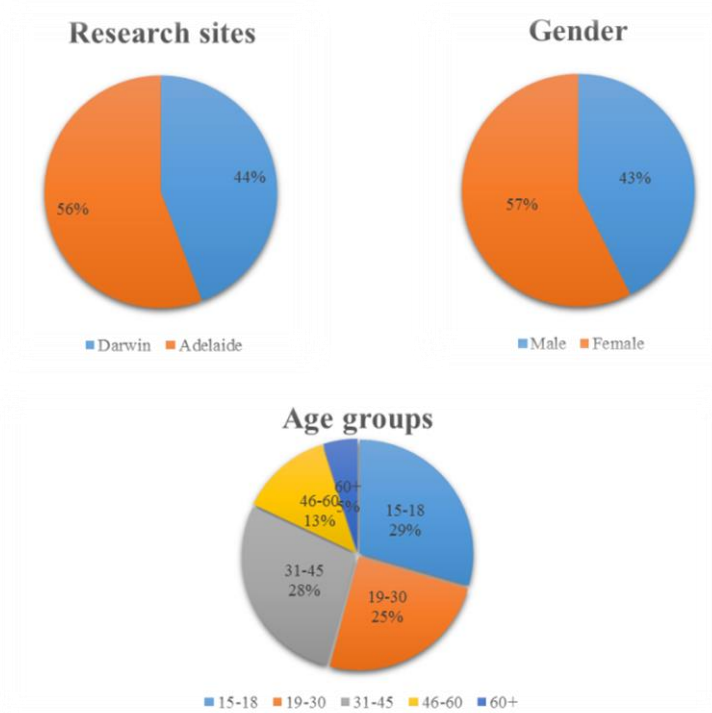
As part of the Ethics applications and for data collection, consent forms were prepared and submitted for each participant group, namely students, parents and guardians, and members of the Muslim community.

## Sample

The sample of the case study is diverse regarding geographic distribution, gender, and age of the participants. As shown in Figure 1, among the 61 respondents who participated in the research, 55.74% are from Adelaide and 44.26% from Darwin. Of these respondents, 57.37% were females, and 42.63% were males. The ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 60 and above, with the largest group, aged 15–18, representing 29.56% of the respondents. The second largest group was aged 31–45 (27.86%), the third largest was 19–30 (24.59%), the fourth largest 46–60 (13.11%) and the fifth largest 60+ (4.88%).

Figure 1 The summary of the research sites, the gender and the age distribution of the participants; showing the inclusiveness of the sample regarding geographic spread, gender and age groups.

Figure 1, Research sites, gender, and age of the participants



## Data Analysis

The analysis of the data focuses on the views held by the Muslim community on the attitudes of the wider Australian community toward their institutions. They participants were asked to use their knowledge, observation, (lived or otherwise) personal experiences in the community and with members of the Australian wider community to indicate their views on the attitudes of the wider community toward their institutions. Here their views refer to their feeling, perception, knowledge, and experiences based on or deduced from association, observation or interaction with members of the wider Australian community. In this article, ‘wider Australian community’ refers to non-Muslim Australians regardless of their ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. They may be (personal or family) friends, neighbors, work colleagues, fellow students, simple acquaintances

or any other fellow Australians—known or not known to the respondents—and then express their views. An attitude is seen as positive when it is favorable to the Muslim communities, for example, when a member of the Australian wider community thinks that it is important for the Muslim Australians to maintain their religion or to practice their faith. An attitude is negative when it is unfavorable to the Muslim community, for example, the use of negative language toward members of the Muslim community or violent behaviour toward such institutions as Islamic schools and mosques. The questions for data collection were framed in such a way that it was possible to express the ways in which the Muslim community viewed the attitudes of the wider Australian community towards their institutions. The findings show mixed attitudes; with overwhelming positive attitudes.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

