

A Response to

***LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER; BRINGING
MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES INTO AUSTRALIAN
SCHOOLS***

LET'S GET REAL!

Vickie Janson

Upload Your Copy of the Muslim Perspectives Curriculum Project:

<http://www.nceis.unimelb.edu.au/school-education/learning-one-another-faqs>

INTRODUCTION

This is a response to selected issues raised in the very disturbing curriculum project *Learning From One Another; Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools*. The over-riding question that must be addressed is this: is this curriculum project education or Islamic indoctrination? I would add, is it historically and theologically accurate? Will this curriculum foster integration or does it justify segregation?

Recently I was given a real example of a young man training to work in a hospital. In the *'lets be culturally sensitive and respect every culture'* part he was asked what to do if a woman wont work with a man or is wearing the wrong clothing. Of course, he knew the answer that the trainer was seeking but marveled that a person would work in an Australian hospital yet refuse to assist a particular gender or wear work appropriate clothing (and expect respect for this).

As you consider this response to the curriculum project, please also consider the consequences of the thinking this curriculum will foster in students' minds in the long term and the type of society it may produce.

And I would like you to consider the claim made by Andrew Robb, MP, when the government announced its intention to develop at our universities the National Centre for Excellence in Islamic Studies (NCEIS), which contributed to this project. Mr Robb claimed *'this institute would be an important vehicle for teaching Islam in an Australian context, applying the usual academic rigor of the university system...'* I would like to suggest if this is the 'usual academic rigor' then our universities are in dire straits.

Learning From One Another; Bringing Muslim Perspectives Into Australian Schools.

While it is true Australian society has gone through significant changes in the last few decades with greater diversity in ethnic groups and religions, it is also true the Muslim population represents a very small minority. Yet Muslims seem to have completely disproportionate attention and funds afforded to them to promote Islam. *Learning From One Another; Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Classrooms* appears to be yet another initiative offering no alternative but to 'respect' Islam as a great religion we should all be grateful to for contributing to our way of life. This is a work which politely undermines the western heritage which has served us well and highlights Australia's lack of morality, while side-stepping, omitting and whitewashing important historical facts and differences.

While telling us he is promoting a *humanist value system* and fostering *inclusiveness* Professor Akbarzadeh has actually presented quite the opposite. This is a document which positively promotes Islam to our children (proselytism), supports separate Muslim facilities, separate financial institutions, separate rules within the school system, separate foods, separate considerations on many occasions. This document does not foster *inclusiveness* at all; rather it fosters *exclusiveness*. This workbook tells us why Muslims will not be integrating the way other peoples have. While non-Muslim Australians are to be socially inclusive learning about Islam, Muslim Australians may be too offended to sit through either Christian religious education (which is part of Australian history and culture) or parts of our secular education system that offend them. How will this ever become a *mutual learning exercise*?

Part A focuses on incorporating Islamic content and Muslim perspectives in all curriculum areas. It hopes to...*develop interfaith understandings* and social relationships...

How will this interfaith understanding be achieved for the Muslim population? Will they be exposed to the Judeo-Christian roots of Australia which developed the Rule of Law and the many institutions that have benefited Australia? Will they be exposed to Christian theology and history and achievements of great Christian men and women in the same way this booklet upholds Muslim achievement? Will they be told the historical Jesus was a Jew, ethnically and religiously, rather than as the Qur'an says, that he was a Muslim? Will they be sensitive to this and understand that to call Jesus a Muslim is an offence to religious Christians? And how will the multitudes of non-Muslim children who have no religious education be able to question any of the Islamic claims? Perhaps they will embrace the Islamic faith and then there will be more segregated groups, separate prayer rooms, unisex swimming pools, sharia finance providers and calls for further implementation of sharia?

While we are all practicing this notion of social inclusivity, please tell me in what way Islam is socially inclusive? Men and women are segregated and as this workbook says, Muslim girls wanting to swim not only require a female only pool, but preferably a *Muslim only* pool.

