The construction of national and religious identities amongst Australian Isma'ili Muslims

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Abstract

Australian civic society has become increasingly multicultural and diverse. Nevertheless, in the current political climate, Australian Muslims may feel as though they live under a microscope of scrutiny with their sense of affiliation and allegiance questioned. The narrative regarding Muslims in Australia has largely focused on Sunnis and ethnic Arabs. This qualitative study examines the Australian Shi'a Isma'ili Muslim community – a minority within a minority – and how attachment to supraordinate identity markers of 'Muslim' and 'Australian' influence their identity construction. It utilised semi-structured interviews with 16 first- and second-generation Isma'ili Muslims to examine the intersection of national, religious, and cultural identities via the lens of Identity Process Theory (IPT). Religious identity was important to respondents, who spoke of how their 'double minority' status distinguished them vis-à-vis the broader Muslim community in Australia and Australian society overall. Nevertheless, respondents noted a strong sense of instrumental attachment to Australia which enabled them to develop a distinct niche of Isma'ili Muslim identity unique to the Australian landscape.

Keywords

Australian Muslims; Identity Process Theory; ethnicity; social psychology; religion

Introduction

Islamophobia has steadily increased in Western countries. Terrorist activities such as the 9/ 11 attacks in America, the 7/7 bombings in London, the 2015 attacks in Paris, and the 2017 attacks in Manchester and London have placed Muslim migrant communities under suspicion, feeling a need to 'prove' their allegiance to their countries of residence. These feelings are echoed in Australia, where what was previously characterised as unease towards the ethnic minority Lebanese population now encompasses the broader Muslim community.

Australian socio-political discourse regarding Muslims

Australia's official policies towards immigration have undergone a radical shift – from historical 'White Australia' to the 'People of Australia: Australia's Multiculturalism Policy' (Bryant, 2013; Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). Nevertheless, debates concerning a 'Big Australia' reflect unease towards rapid population growth and demographic change. Woodlock (2011) argues that despite political rhetoric regarding a multicultural Australia, the lived experience is often of ethnic monoculturalism with Akbarzadeh (2016) noting anti-immigration views are ensconced within an anti-Muslim paradigm.

For many, the 2005 Cronulla race riots were the flashpoint of a supposed Australian vs. Arab/Muslim divide. Originating from a scuffle between White Australian lifesavers and Australian Lebanese men responding to racist taunts, subsequent publicity led to 5000 White Australians marching onto Cronulla, wearing Australian patriotic symbols and shouting racist taunts towards perceived Middle Easterners (Kabir, 2015; Woodlock, 2011). These taunts,

initially situated within a race/ethnic discourse, quickly transformed into anti-religious tirades due to a perception of an 'intrusion' by an 'Other' into a historically White space, a bastion of 'middle Australia' (Kabir, 2015), essentially inducing feelings of (national) identity threat in symbolic and realistic terms (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010a). Australian Lebanese individuals responded with retaliatory protests (Kabir, 2015; Woodlock, 2011). Rather than interpreting the instigating event as an incident between hooligans, or as a response to provocation, the riots were formulated within a broader narrative of 'us vs. them' – of (White) Australians protecting their beaches and women from a hostile 'Other' (Hosseini & Chafic, 2016; Kabir, 2015; Saniotis, 2004).The riots physicalised the shift from 'anti-Arab' to 'anti-Muslim' racism during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Kabir, 2015; Poynting & Mason, 2007) where young Muslims increasingly experienced discrimination and marginalisation (Abu-Rayya et al., 2016; Hosseini & Chafic, 2016).

This discourse towards (Muslim) migrants is reflected by the response to Pauline Hanson's 'One Nation' party, an anti-establishment party with an overt anti-immigrant platform (Gibson et al., 2002). The 'One Nation' party claims immigration threatens 'the very basis of…Australian culture, identity, and shared values' (One Nation, 1998). While the views of 'One Nation' became an object of public derision during the 2013 election campaign, when a party candidate confused Islam for a country and conflated the terms permissible (halal) with forbidden (haraam), Hanson herself was elected as a One Nation senator in the 2016 election, on the heels of the 2015 'reclaim Australia' demonstrations and 2014 controversy regarding halal food labelling, reflecting a vocal unease towards Muslims (Abu-Rayya et al., 2016; Akbarzadeh, 2016; Blakkarly, 2015). More recently, Fraser Manning, a One Nation senator, claimed the 2019 New Zealand Christchurch attacks were a response to 'increased Muslim presence' (Shuttleworth, 2019). Thus, despite Australia being a diverse country, debates regarding (Muslim) immigration and integration continue. Indeed, Hosseini and Chafic (2016) suggest almost half of all Australians harbour anti-Muslim sentiments.

Australian Muslims
There are approximately 600,000 Muslims in Australia, comprising roughly 3% of Australia's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), with 66% being under the age of 35 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) and nearly 40% who are Australian-born (Abu-Rayya et al., 2016). Saniotis (2004) argues that historical practices of exclusion have led to an 'Other'-isation, whereby Muslim values are considered the antithesis of 'Australian values', leaving Muslim Australians feeling they must 'prove' their national allegiance (Aly, 2007; Saniotis, 2004). Despite the 'I'll ride with you' campaign following the 2014 café siege in Sydney viewed as a marker of Australian pluralism and solidarity (Alexander, 2014), Briskman (2015) argues that Islamophobic actions are more prevalent with instances of protestors placing pigs' heads at sites of proposed mosques and Muslim women wearing the hijab being physically and verbally assaulted. Muslims are therefore constructed as a hybridised threat, an outgroup impacting the identity of the (White) ethno-national in-group (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010a).