#### Positive attitudes

When members of the Muslim community were asked their views on the attitudes of the wider Australian community toward Muslim institutions, they provided a range of positive answers. One respondent indicated that *'from my experience, I think people see it as good; some of my friends say it's good for people to be able to learn about your culture.'* This response is quite interesting as it highlights that the view is based on the respondent's personal 'experience' as well as those from their friends. Also important in this response is the use of the adjective 'good' twice. For this respondent, the attitudes of the wider community toward their institutions are positive as the wider community recognizes the value for members of the Muslim community to learn about their culture. For Muslims, Islamic culture and knowledge are imparted through Islamic (community) schools and mosques. In the same line of thoughts, another respondent added that *'some members of the [the wider community] think it's good for people to be able to learn about their culture.'* This second comment emphasizes the idea expressed by the first respondent. Both respondents show that the wider community thinks learning one's culture is 'good' for the Muslim community. Therefore they see Islamic schools and mosques in positive lights. This view is reiterated by the third participant who commented that *'people [the wider community] see it [the Islamic school] as good.'* According to this respondent, the attitude of the wider community towards their Islamic schools is also 'good'. In the same line of thought, another respondent mentioned that *'most people are good about the school and the mosque and all I've seen is a good attitude from Australians.'* This response adds a powerful voice to the

experiences expressed before, but specifically, this one emphasizes that 'most' in the wider community are 'good' about the school and the mosque. Importantly, the respondent mentioned 'all I have seen is a good attitude' which means that their views are based on personal observation and experiences.

The next view is similar to the views expressed by the previous participants that are already discussed. The respondent mentioned that *'from personal experience, I haven't had a bad experience; it's the opposite. People smile at me and are nice'*. According to this respondent whose views are based on 'personal experience,' they mentioned that they hadn't had any bad experience with the wider Australian community. They also added that *'it's actually the opposite.'* This reinforces their positive personal experience with the wider Australian community. To support their view, the respondent indicated that 'people smile and are nice to them.' This experience is interesting as it shows that the positive view of the respondent as well as the 'friendless' displayed by some members of the wider community toward the Australian Muslims. The next respondents indicated that *'but I have heard stories from other people who've been sworn at in the street or had their hijab pulled in the street. Oh my God I'm glad I haven't experienced that. I don't know, they might be judging on the inside I don't know, but all I've seen is a good attitude from Australians.'* In contrast with the previous respondents who based their responses on personal experiences, this respondent indicated that they have 'heard' about incidents against Muslims; which means experiences 'stories' that were told. They have 'heard' of such 'stories' as Muslims being 'sworn at' or some Muslim women having their hijab pulled in the street. We are left to wonder whether the respondents believe that these 'stories' really happened. Interestingly, the respondent added that they are

glad because they didn't experience the kind of 'stories' they heard about. From what they have 'seen' not 'heard' and not based on their experiences, the wider community has a good attitude toward the Muslim institutions. The next response reinforces the positive attitudes of the wider community toward the Muslim institutions: the respondent said that they view the wider community being '*mostly positive*' to their institutions.

There are also other positive views from the Muslim community, especially those in Darwin. The respondents mostly viewed the wider Australian community in Darwin as having very positive attitudes towards their Institutions. For example, one mentioned that '*Darwin is a very positive, multicultural society and the Aboriginal people make it different. It is more obvious that we are all immigrants.*' This highlights that the ethnic diversity of the population in Darwin had an impact on the attitudes toward the Muslim institutions. The respondent mentions that Darwin is a multicultural society with a substantial number of Australians from overseas and aboriginal people. For this respondent, this explains the 'very' positive attitudes towards the Muslim institutions. The following responded added that '*the Darwin people have been very warm and welcoming. I am happy I brought my daughter into this place.*' In this response, the participant showed that Darwin is quite different from other cities in Australia. They said people in Darwin are positive toward their school and mosque. This positive attitude was supported by the next two respondents who indicated that '*Darwin is multicultural, so far no negative incidents or feedback*' and '*Positive in Darwin though.*' The last response is quite interesting as it shows that the respondent implies differences of attitudes between Islamic institutions and the religion. They mentioned that generally local people [people in Darwin] don't like the negative attitudes toward the Muslim

institutions and also locally [in Darwin] people have a positive image of Islam in contrast with what is happening 'globally'; that is generally a negative image of Islam: "*I generally think locally they don't think like that but globally the image of Islam is negative.*'