I understand too well we all have to connect with Muslims on their terms. With my Muslim friends I can eat at their house, but they won't eat at mine. Why are our Muslim friends not being more socially inclusive and accepting the plain words of the Qur'an, which says *the food of the Jews and Christians is permissible*? Why aren't our government and educators pushing this instead of promoting *halal* products if social inclusion is really the goal? As it is, you must forgive people from thinking the goal is really Islamisation and our government is buying into it.

We are told in this workbook that it is intended to provide a *global perspective*. Below are some of the reasons why I believe this document fails to do this. And I feel it is worth noting that a global perspective is not something Islamic nations are known for promoting. Palestine and Saudi Arabia have school textbooks that don't even have Israel appearing on the map! And a number of Muslims I have personally met had no idea Jesus was a Jew. As this workbook intertwines every discipline with religion, one wonders how this could ever possibly provide a global perspective.

ENGLISH

Under 'Issues to look out for' discussions about sex, drug use, music, immorality, crime, Easter, Christmas, birthday parties and religious bias (presumably not supportive of Islam) are all noted as possible areas of sensitivity. I wonder why teachers are not encouraged to dispel some of the myths about birthdays and music being in the same sensitive category as crime and immorality. Perhaps it is not only non-Muslims that need misperceptions and stereotypes addressed if harmonious relationships are to be fostered. After all, this workbook is titled *Learning From One Another*.

It is when we get to define words that the lack of academic integrity in this workbook descends to new levels. I wonder what Muslim would *really* go to the *Macquarie dictionary* to define an ancient Arabic religious word! Of course, the Macquarie dictionary definition of *jihad* as a 'spiritual struggle' is perfect for the recommended exercise of re-writing news articles. It certainly sanitizes a muddy word. But is this a true Islamic definition? Rather than a western dictionary, I was given a Quran by a Muslim friend in Melbourne, which one would expect to be a more reliable definition of Islamic jihad.

The Noble Quran commentary for Surah 2:190 says this: *Al-Jihad (holy fighting) in Allah's cause (with full force of numbers and weaponry) is given the utmost importance in Islam and is one of its pillars (on which it stands). By Jihad Islam is established, Allah's word is made superior (His word being....which means none has the right to be worshipped but Allah), and his religion is propagated. By abandoning Jihad (may Allah protect us from that) Islam is destroyed and the Muslims fall into an inferior position; their honor is lost, their lands are stolen, their rule and authority vanish. Jihad is an obligatory duty in Islam on every Muslim, and he who tries to escape from this duty, or does not in his innermost heart wish to fulfill this duty, dies with one of the qualities of a hypocrite.*

Based on this, what some are calling a bad stereotype is actually just fulfilling a religious duty. The whitewashed workbook merely says 'at times, it can involve armed fighting,

often in self-defense, should that be necessary'. This is a very bad misrepresentation of a word that is used perpetually in Islamic traditions to speak of armed conflict, both offensive and defensive. History bears out that Islam conquered by jihad; nations fell to Islam because of jihad. Why not discuss honestly why this is not expressed as a valid reading today?

Rewriting articles to only provide a positive, sugar coated rendering of an event does not say much about academic integrity. It seems academics offer today the only option Muhammad himself offered people; respect Islam or suffer wrath. (Empirical evidence shows that upsetting Muslim sensitivities has this effect) Objectively analyzing Islam and rejecting it based on Islamic texts, history and behavior supporting this, does not seem to be an option on the table. We are only permitted positive images to counter negative media images regardless of whether there is substance to media articles or not. The assumption is always that the media is getting it wrong when it does not show Islam in a good light.

SCIENCE

Should we be crediting Islam for scientific advancements? Is veiling science in religion now the new academic standard? Are all achievements to be attributed to one's religion? If we apply this same standard to the European textbooks we will have to rewrite them with a greater emphasis on Christianity! This section of the workbook resounds with Islam's achievements and while credit should be given where it is due, academic integrity must be maintained. One could be forgiven when reading this section to come away with the impression that all the works mentioned were innovations of Islam.