This negative social representation and marginalisation can leave Australian Muslims feeling alienated from the country and culture with which they self-identify (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007) and thus may lead to their prioritising their religious identity as an alternative source of belonging (Aly, 2007; Kalek et al., 2010). Yet, looking at Arab Australian Muslims, Akbarzadeh (2009) suggests that while they have a strong religious identity, they see no contradiction between Australian and Muslim values. Nonetheless, discrimination limits their economic opportunities, which may explain their higher levels of unemployment despite high levels of educational attainment (Akbarzadeh, 2009; Hassan, 2010; Hassan, 2015; Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016; Patton, 2014).

Abbas et al. (2018) suggest that this may impact Australian Muslim acculturation and identity formation, rejecting assimilation and seeking other forms of belonging, i.e. transnational religious identities (Asmar, 2001; Mitha et al., 2017; Saeed & Akbarzadeh, 2001)

or cultural and ethnic identity markers (Hopkins & McAuliffe, 2010). Kabir (2008) and Abu-Rayya et al. (2016) state that identities of Muslim Australians are transactionalised – Australian in everyday cultural consumption but Muslim when aggrieved by anti-Muslim activity. This interplay of identities may explain why Muslim Australians have little difficulty in reconciling their Australian and Muslim identities despite exposure to racism and Islamophobia (Abu-Rayya et al., 2016; Hassan, 2015; Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016; Patton, 2014; Safi, 2015).

With nearly half of Australian Muslims being of Lebanese or Turkish descent (Khawaja & Khawaja, 2016), most research on Australian Muslims has focused on these ethnic groups, with limited work regarding other ethnicities/denominations (i.e. Asghari-Fard & Hossain, 2016; Patton, 2014). This study therefore adds to the literature on Australian Muslim identity by examining Australian Shi'a Isma'ili Muslims – a minority within a minority.

Australian Isma'ili Muslims

Australian Isma'ili Muslims follow the Shi'a branch of Islam, which affirms that temporal and spiritual leadership of the Muslim ummah (brotherhood) was passed on to the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, after his death. In contrast to the Ithna'Ashari branch of Shi'ism, Isma'ilis believe that the physical imamate (leadership) continues to this day, with the Aga Khan IV as the Hazar (living) Imam (Daftary, 1998). The global Isma'ili community is largely concentrated in Central and South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with large numbers in North America and Europe (Daftary, 1998). The Isma'ilis occupy a doubly marginalised social sphere. As a minority Muslim denomination, they are often disparaged by other Muslim communities given their distinct and syncretic liturgical practice (Asani, 2011; Bhimani, 2019). Yet their distinctiveness has given rise to community feelings of 'exceptionality' and being a 'model minority' (Bhimani, 2019). Nonetheless, by virtue of their self-proclaimed Muslim identity, Isma'ilis may not be completely accepted in their host nations.

With a self-estimated population of 5000, Australian Isma'ilis comprise a minority amongst Australian Muslims and the global Isma'ili community. Isma'ili migration to Australia occurred in the 1970s, with significant communities in Perth, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Adelaide. The community is demographically young, with a substantive proportion under 25. It is ethno-culturally distinct from the broader Australian Muslim community as its adherents are predominantly of East African and South Asian heritage. The community's distinctiveness and disparate population may thus impact how it constructs its national and religious identities.

Theoretical framework: acculturation and identity

Berry's (1992) acculturation framework describes migrant communities' adaptation to their new surroundings, proposing four strategies: marginalisation, separation, assimilation, and integration – the latter is considered most socially and psychologically beneficial (Berry, 1992). Chryssochoou (2014) notes how acculturation strategies can influence identity construction – building on Wimmer (2013) who suggested that identities can vary depending on shifting boundaries of social context. While both national and ethnic identities employ concepts of shared mythos, values, and history, they are often juxtaposed against each other. These 'shifting boundaries' can be influenced, or 'activated', by political context more than cultural distance (Chandra, 2012). Debates continue regarding the saliency of national or ethnic identities per migration generation, with some suggesting a weakening of the latter in second- and subsequent generations (Maliepaard et al., 2010; Platt, 2014). However, it has also been proposed that they may adopt more transnational identities, such as religious identities (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Platt (2014) suggests that while subsequent migrant generations experience greater secularisation, religious identity (i.e. affiliation to a religious group) amongst Muslims maintains salience while religiosity (i.e. performativity of religious behaviour and ritual) does not. As ethnic identities can often be ascribed, regardless of

individual affiliation (Chandra, 2009), the same could also apply to religious identities – where performativity and ascription are assumed.