In this section, the Muslim community holds the view that the attitude of the wider community toward their institutions is positive. The use a range of such positive phrases as 'positive,' 'good,' 'smile,' 'nice', 'warm,' and 'welcoming' to describe their views of the attitude of the wider Australian community toward their institutions, especially toward the mosques and their Islamic institutions. For example, the Muslim community in Darwin stressed that Darwin's diverse ethnic demographic composition made it a 'welcoming place' to the Muslim community by the wider Australian community. These findings seem in sharp contrast with anti-Muslim rallies, violent attacks against Muslim institutions depicted in the media and studies conducted on the attitudes of the wider Australian community. The next section discusses the negative views reported by the Muslim community on the attitudes of the wider Muslim community.

### Negative attitudes

Despite positive attitudes towards the Muslim community discussed above, some members of the Muslim community indicated that there are members of the wider community who holds negative attitudes toward their institutions. However, they believed that these are most because of the Australian media. For example, one respondent thought that there are '*very negative*' attitudes from the wider community without further comments. Another added that the attitudes of the wider community toward their Islamic institution were '*negative to an extent.*' And the view of this respondent is similar to the answer provided by the previous

respondents as they said that *'some things are negative'*. These responses supported the ideas that for some members of the Islamic community, there were negative attitudes toward the Muslim institutions. The view of the next respondent is interesting as they saw calling their school Islamic school is some way negative. The participant responded that there is *'a bit of Islamophobia towards the school, you know like calling our school an Islamic school, because a lot of them don't open their doors to the wider public, they are more closed, and hence why people don't know what is going on ... In South Australia there isn't much [negative]; there is a bit, but it isn't much compared to Melbourne and Sydney'*. This respondent was the first and the only one in the whole sample to use the phrase Islamophobia to indicate the negative attitude toward the school and the mosque. The respondent did not seem to be at ease with the fact that the school is called 'Islamic school.' The respondent would have preferred the Islamic school to be called 'a school'; just like any other school. According to this respondent, there is a perception that Islamic schools 'don't open their doors to the wider public, ' or they are 'more closed.' The respondent gave the example of South Australia, where the Islamic school was making the headlines few weeks before data collection, but the respondent thought there were no negative attitudes toward Islamic institutions in Adelaide compared with Melbourne or Sydney where the attitude was more negative according to the respondent. The next comment, like the first three comments before, indicated that there are sometimes negative attitudes toward the Muslim institutions, but they believed they are from the media: they are 'negative in general, from the media.' The next respondent holds a view similar to the respondent before them: *'sometimes negative, mainstream media. There are negative attitudes from the wider community, but they*

*are from the mainstream media'*. The next respondent puts also the blame of the negative attitudes on the media: *'I honestly think the attitude of the media is not quite positive, but from work, from my interactions with my work colleagues, my friends around, uh, my neighbours, I see everyone as being neutral towards what I do. They don't try to discourage me from anything, I pray at the university and I openly talk about it with my colleagues at university and I don't see it as a topic of tension so the way I perceive it, it's a media perspective more than anything else'*. This long comment from this respondent provides interesting information about the experiences of the Muslim community with media and their personal experiences. They say 'honestly' the attitude of 'the media is not positive'. Therefore, it is likely to be negative given the sentence that follows. They mentioned that their interactions with the wider community (colleagues, friends, neighbours) do not suggest any signs of tensions or negative portrayal. The respondent says that 'everyone' is 'neutral' and that they [Australian people] do not 'discourage them', but in fact, they 'openly talk about it'. This shows that for this respondent who engages with the wider community, their experience is positive and, to some extent, 'neutral', but the negative attitudes are from the media, not from the wider community. The following respondent, like the last three respondents, put the blame on the media too, but adds that the negative attitudes of the media have impacted on the community: *'Our community should be a role model for the whole world. It's like any other school, it's just an Islamic school but because of the issues in the media perhaps there is some negative feelings in the community. I try to understand those people. So long as the system or the government is not against me I'm okay.'* For this respondent, the Islamic schools are just normal schools like any other schools as reported by a previous