For example, stated *Muslim* innovations include 'soap, perfume and toothpaste'. But a simple *Google* search reveals soap making was known as early as 2800BC, perfume in its first form 4,000 years ago and in Egypt 3000BC, and development of toothpaste began as long ago as 300-500BC in China and India. All these examples predate Islam by centuries or millennia! Perhaps Muslim people at some time improved upon what was already existent – but how are students of this workbook to know that these advancements originated elsewhere by different people groups? If a global perspective is to be promoted should recognition not be given to those individuals who originated these sciences rather than Islam claiming these as Muslim innovations? Academic integrity should be maintained.

We are told the need to face the direction of Mecca for prayer 'led to developments in the field of navigation'. Perhaps this could be qualified. Phoenicians, Ancient Greeks and Persians would have preceded Muslims in the field of navigation. What exactly was developed and should credit not be given to the science Muslims acquired from others and built upon?

While the word algebra does come from the Arabic language, much of its method can be traced to earlier traditions; I believe the roots of algebra can be attributed to the ancient Babylonians. Most notably it was Indian mathematics (known as Hindu mathematics), which influenced the Muslim scholar Al- Khwarizmi. The perfected Indian system

passed over to the Arabians in 773AD along with certain astronomical writings. This timing would seem in keeping with the Islamic invasion of India under Muhammad Qasun where everything was plundered. According to author Dave Hunt the 'massacres perpetrated by Muslims in India are unparalleled in history, bigger in sheer numbers than the holocaust.'¹ How Muslims acquired this science is omitted from the workbook, which is at odds with the stated aim of giving Australians a global perspective. In the scientific chain Muslim scholars were definitely a link; but would this conclusion really be drawn from the workbook or would students form the opinion that Islam was the source?

The first records for the symbol we use for the number zero were apparently from Hindu writings; some say mid 5th century and others as late as 9th century. The Mayan culture had a symbol for the number zero 4AD as well as the Babylonians. Other sources say Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia offers the first evidence of the number zero, some millennia before the advent of Islam. It's what the workbook doesn't say; with a couple of exceptions you could be forgiven for assuming these things were entirely Islamic.

MATHS

The segment on tessellations is interesting. I believe in keeping with the global perspective theme it would have been beneficial to note the word tessellation is from a Latin word meaning 'small square stones used in ancient Roman mosaics.' Tessellations are found in Moorish, Asian, Persian and Greek art and buildings. And Sumerians used geometric tilings (ie tessellations) as decorations about 4,000BC. This does not detract from the beautiful work and achievements of the Muslim people but tessellations in building and art is not the exclusive domain of Islam, which originated in the 7th century.

HISTORY

I take exception to the claim in the 'history' section that Islam 'lay the intellectual foundations for enlightenment in Europe'. Dr Mark Durie in his book 'The Third Choice' comments on the narrative that Islam underwent a golden age of cultural and scientific development, preserving Greek learning, which then kick started the Western Renaissance. Let me quote:

'Of course Greek civilization did not need 'rescue-by-conquest': indeed it continued in Constantinople all through the European dark ages. It is true that when the Europeans translated Arabic texts into Latin, this did stimulate the development of Western philosophy and science. Many terms passed over from Arabic into European languages as a result, including sherbet, zero, and zenith. However the fact that elements of Greek philosophy and science were transmitted to Europe via Arabic was not something for which Western children should be schooled to feel grateful. If Arab conquest had never happened we can assume that Greek culture and philosophy would have continued to develop in Alexandria, Damascus and Constantinople to the present day.'

¹ Dave Hunt, *Judgement Day; Islam, Israel and the Nations*, The Berean Call, USA, 2006, 165

*In reality, as Crombie pointed out in Augustine to Galileo, the conquest of the heart of the Greek-speaking world by Islam, and resulting Arab control of the Mediterranean, stunted scientific progress in Europe. ..Mohammedan invaders into the Eastern Empire in the 7th century gave the most serious blow to learning in Western Christendom. The conquest of much of the Eastern Empire by the Arabs meant that the main reservoir of Greek learning was cut off from Western scholars for centuries....*²

I note this workbook states 'Muslims have their own version of history that needs to be acknowledged and appreciated.' It appears the Muslim version of history, which we *must* appreciate, is only the positive version.