Stroup (2017) notes that while religion can often be treated as a component of ethnic identity, it can play universalising and differentiating roles – facilitating supraordinate 'group-ness' yet maintaining distinctiveness. Stroup (2017) further argues that the universalising approach may facilitate belongingness and a connection to a wider community. Although Maliepaard et al. (2010) suggest that religious and ethnic identity may be more strongly intertwined for the second generation, other research amongst Muslim minority communities suggests a transnational religious identity is stronger in second generations whilst ethnic identity is more salient for first generations (Abbas et al., 2018; Jacobson, 1997; van Heelsum & Koomen, 2016; Mitha et al., 2017; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Jacobson (1997) notes Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim youth in Britain, for example, may place primacy in their Muslim identity given the social stigma attached to being Muslim. Social ostracisation by the mainstream may therefore explain why second-generation Muslim youth attach greater importance to a supraordinate, transnational, inclusive, religious identity versus an ethnocultural or national one (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Wise & Ali, 2008; Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, it is important to note Muslim migrants do simultaneously hold national and religious identities, though religious identity takes primacy (Anwar, 1998; Hopkins, 2004; Jacobson, 1997; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Modood et al., 1997). While hybridity may play a role (Modood et al., 1997), salience of a particular identity may depend on the social environment. For instance, differences in perceived value systems may delineate distinctions between a national identity based on birthright and one based on cultural 'norms'. The latter may be inaccessible to Muslims given that certain behaviours like clubbing and drinking may be considered part of the 'host culture', yet considered culturally taboo by Muslims (Hopkins, 2004; Jacobson, 1997; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010).

A distinction between identifying with 'host' nationality versus 'host country' culture may be due to social representations of Muslims. While Chandra (2009) argues that religious identity can be less 'sticky', or visible, for Muslims, religious identity is often assumed and performed via visible markers (e.g. hijabs, beards, etc.) leading to assumptions of religiosity and a visible 'Other'-ness. McCauley and Posner (2019) argue that religious identity can be a political tool in response to social environments. Samad (2004) proposes that Muslim identity may be used as a marker of distinctiveness. Chandra (2012), however, claims that to understand changes in ethnic (and religious) identities, one must understand the variables which trigger particular salience, including how people 'switch' and 'pass'.

From a social psychological perspective, it is important to understand the impact of individual subjective experience on meaning and identity. Chryssochoou (2014) states that identity is a social psychological concept reflecting the context in which people live and their self-positioning within it. Tajfel and Turner (1986) posit that individual self-concept is comprised of multiple social identities from multiple group memberships and that social context enhances saliency. Furthermore, Amiot and Jaspal (2014) state that individuals are psychologically motivated to enhance compatibility and coherence between multiple group identities. Migrant communities may experience identity threat via acculturation, as aspects of their identity may be devalued or denigrated by social representation, affecting psychological coping. Although various identity theories exist, Identity Process Theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986, 2001) is unique in considering the role of identity principles in managing the self-concept.

IPT proposes that an individual's identity is dynamic and a product of their interaction with the social context (Breakwell, 2010). It suggests that identity construction is guided by assimilation-accommodation and evaluation:

- assimilation-accommodation refers to the absorption of new information into the identity structure and the changes this entails. For example, incorporating national

identities by migrants in a new context (i.e. 'I am Australian') and its relationship within an existing identity structure (i.e. 'can one be both Isma'ili and Australian?').

- Evaluation refers to the attribution of meaning and value to identity contents (i.e. 'does being Isma'ili have more positive meanings than being Australian?').

The identity processes are influenced by the social context in that social representations, norms, and ideologies determine which identity elements are 'inter-connected' and need adjustment for the new identity element. For instance, the narrative of assimilation and intra-community pressures may make it difficult for an individual to feel Australian and Muslim simultaneously. Furthermore, the meaning and value appended to identity elements is partly based on social representations, norms, and ideologies. These processes are guided by the identity principles which refer to the desirable end-states for identity. According to Breakwell (1986) these include:

- continuity, referring to the psychological thread between the past, present and future;
- distinctiveness, that is, feelings of uniqueness from others;
- self-efficacy, referring to feelings of control and competence;
- self-esteem, that is, personal and social value (Breakwell, 1986).

IPT has been extended by Vignoles et al. (2006) and Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010b) to include the principles of belonging (maintaining closeness and acceptance by others); meaning (finding significance and purpose in one's life); and psychological coherence (deriving compatibility between different identities).

IPT posits that identity threat occurs when identity processes cannot comply with the principles in a particular social context (Breakwell, 2010). For instance, if the assimilationaccommodation of Australian nationhood challenges the continuity principle because it represents a rupture between the past, present, and future, this may result in identity threat. Similarly, if the evaluation process results in the attribution of negative value to one's Muslim identity (due to Islamophobia), this could result in threats to the self-esteem principle as individuals are unable to derive a positive self-concept on the basis of a stigmatised identity (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010a). Individuals respond to threat by using coping strategies designed to remove or minimise the impact of identity threat. These strategies operate at three distinct levels: intra-psychic (denial); interpersonal (self-isolation from others) and intergroup (the derivation of support from social groups) (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010a). IPT bridges the social and psychological levels of analysis – on the one hand, identity threat occurs largely because of the social context in which identity is threatened and, on the other hand, coping strategies are determined in part by the social context. Chryssochoou (2014) offers a powerful rationale for using IPT to understand how acculturation is experienced at the individual psychological level in distinct acculturative contexts. The present study applies tenets of IPT and the acculturation framework to understand how Australian Isma'ilis navigate their identities within the Muslim ummah and Australian society.