respondent. The respondent is philosophical about the negative attitude toward the Islamic school. For them, the Islamic school is just like any other school in Australia. However, it is the media that has created the 'separation' between schools which has had a negative impact on the community. However, the respondent added that they 'try to understand those people'; that is the people in the community who have negative 'feelings' towards Muslims but did not give the reasons. One could guess it is because the people are not to be blamed for their negative attitudes, but it is rather the media that is responsible and therefore to be blamed. Interestingly, the respondent's final point in their comment testifies that the negative attitudes are not institutionalised or supported by institutions. Therefore, the respondent said they are 'okay'.

In this section, we have discussed that the Muslim community holds the views that there are also negative attitudes from the wider community toward their institutions by highlighting such phrases as: '*negative*' and '*Islamophobia*' (only once) to illustrate their views. However, they stressed that these negative attitudes are not from individual members of the wider community, but mainly from and influenced by the media.

## Discussions

This data analysis shows that the Muslim community holds mixed views on the attitudes of the wider community toward their institutions. Their views are overwhelmingly positive, but there are also negative views. As shown in the data analysis, the Australian Muslims hold the view that the negative attitudes are not from individual members of the wider Australian community, but from the media. These findings are interesting in the sense that they highlight, on the one hand, the relationship between the Australian Muslim community and the wider Australian community

and, on the other, the relationship between the Muslim community and the media and the ways in which the attitudes of the wider Australian community is influenced and shaped by the media. The responses provided by the Muslim community come as a contradiction when looked at from violent anti-Muslim rallies, reports of attacks against Muslim institutions and Muslim people, and more recently the strengthening of anti-Muslim agenda and political discourse. It is possible that despite the climate of insecurity, the attitude of fear and sense of vulnerability caused by the executed and foiled terrorists in Australia and elsewhere, the wider Australia community still recognizes the needs for the that Muslim community to establish their institutions for language and culture maintenance, religious education and Islamic practices. This attitude may be partly explained by the extreme linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity of the wider Australian community regarding personal and family ancestry, language and cultural backgrounds, and country of origins among other factors that may have influenced their attitudes towards the Muslim community. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, for example, 'in 2016, nearly half (49%) of Australians had either been born overseas (first generation Australian) or one or both parents had been born oversea (second generation Australian)' The 2017 Census shows that Australian population has over 300 ancestries and speaks over 300 languages at home. Interestingly, there is also a significant shift in the demographic make-up of the overseas-born Australian citizens and residents. The number of non-European overseas-born Australian residents have significantly increased, especially those from China (2.2 per cent) and India (1.9 per cent) in addition to Australian residents and citizens born in the United Kingdom (3.9 per cent) and New Zealand (2.2 per cent). Therefore, it is not a surprise that such