1. It is clearly stated under 'issues' that Muslims have a different worldview and reference is made to the distinct lack of references to the history of Islam in history textbooks used in Victorian secondary schools.
2. Further, it is recommended that teacher and students learn from each other in the classroom to alleviate this ignorance.
3. And recommended reading includes *People Like Us; How arrogance is dividing Islam and West*, by Waleed Aly.

The concerning features of the three previous statements include the assumption that 'all worldviews are equally beneficial'. While freedom is a hallmark of the countries shaped by the western worldview it is clear theologically, legally and historically that this is not the case where Islam is the prevailing worldview. And that Palestinian and Saudi textbooks actually omit Israel from their maps, indicates that this idea of global and social inclusion is not prevalent in many Islamic contexts.

It is assumed that students, who as yet probably have no knowledge of comparative theology in which to frame their cultural experience in Islam, shall be able to teach the teacher. Many of these students are influenced by negative portrayals of western colonialism while totally ignorant of Islam's period of colonial jihad, which was perpetuated for centuries. Where is the balance?

Yet a book attributing differences in understanding to simply 'arrogance and ignorance' is recommended reading. This is in itself Islamic theology. Islamically, the human problem is said to be ignorance and the answer is guidance. And Islam conveniently provides this guidance. If we really want to promote a global perspective perhaps this book of Waleed Aly's should be offered in companion with a Christian response to it titled '*Ideological Jihad; Come Mr Aly Let Us Reason Together.*' It was my aim in writing this book as an open letter to Waleed Aly to highlight it's not always arrogance and ignorance, but instead legitimate differences, which prevent real social cohesion.

It is interesting in the Crusades section of the workbook that Saladin's Secretary is quoted as being totally focused on his *holy war*. In Mr Aly's recommended book Aly argues very strongly that in Islam there is no such concept as *holy war* – while he does attribute this principle to Christianity. Yet history is rampant with Islamic quotes about holy war. In these workbook examples the westerners are portrayed as immoral with

² Dr Mark Durie, *The Third Choice; Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom*, Mark Durie 2010, 217

no honor or jealousy, and Jerusalem needed to be '*purified of the filth of the hellish Europeans to put on the robe of honor of Islam*'. These historical sources affirm an Islam with a sense of superiority and a hatred for the 'infidel' – it was perhaps brave, and certainly telling, to include them. Perhaps these ancient sentiments could be connected to the more contemporary attitudes towards non-Muslims defiling Islamic lands with their presence? Clearly Mecca is holy because non-Muslims are forbidden entry, a fact which undermines any claims that Islam offers equality.

It is clear, from the questions posed on the next page, that an assumption is being made that Christians and Muslims were capable of bad attitudes and behavior. But it is not made clear where these attitudes come from. While a Christian displaying such attitudes would be behaving *contrary* to the teachings of the Christian Scriptures, a Muslim could be said to be *fulfilling* their Scriptures. The religions are painted as equally beneficial while the core teachings are at variance.

Why isn't the history included which argues for the Crusades as a response to four centuries of jihad? As Christian lands fell to Islam one after another it can be validly argued that when it came to Jerusalem the Christian nations said, enough is enough, and roused themselves to action to safeguard the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land. Is it education or indoctrination to omit such discussion?

GEOGRAPHY

I was wondering why it was said 'without the *Muslim* mapping of the world, Columbus might not have discovered America'. Do we suppose America would remain undiscovered if not for Islam's contribution? Mapping on clay tablets in Assyria began as early as 500 BC and construction of the first Greek maps was 6BC.

Is it healthy to attribute so much to religion? 'Muslim' is a very general term. Why are most other achievements noted in history by *ethnic or national* origin and a different standard applied to countries of totally different cultures that collectively call themselves 'Muslim?' By uniting the Muslim achievements isn't this just another tactic in undermining national identities in support of a corporate Islamic identity? Isn't this merely encouraging the recognition and acceptance of a worldwide Islamic state expressed for us most recently by the radical group Hizb Ut-Tahrir at their *Khalifa* Conference in Sydney? While helping students to find the direction of Mecca is an interesting exercise, is this the direction Australia really wants to face?

ARTS

While it may be true Muslims have contributed much to the arts, I think this once again needs to be put in context. Let me quote from Durie's research.