Methods

Sixteen Isma'ili Muslims were selected via purposive sampling from two mosques in New South Wales and Victoria, the two Australian states with the highest Muslim populations (Hassan, 2015). A cross-sectional stratified sampling method accounted for generation, immigration status, and gender. A demographic breakdown of respondents can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Gender	Number of respondents
Male	9
Female	7

Table 1. Gender breakdown of respondents

Migration/generational status	Number of respondents
First generation, <25 years old	6
Second-generation, <25 years old	5
First-generation, > 25 years old	5

Table 2. Migration/generational status breakdown of respondents

Respondents were of East African and South Asian heritage, reflecting the community's largest heritage groups. The sample size enabled an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a hard-to-reach minority population (Denscombe, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Green & Thorogood, 2013; Mays & Pope, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews comprised of 10 open-ended questions focusing on ethnocultural heritage, the Australian Isma'ili experience, religion, interaction with the faith community and larger Australian society, and acculturative stressors. Interviews took place in a location convenient for respondents, with most selecting a meeting room at the local mosque. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to three hours, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author.

Data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis, 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The nine principles outlined by Jaspal (2020) were followed to undertake the analysis. The first author initially read the transcripts repeatedly to familiarise himself with the data. Transcripts were then uploaded onto NVivo 10.0, a qualitative analysis software to enable cross-comparison of responses. Extracts were examined through close reading, with salient extracts coded inductively based on analysis of the participant's narratives and connections between their statements. These codes were grouped into broader observations, or 'themes'. Themes were rigorously reviewed against the data for compatibility and interview extracts listed against corresponding themes. Themes observed via cross-comparison between respondents enabled the generation of supraordinate themes. Extracts that were considered vivid, compelling, and representative of the themes were selected for analysis. These superordinate themes are presented herein. In respondent quotations, ellipses indicate omission and square brackets signify clarification. Pseudonyms have been used for anonymity.

Findings and analysis

A central question of this study was how respondents developed and constructed their identities as a 'double minority'. Key themes elaborated in this section centre around religious identity, Muslim 'authenticity', values and cultural differences, and hybridised identities.

Religion as foundation

Religion was considered a fundamental aspect of respondents' identity. Zulfiqar, an Australian-born youth, said 'religion and spirituality…plays a huge role because it's…what we [Isma'ilis] live and breathe'. The centrality of religious identity was similarly echoed by Alim, a recent immigrant youth: '…a person who can connect to his religion, his identity is defined by his religion…those are my foundations'. These quotations suggest that affiliation to the religious in-group provides a sense of meaning and purpose, demonstrating the importance of the meaning principle of identity.

The centrality of religious identity was echoed amongst other respondents who spoke of 'being Isma'ili' as 'encompassing everything' (Fazila, Australian-born youth). While religious affiliation can bring a sense of community and social support, the pervasiveness of religion as a foundation to identity suggests a meaning and value distinct from its social nature. For. Australian Ismailis, this centrality of religious identity confers a source of strength, which has implications for development of self-efficacy.

Being an inner 'Other'
Respondents noted a demarcation of their Isma'ili identity vis-à-vis their Muslim and Australian identities. Hafiz, a first-generation migrant, said:

While they are young, many youth tend to hide their [religious] identity from their peers at school…today, most kids do not fly the flag of 'I'm a Muslim'…are we risking these youth growing older, not having a Muslim identity? Have they been exposed sufficiently…to their faith to pick it up when they are ready?

Hafiz's perspective is that youth may not readily affiliate with their religious identity given the socio-political climate towards Muslims in Australia. His statement suggests that youth minimise their Muslim identity to situate themselves within Australian society. Hafiz also situates Isma'ili identity within a broader Muslim identity. By stating that youth could 'pick it up when they are ready', Hafiz suggests that Muslim identity in a foreign context can be situationally and contextually dependent.

For the youth, the distinction between Isma'ili and Muslim was more demarcated, based on social representations of Muslims in Australia. Being 'more Isma'ili' facilitated an escape from the 'Other'-isation of Muslims, which could outwardly be seen as their ingroup, helping them to 'pass' in secular Australian society. This downplaying of Muslim identity may be due to, as Parvez, an Australian-born youth, explains, the negative social representations towards Muslims in Australia:

Obviously being of Muslim background, especially given the climate we live in post 9/11… having people understand your religion and who you are when terrorism is such a hot topic is certainly another challenge for any Muslim or Isma'ili…The Cronulla riots [where] people [were] waving an Australian flag, saying 'go back to your home countries, Muslims' …people can get alienated or isolated within their own society, especially if they are confronted with those…characteristics…Australia overall is a great country…but there are obviously…challenges you have to face…. it's not as bad as I make it sound…not a big issue…just something to be mindful of.