a diverse wider community is sensitive to such issues as language and culture affiliation and religious practices. Such findings may suggest that the perpetrators of physical and verbal violent attacks and threats against Muslim institutions and Muslim people do not necessarily represent by their actions and attitudes the views of the wider Australian community. Similarly, the data analysis shows that there some negative attitudes from the wider community but they are mostly from the media. The respondents blamed the media for the negative attitudes toward their institutions and their religion. These views are highlighted in some studies on the attitudes and perceptions of the wider community toward the Muslims and Islam. For example, Lentini, Halafoff, and Ogru discussed the mainstream Australians' perceptions of Muslims. According to their study, the 'Australian community leaders attribute some of the blame for these negative phenomena to the media for perpetuating negative stereotypes of Islam, Muslims and Arab' (2011, 411). To lend voice to this view according to which the Australian media is a carrier of negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, they quoted Jabbour who pointed out that "this is due to the link the media immediately and consistently draws, between the local community and the proprietors of the acts of terror" (2001, 2). In this quote by Jabbour, it is important to emphasise the use of the adverbs 'immediately' and 'consistently' to emphasize the attitudes of the media towards the Muslim community. They indicate the extent to which the Australian media negatively represent Islam in the media. Kabir (2006) also explored the ways in which the Australian media shaped the attitudes of the 'mainstream' or wider community toward Australian Muslims. Her study conducted on the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian media between 2001 and 2005 found that 'some print media

reports Muslims news with provocative headlines often associated with the images that showed Islam as a violent religion' (Kabir, 2006, 314). She also added that the Australian media associated veiled Muslim women and men with terrorism, violence and fanaticism (Kabir, 2006, 315-6) correlating Islam with chaos, brutality and violence (2006, 320). The attitude of the wider Australian community as depicted in the media is generally negative and to some extent hostile to Muslims and their institutions. Dandy and Pe-Pua who looked broadly at attitudes to multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity by comparing dominant and non-dominant groups in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia also found "a preference hierarchy with New Zealanders and British as the most liked, and Arabs, Muslims and Lebanese are the least liked target groups" (Dandy and Pe-Pua, 2009, 44). In addition to highlighting the negative attitudes towards Muslims, their findings "point to the highly negative representation of Muslims in Australia as the current targets of racism and xenophobia" (Dandy and Pe-Pua, 2009, 44). They argued that the media has played a part in this negative representation of the Muslims by mentioning that "such representations are reinforced by the media and political rhetoric, and can have a profound negative impact on the settlement and integration of Muslim Australians" (Dandy and Pe-Pua, 2009, 44). With these findings, it is possible to argue that the negative views of the media do not reflect the views of the wider community. Also, despite negative reporting, there are members of the wider community who still hold positive views toward the Muslim institutions according to Muslim population surveyed in this article.

## Conclusions

This chapter, which is based on a limited sample of 61 participants in Adelaide and Darwin, shows that the Muslim community holds the view that the attitude of the wider Australian community towards their institutions (e.g., mosques and Islamic community schools) is positive despite a challenging context marked by anti-Muslim sentiments (violence against Muslim institutions, Muslim people, and negative media reporting). The Muslim participants hold the view that there are also negative attitudes from the wider community, but they believe these are mostly generated and shaped by the media and not from individuals in the wider community. In light of the findings of the case study, it can be argued that, on the one hand, the anti-Muslim activists (protestors and perpetrators of violence against Muslim institutions and individual members of the Muslim community) and, on the other hand, the media, like violent and extremist Muslim jihadists, are all minority groups whose actions and views do not necessarily reflect those they claim to represent. The findings of this case study offer a clear insight into how Australian Muslims and the mainstream Australian society see each other. It shows that despite differences in worldviews between the two communities, and the campaigns of fear and demonization of Muslims led by political parties and political groups (One Nation and Australian First), there are solid reasons for maintaining a sustained dialogue between the Muslim Australians and Mainstream Australians and exploring other avenues for mutual understanding. For example, the Muslim community's initiatives to organize public relation events (e.g., Open Mosque Days) to better inform the wider Australian community (including the media) about Islam and its religious institutions. These are significant community engagement activities to create meaning full exchange and critical steps to

breaking down stereotypes, especially when the media continues to give too much attention to Pauline Hanson without considering the Australian wider community.

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