'The Muslim Arab people who spread out from Arabia to conquer the Middle East did not bring significant visual artistic traditions with them. However, they did conquer brilliant civilizations, which had highly developed arts and crafts, including Persians, Egyptians (Copts), Greeks, Armenians, and Hindus. After Islamic conquest, vast non-Muslim populations, initially majorities in their ancestral lands and enduring harsh conditions of

*military occupation, continued to produce art. At what point did their artistic creations become 'Islamic?'*³

Let's be honest and give credit where credit is due. Cat Stevens, now known as Yusuf Islam, is an *English* artist who gained fame prior to Islam. Islam shut down his creative expression until very recently. Why attribute his talents to Islam?

It is said in the workbook 'many traditional legal opinions view music unfavorably,' which is somewhat understated. It's more readily taught that music is from Satan, giving this particular cultural expression a very bad standing in Islam and demonizing a cultural activity enjoyed by the rest of the world. Let's just be honest.

HEALTH AND PE

While 'Muslims value health and physical education' it is women who are limited in this regard. Many veiled women who don't expose themselves enough to the sun are likely to suffer Vitamin D deficiency. Women often miss out on sport because of clothing issues; clothing that is not permissible in sports because it either hinders movement, is dangerous or simply is seen as not being inclusive in a team sport.

Teams present themselves as a unified team. Given this, it is sad to read that many parents unnecessarily have their primary school children in hijab, 'to get them used to it'. Why should we get children 'used to' being segregated and denied team participation? Why should they not get used to wearing the same as other children and be included? School uniforms are a form of social inclusion and have an equalizing effect.

Suggesting these problems are linked to modesty and morality tends to support the pervasive Muslim attitudes that non-Muslims are, in the main, immodest and immoral. Perhaps this is why Muslim females prefer not just 'female only' swimming pools but 'Muslim only' pools. This segregation is simply not helpful to notions of integration.

And while claims of immorality may be thrown at non-Muslims, suggestions of immorality connected to:

- child marriage, (which was practiced by Islam's prophet and therefore condoned by many Muslims today)
- polygamy
- the temporary (mutah) marriage facilitated by some Muslims
- or any number of human rights abuses under sharia law

are seen as intolerant attacks on a righteous religion. Why would we be promoting tolerance of intolerant attitudes and moral superiority in our classrooms?

ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

Why is this booklet promoting sharia finance, the financial arm of sharia law, to our students? Sharia finance is a modern innovation of the Muslim brotherhood and links to

³ Durie, page 6

terrorism are proven. Are the discussions about the zakat (charity) collected going to include jihad as a legitimate charity? Many Islamic sources uphold this practice.

Sharia finance, currently promoted in Australia by our Government as 'ethical finance' lists as unethical, with prostitution and gambling, our quite legitimate pork and alcohol industries. I consider this defamation of legitimate Australian industries. Are the discussions about sharia finance going to include the nature of sharia law which legislates in favor of public floggings for drinking alcohol, execution for the 'crimes' of homosexuality, adultery, blasphemy and apostasy and amputation of limbs for theft so they can evaluate if sharia in any form may be called 'ethical?' How can the government suggest it does not support the introduction of sharia law while promoting sharia finance?

And one wonders why the underlying premise is not questioned. That is, that 'infidel' money has to be cleansed Islamically. Are these the socially inclusive attitudes that we should be fostering as Australians? Is our food, money and even presence (in swimming pools for example) unclean?

Perhaps in answer to the workbook's concern that *many Muslims live in poverty* a discussion on the effect of negative attitudes toward non-Muslims and consequent rejection of capitalist ideas might be in order.

From the western heritage sprung the democratic Rule of Law and from Islam sprung sharia law. At its core, the western system values freedom of speech and freedom of religion. At its core, Islam legislates against these values with apostasy and blasphemy laws, which may both carry the death penalty. So attributing the terms 'moral and ethical' is very subjective.