Parvez alludes to multiple layers of juxtaposition between his identity as an Isma'ili Muslim male vis-à-vis 'other' Muslims and Australians. Social representations equating Muslims with terrorism may leave Muslims feeling like they must 'justify' themselves as 'authentic' Australians. Parvez's narrative speaks to the concept of 'external validation'. His reference to 'having people understand your religion and who you are' indicates a desire to be considered an in-group member being Australian-born and thus viewing being Australian as part of his identity; however, his distinctiveness as an 'Other', a Muslim male of South Asian descent, may highlight his difference as an out-group member by mainstream Australian society. Parvez's statement alludes to the sentiment that Muslims are not 'true' members of Australian society; as a 'Mossie' (Muslim Aussie), Parvez feels 'alienated or isolated within…[his] own society', potentially impacting the belongingness and self-esteem principles of identity. Yet, by stating 'Australia overall is a great country…it's not as bad as I make it sound', he is minimising potential identity threat. Arzina, Australian-born, echoes Parvez by distinguishing herself as an Isma'ili Muslim vis-à-vis other Muslim communities:

after September 11th…happened…it was a really sensitive time…and as much as people didn't know that I was Muslim because you can't tell straight away, right? It's [discrimination] very generalised to Lebanese Muslims and Sunnis. It was…a good challenge because it led to the jamaat (congregation) being closer and we knew we had to look out for each other…being here as an Isma'ili, that was really hard because…people are [asking] 'aren't you Muslim as well? and 'didn't you guys do that [certain ritualistic practices] as well?'

While Parvez states he is 'obviously…of Muslim background', referring to the conflation of skin colour as a marker of religious identity, Arzina says 'people didn't know that I was Muslim because you can't tell straight away, right?'. This striking difference demonstrates that Australian Isma'ilis differ on societal representations of 'being Muslim'. While Parvez suggests a 'Muslim background' may be an ethno-racial construct, for Arzina representation is limited to Lebanese Arabs, distinguishing herself as an Isma'ili Shi'a Muslim of South Asian descent vis-à-vis Arab Sunnis. Her lack of visible religious markers may induce ambiguity regarding external religious identity attribution. Nonetheless, it leads to questions of Muslim authenticity. This speaks to the notion of 'double rejection' faced by Isma'ilis – by prioritising integrationist approaches they may not be considered 'authentically Muslim' by other Muslim communities. Yet, their ethno-religious differences may limit acceptance from the (White) mainstream, potentially leading to marginalisation, and inducing identity threat.

This 'double rejection' may impact the psychological coherence principle of identity by ascribing characteristics to a group who may not perceive themselves like other in-group members. To cope with this identity threat, individuals may promote facets which foster identity cohesion – 'look[ing] out for each other' may be a coping strategy to enhance belongingness. The implications on psychological coherence were clear. For Arzina, highlighting her distinctiveness as a Shi'a Isma'ili Muslim of South Asian descent may serve as a psychological means of maintaining self-esteem by ascribing any discrimination towards Muslims to be limited in sectarian and ethnic terms.

National allegiances
The interplay between ethno-cultural and national identities was also important. The context of 'home' was still present for recent immigrant youth, like Naheed:

I've lived here for five years and might never go back [to Pakistan] but I'm still Pakistani.

Naheed's affirmation demonstrates that despite living in Australia for years, 'home' was very much still Pakistan. Despite an expected threat to identity, he indicates some degree of acceptance into Australian culture:

I was expecting something far worse than I actually faced. I was expecting no one would accept me because of my skin tone and [being from] Paki[stan]…[but] for me, my start was actually good.

The importance of the continuity principle of identity was echoed by other recent immigrants, like Alim:

I am very patriotic but at the same time I respect this country [Australia] because it is providing me with shelter and opportunities to work and grow and I appreciate the culture here as well…but I feel that I am away from my country and every small tiny thing does connect me to my country…Independence Day for Pakistan is coming up and I'd dress up in national clothes…and it makes me feel patriotic.'

Alim articulates the instrumental benefits of living in Australia, through it affording him 'shelter and opportunities to work and grow'. The self-efficacy principle was highlighted through his discussing opportunities which may have been unachievable in Pakistan. Simultaneously, his emotional attachment to Pakistan is demonstrated by 'every small thing… connect[s] me to my country'. This reference to 'my country' as Pakistan demonstrates the importance of the continuity principle.

While a sense of continuity may explain recent immigrants' identifying with their country of birth, interestingly, Australian-born youth did not explicitly refer to themselves as 'Australian', suggesting there may be a social barrier which precludes complete acceptance. It was also striking that no respondents used hyphenated forms of identity.

Creating an Isma'ili 'Mossie' identity
The narratives of Australian Isma'ili Muslim youth demonstrated particularities in developing a hybridised identity. There was a perception that Australian-born Isma'ilis had friends within and out with the Isma'ili community whereas recent immigrants tended to be insular but this was not necessarily the case, as Naheed explains:

When I'm with an Aussie, I think like them; when I'm with someone that's not an Aussie, an immigrant, then I think like them and I understand that barrier…I feel like I've got a skill where I can understand [being] an immigrant and an Australian.

By dichotomising 'Aussie' and 'immigrant', Naheed asserts the distinctiveness principle of identity. His use of 'them' sets Australians as distinct from his ingroup. Yet, by stating interactions with both 'camps', he sees himself as adaptable to, and accepted by, both categories.