I recently heard Dr Salim Atchia comment in this way about Islam and the West: *Right and wrong, good and bad, legal and illegal. We look at it in a very, very different way.* I think Australia needs to be deciding which way she wants it rather than defaulting to Islamic values and sanctioning the development of parallel societies. Suggesting students explore the principles of Islamic banking without introducing them to the overarching sharia legal principles is merely propaganda. (Particularly as the activity was to sell the service, which would restrict students to the sellable points)

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

It appears that the justification for positive Muslim content in schools to counteract negative stereotypes represents an impetus for balance without an analysis of whether or not any of the negative stereotypes are actually true reflections. For example, if 9 out of 10 terrorist attacks are committed in the name of Islam is it actually misrepresenting Islam to call this terrorism 'Islamic'? Is denial actually helpful in understanding the world we live in? The website 'The Religion of Peace'

<http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/>

documents as at October 2010 Islamic terrorists have carried out more than 16,000 deadly terror attacks since 9/11. If this figure is accurate, I cannot say for sure, but if it is anywhere near this type of figure is it really stereotyping Muslims to say this is associated with Islam? If this topic is too sensitive to discuss, how on earth will this global problem ever be confronted? Looking at why some Muslims behave this way may be helpful. If we are to include Muslim content in schools it can't just be a whitewashed version. I note that suggested topics on page 59 do include the Bali terrorist bombings yet I haven't noticed resources for understanding the justification for this supplied in the workbook. It would seem prudent to assume for so many attacks to be happening, there is religious justification.

The contact between Ivanhoe Grammar school and the Balinese School SMAN 4 is encouraging. However, does a *Balinese* school really represent the attitudes of the mainland Indonesians?

It is discouraging to see the results of the job applicant survey. Unjust discrimination is sad. However, having been employed as a recruiter of staff, I'm aware that the whole recruitment process is one of necessary discrimination as it is based on the recommended selection criteria. As is noted in the workbook, if good communication skills is high on the criteria list a quick look at how long a person has been in Australia from a non-English speaking country, or a low standard of English presented in the application, may indicate a possible shortfall. But it's not just skills employers' want. They want a compatibility with their own cultural environment in order to maintain harmonious working relationships. Every company has its own company culture. Many want Australian experience so staff will work according to Australian industry standards. If this is preferable and applications are received which meet that requirement, obviously they will receive preference. The employers themselves dictate the selection criteria. I don't know that this is always 'racial' discrimination. I have Egyptians friends who seem to only employ Arabs, and know Asian restaurants tend to only employ Asians. They have the cultural fit they want.

'Muslims are involved in a continual learning process about the requirements of their faith, and it would be helpful if this journey was shared constructively with the school...' page 64

I cannot see how educators can, or should, share the faith 'journey' with their students, Muslim or otherwise; many educators are secular in approach, and may be personally atheist in their outlook or indifferent to religion, as is their right. Faith matters, from the Muslim perspective, seem to have crept back into schools under the heading of 'culture' while Christianity has more often than not been shunned. If faith matters are to be reintroduced then I believe we need to have Christian teaching as well.

ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

This section begins...'Since September 11, 2001, and the other acts of terror that followed...'

The word 'followed' (being past tense) is a misrepresentation of the acts of terror around the world, which still follow daily. This statement should reflect the *continuing* problem the world faces.

It is suggested that Muslim students may find oral presentations intimidating and difficult. I think it's fair to say this is true of most students but nevertheless public speaking is a skill our education system is dedicated to equipping young people with.

The comment '*looking people in the eye is improper in some cultures*' assumes teachers should be tolerant. Does this mean teachers should tolerate what is considered rude in Australian culture? How will this tolerance help the student learn to interact in the broader community? How will it help them perform well in an interview? Shouldn't this be part of some of the behavior that should be modified to enable Muslim students to integrate and flourish in Australia – like shaking hands in a professional setting? Isn't Australian culture to be respected as well?

It is said a '*good way to engage and motivate Muslim students is to incorporate content about Muslims from different parts of the world into classroom learning*'. If it's 'all about me' should we also incorporate content about China for the Chinese, information about Buddhism for the Buddhists and cater to every individual student's needs? Does this mean Christianity will be reintroduced back into curriculum studies to cater to the Christian student? Are we forming open minds in our classrooms or merely having closed minds for our future? How is an Australian identity to be developed?