Navigating value differences
Youth spoke about challenges in navigating parental and religio-cultural expectations against Australian 'norms'. They discussed these within ethno-religious frameworks. Respondents like Imran, a recent immigrant youth, focused on the role of family and the distinction between South Asian collectivist and Western individualistic cultures: 'in India, you live with family. You have friends there. And you can get support from them… Here it's different because there is no family'. Other respondents, like Naheed and Alim, discussed Australian socio-behavioural norms which were problematic in the Isma'ili Muslim framework:

I'm from Pakistan, a Muslim country, so you don't see people getting drunk every night or weekend – there's nothing wrong with clubbing as long as you know what you're doing, but there would be less clubbing [in Pakistan].… and getting pushed away from JK(jamaatkhana) – Naheed

Alim says *'The challenge basically is how to…separate yourself from the bad elements and absorb the good elements which this [Australian] society has as well – freedom to do what you want to; if you aim for something, you can achieve it'.*

These quotations demonstrate how respondents imbued a distinct set of values, grounded within a South Asian Muslim framework, whose distinctiveness highlights their difference within a secular Western context. Naheed's asserting of the importance of jamaatkhana1 and being from Pakistan, 'a Muslim country', ground him within an ethno-religious paradigm; yet, his stating 'there's nothing wrong with clubbing', conditioned by 'as long as you know what you're doing', reflects a desire to belong to Australia by taking part in socio-cultural behaviours normative within that context. Alim suggests a process of adaptation maybe to 'separate

yourself from the bad…absorb the good', thus rendering it possible to be part of a societal culture while engaging only in select elements of social practice.

Australian-born youth suggested a generational difference in developing internal values. Zulfiqar states 'growing up in Australia, your mentality changes a lot as opposed to your parents' … which is a lot more traditional'. He thus suggests a liberalisation of one's world-view compared to the 'traditional' culture of one's parents. For Australian-born/ raised youth, there appeared to be a downplaying of the continuity principle but a re-assessment of meaning to identity. Fazila, Australian-born, suggests that meaning may be developed by amalgamating traditional, ethno-religious, and Australian values:

It's a very heavy mix…as far as my values and ethics come from [it's from] where they've [my parents] come from but…the way I look at society probably comes from the fact that I was born here.

Fazila alludes to the supposed tension between secular, Australian values and traditional, ethno-cultural, Muslim values. The continuity principle is evident through her assertion that her views are influenced by her parents. This influence on her worldview also reflects the psychological coherence principle – merging two aspects of identity into a cohesive whole.

The struggle of negotiating values was also discussed by members of the older generation, like Hafiz:

some [Australian] cultural behaviours, like drinking [alcohol], it's quite normatised. It's quite normal for a child [in Australia] who has turned 18 to drink, to go clubbing…those are the issues kids face now.

Issues concerning a potential 'culture clash' are intertwined with identity construction. Certain behaviours considered to be acceptable in Australian society are considered taboo in Islamic cultures. Thus, Naheed, differentiating between 'Pakistan, a Muslim country' and behaviours like clubbing and drinking highlights a distinction between 'Islamically- permissible' behaviours and cultural norms in Australia. While non-adherence to the dominant socio-cultural practices may impact the psychological coherence principle of identity, Alim suggests that Australian Isma'ili youth construct their own meaning of identity by 'separate[ing] yourself from the bad…and absorb[ing] the good'.

Finding a middle ground
Tension concerning acculturation strategies was evident between the older and younger generations. Aliya, a first-generation community leader, says that a major challenge for youth was 'merg[ing] with the culture here…. they become completely Australian'. A perceived assimilationist strategy was thus viewed negatively due to a perceived distinction between Isma'ili and 'Australian' cultures. For Parvez, an Australian-born youth, a major challenge was adhering to differing expectations:

the standard for Isma'ili youth is generally higher than the wider society holds for [its] youth…. ethically…as Isma'ilis, you generally don't drink[alcohol] whereas…that is part of Australian culture so you are balancing those expectations and I think that's a challenge.

Parvez's statement reflects an element of identity threat in holding oneself to different standards. As Zulfiqar alludes, the potential for identity conflict may be so great it influences socialisation patterns:

you're a lot more comfortable with people of your own background than people from outside. I know I'm a lot more comfortable with Isma'ilis rather than my friends at uni…there's that

level of understanding…a foundation…whereas when you…bring…spirituality up some person may be an atheist, another person might be a Sunni [Muslim] so you get defensive straight away

Although Australian-born Zulfiqar feels more comfortable amongst Isma'ilis than other Australians, his statement of 'your own background' suggests that he may not see himself as completely Australian, finding greater affiliation with his ethno-religious subgroup, and notes the distinctiveness of Isma'ili Muslims from the larger Muslim community. While the older generation were concerned that youth were 'becom[ing] completely Australian' (Aliya), youth themselves noted efforts and challenges in balancing differing societal expectations. That said, the older generation recognised the challenges that youth face. For instance, Hafiz notes that 'kids sometimes do feel inadequate if they don't do what the mainstream youth do'. While a lack of engagement in 'Australian' normative behaviour may showcase distinctiveness, it may also alienate individuals, calling to question whether distinctiveness or belongingness take on greater primacy. Although Brewer (1991) suggests that an equilibriumis often sought between distinctiveness and belonging, these youth indicate that social context is important in navigating this balance. For respondents, shared religious values regarding social and religious behaviours encouraged feelings of belongingness and a greater sense of identity within their religious group.

Discussion

This study examined identity construction amongst Isma'ili Muslims in Australia, a 'double minority'. Extant literature on Isma'ilis (i.e. Bhimani, 2019; Mukadam & Mawani, 2009; Versi, 2010) suggests their acculturation strategy and identity development may differ from that of other Muslim migrant communities. The framework of IPT was used to examine factors involved in identity construction and in responding to identity threat. Focusing on subjective identity enables us to examine individual agency in constructing identity through accommodation-assimilation and the evaluative processes (Breakwell, 1986; Breakwell, 2001).

Application of IPT principles

Saliency of the various identity principles differed based on migratory status. Self-efficacy was potentially more important for recent immigrant youth, reflecting an ability to maximise skill development and opportunities in their new setting. This aligns with Kelman (1997) and Jaspal & Cinnirella (2013) discussion of instrumental versus emotional attachment to the nation. For recent immigrant youth, emotional attachment was rooted in symbolic markers of identity of their country of origin, indicating the importance of the continuity principle. This principle was also evident for Australian-born/raised youth who felt that their values and ethical frameworks were informed by their ethno-religious background. This contradicted perceptions from the older generation and prior research suggesting that second-generation youth gravitate away from their ethno-cultural tradition (Abbas et al., 2018; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013; Maliepaard et al., 2010; Woodlock, 2011). Thus, a 'double minority' status may enhance ethno-religious affiliation and consequentially, the continuity principle.

The importance of the self-esteem principle was juxtaposed with the identity principles of distinctiveness and belongi, ess. As with other Muslim youth in Western contexts (Anwar, 1998; Jacobson, 1997; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013; Modood et al., 1997; Mukadam & Mawani, 2009), Australian Isma'ili youth felt that religion was a central component of their identity. Yet, in contrast to other Muslim youth, they did not view their religious identity purely in religio-cultural terms (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Muhammedi, 2010; Mukadam & Mawani, 2009; Smith, 2004). Rather, they spoke of its moralistic dimension appending greater meaning to their religious identity than prescriptive behaviour, demonstrating a distinct type of attachment to religious identity. This saliency may have led to identity threat vis-à-vis the community's self-positioning within larger Muslim and Australian cultures. Respondents spoke of values

and cultural aspects normative to Australian culture which did not align with their ethno-religious belief systems. This social boundary is believed to impede total integration for Muslim migrant communities (Hopkins, 2004; Jacobson, 1997; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013; Vadher & Barrett, 2009). While this highlights the distinctiveness principle of identity, it may do so negatively, excluding Muslim youth from the mainstream majority. This was seen here with respondents discussing activities like 'clubbing' which Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) note as an example of how certain behaviours are highlighted when emphasizing distinctiveness but minimised when claiming in-group membership. While other Muslim communities may assume Ismai'lis engage in these activities, due to the perception of their being 'liberal' and 'acculturated', the fact that respondents noted these activities were anathema within the Islamic tradition showed that they interpreted it within an Islamic paradigm and thus situated their Isma'ili-ness within an Islamic framework. Yet, while their distinctiveness as Isma'ilis were seen by respondents' lack of visible religious markers, this affiliation to their Muslim identity may impede total assimilation into Australian society.

Religious identity was discussed across a spectrum of 'religion', 'spirituality', 'being Muslim', and 'being Isma'ili'. Respondents grounded their interpretation of Isma'ili Islam within an ethno-cultural paradigm, explaining why the values they spoke of were reminiscent of both South Asian cultural and Islamic traditions. Respondents' distinction between 'being Muslim' and 'being Isma'ili' could be read as adopting a more socially palatable identity dependent on social context (McCauley & Posner, 2019). Alternatively, it could be a consequence of being a 'double minority' with religious identity becoming salient in certain contexts to minimise identity threat.

Youth spoke of their distinctiveness and feelings of 'double exclusion' from other Muslim groups and wider Australian society. It was unclear whether respondents' juxtaposition with other Muslim communities was intended to deflect societal Islamophobia (Saniotis, 2004) or historical distinctions between the Isma'ilis and the larger Muslim ummah (Asani, 2011; Daftary, 1998; Steinberg, 2011). Nevertheless, this finding echoes the work of Muhammedi (2010) and Jessa (2011) who found that Canadian Isma'ilis often felt disconnected and differentiated themselves from the wider Muslim community given their distinct liturgical practices, interpretations of Islam, and acculturative strategies. This distinction leads to increased feelings of belonging with the Isma'ili community. This may explain why our respondents noted,with the increased negative social representations of Muslims post-9/11, experiencing a greater sense of belonging and community within the Australian Isma'ili community distinct from the wider Australian Muslim community.

That said, the ascription to a Muslim identity in light of negative social representation of Muslims in Australia, acts as identity threat for Australian Isma'ili Muslims. Woodlock (2011) and Aly (2007) suggest that representations of Muslim identity are socially constructed as opposite to Australian identity, resulting in 'Other'-ising young Australian Muslims who may consequentially feel rejected by mainstream society (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007; Saniotis, 2004). Our respondents described the impacts this had on feeling marginalised by mainstream Australian society and other Muslim communities. 'Double exclusion' may thus promote greater solidarity and communal identity, giving salience to the belongingness principle of identity. The strategy of finding greater belonging within one's own community has been alluded to for British and Australian Muslim communities (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007; Wise & Ali, 2008). Given this identity threat, respondents coped by rethinking the salience of various identity components. This follows from Breakwell (2010), Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012), and Vignoles et al. (2006) who state that given negative distinctiveness, individuals may focus on groups enabling a greater sense of belonging – such as an ethno-religious in-group.

The role of psychological coherence was important for respondents. Respondents' narratives suggested a social barrier limiting total inclusion within Australian society. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) and Sundar (2008) discuss the emergence of hybridised identities, i.e.

'brown' and 'Desi' in North America, and 'British-Asian' in the UK. Hyphenation enables the construction of a hybridised identity, highlighting distinctiveness and developing psychological coherence against the supposed contradiction between cultures of countries of residence and ethno-cultural origin (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Modood et al., 1997; Sundar, 2008). Levey (2012) notes that hyphenation is not largely used in Australia. Indeed, none of our respondents used hyphenated labels of ethnic, religious, and national identities. This could permit individuals to identify themselves as Muslim Australian or Australian Muslim wherein the duality of identities is considered complementary rather than exclusionary. This could explain the levels of attachment to national and ethnic identities. This contrasts with other findings examining Australian Muslims (Abbas et al., 2018), who note increased national identity affiliation was linked to decreased ethnic identification and religiosity.

Unlike other diasporic communities, Isma'ili Muslims have been instructed by the Aga Khan IV to make their countries of residence their home (Versi, 2010) – ethnic attachment, therefore, comes from cultural markers rather than physical connection to the 'homeland'. For Australian Isma'ili Muslims, 'blending in' to society meant adopting coping strategies against identity threat (Chryssochoou, 2014) opting for an integrative strategy between their national and religious identities. This was encapsulated amongst respondents who suggested that, by not wearing any visible markers of 'Muslim-ness', they could be perceived as non-Muslim and therefore 'pass' as 'authentic' Australian; yet, their ethnic visibility through skin colour still rendered them an 'Other' (Chandra, 2009, 2012).

For Australian Isma'ili Muslims, integrating traditional and contemporary contexts into a coherent whole illustrates the psychological coherence principle. This echoes Woodlock (2011) saying that Muslim youth experience no conflict in reconciling or integrating their Australian and Muslim identities. Rather than using religious identity as opposition (Samad, 2004), or viewing religious and national identity as dichotomous (Maliepaard et al., 2010), respondents incorporated religious identity alongside national identity as hybridisation (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012).

Limitations and implications
Our respondents were drawn from individuals who attended jamaatkhana. Further work could examine whether there are differences in identity strategies amongst those who do and do not frequent religio-social spaces.

Debates regarding representation and inclusion of Muslims in Australia reflect broader socio-political discourse over 'Western vs Islamic values'. Negative social representations of Muslims mean Muslims are positioned as a form of identity threat to Australian national identity. Future research could thus examine how perceptions of a 'race-bound' national identity may be held by the mainstream.

This study adds to the literature on Australian Muslims by highlighting a minority within a minority – the Shi'a Isma'ili Muslim community. As a community perceived to be 'exceptional' for its acculturative approach, Isma'ilis are often marginalised by other Muslim communities for that very reason. Research amongst Muslim minorities suggests a generational preference for transnational religious identities over ethno-cultural ones (i.e. Kibria, 2008; Ryan, 2014; Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2010). Our respondents followed an approach similar to Stroup (2017)'s study with Hui Muslims in China – a syncretic one, integrating national, cultural, ethnic, and religious markers to carve out a distinct identity. For our respondents, religious identity through ingroup social solidarity played an essential role in solidifying Isma'ili Muslim identity. It was their Isma'ili-ness which permitted the construction of a hybrid identity based on social solidarity, kinship, and values. This has implications for other 'double minority groups' – i.e. Black Muslims, Ahmadi, Chinese Muslims, LGBTQ Muslims – groups for whom their Muslim identity is important, but who face rejection from the wider Muslim community regarding their Muslim 'authenticity' and from mainstream

society due to their Muslim identity (Kesvani, 2019; Stroup, 2017). Stroup (2017) and Chryssochoou (2014) warn of the danger of essentialising Muslim communities as homogenous monoliths without considering how their diversity can lead to various expressions of their religious identities. Our respondents showed that their 'double minority' status led to a hybrid identity – where they could be authentic to their religious and national identities in their acculturative process, yet adapt and shift these identities contextually. A dichotomous approach to acculturation via assimilation and identity may therefore be reductive in examining identity construction amongst Muslim minorities.

Notes

1. The Perso-Arabic word jamaatkhana literally refers to the "house of the community", and is another term used for masjid/mosque, primarily within the South Asian context.

Acknowledgements

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