IDENTITY, CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING

It is said Muslims are constantly '*dodging negative allegations and stereotypes*' or instinctively *withdrawing or rebelling*. I believe dodging, withdrawing and rebelling are all wrong responses. Don't these issues need to be addressed? Is this workbook itself, rather than addressing the issues, not actually another exercise in dodging them?

The inclination to 'see ourselves as superior' is a challenge for all peoples. Islam in particular has a theology of superiority. The Quran refers to Muslims as *the best of people* and this is reflected legally in sharia law throughout the Islamic world, with legislation treating non-Muslims as second-class citizens.

Perhaps when people are dismissive of Islam what they are dismissing is the many Islamic values, such as just noted, that run contrary to a free, democratic, equal and integrated society. In an Islamic seminar I attended in Melbourne on the subject of integration where Muslims were encouraged to acknowledge and smile at non-Muslims to dispel any fears, I experienced quite the opposite. Although I had put myself within the Islamic community I was not socially included; women wearing the niqab, Islamic face veil, stood at a distance rather than approaching to welcome me or introduce themselves. I am not stereotyping, I am merely reporting that dodging, withdrawing and rebelling appears to be more natural to some than attempting to belong, because of a theology that considers others less, which is reflected in Islamic law.

The workbook claims it is 'unfair' for Muslims to be asked if they are Australian first or Muslim first based on the fact that Christian, Jewish, Buddhist Australians are not asked the same question. But is it unfair?

Do these other religious groups have a published agenda to impose a theocratic state? Is the notion of a political-religious state crossing national borders part of their theology? Islam is a political ideology with its own legal system – is not supporting Islamic legal principles in favor of Australian laws seditious?

At the 2008 Mercy mission (Islamic) conference in Melbourne it was taught there is no clash of civilizations – but a rise and fall of civilizations. The decline of western power was noted and the rise of Islam was said to first take shape socially, which is evident, and then politically. This is not western anti-Islam propaganda or a conspiracy theory. Muslim scholars presented this to the Muslim community as a genuine expectation of the consequences of *dawah* (proselytism) efforts. Muslims expect a greater political influence for recognition of Islam. And this effort on the part of the NCEIS appears to support this goal.

When describing ‘normative Islam’ at this conference, Dr Maher Magrabi defined the functions of the mosque as an all-purpose Islamic centre catering for spiritual and material affairs. Calling Muslims back to this model, he clarified the mosque was a place of prayer and education, and also a type of town hall where both **political and military** matters were discussed.

I noticed that meetings I attended in Melbourne were essentially political in nature with a break for prayers. If the mosque in ‘normative Islam’ is a place where political and military matters are discussed is it Islamophobia to resist building them? And why is this inconvenient truth omitted from our NCEIS/ACSA presentation of Islam in Australia? Why shouldn’t our children get a picture of the reality rather than a whitewashed wish list of what Islam could or should be? Is this education or indoctrination?

The recent publicity the group *Hizb Ut-Tahrir* received as they denounced democracy and called for their Islamic State is clear evidence this type of thinking is being perpetuated in Australia. All this goes to the question of why ascertaining allegiance from our Muslim citizens is a concern not directed at other communities. Other communities do not have such agendas. It is not *unfair* as LFOA claims; it is critical for the safeguarding of freedom and democracy.

LFOA claims that ‘*when things go wrong, it is not because of who they are*’. I assume these things ‘going wrong’ are acts of terrorism around the world. It is difficult to justify saying ‘it is not because of who they are’ when in fact the converse is often the claim of the individuals perpetrating acts of terrorism in the name of Islam. They are doing this precisely because of ‘who they are’ and perpetuating a pattern of jihad and vengeance for perceived wrongs. It is because they are Muslims they are taking this course of action. This is a culture that requires honor, when perceived to be lost, to be restored and shame ‘cleansed’.

LFOA advises that ‘*some Muslim parents do not allow their children to attend parties*’. This is yet another example where ‘tolerating exclusion’ rather than encouraging some inclusion seems to be the standard. Parents are free to make these choices, but shouldn’t the role of educators be to *encourage* inclusion where possible, espousing the

benefits of social and team participation? Stating these issues can be *traumatic for families* highlights what an enormous job Australia has in trying to promote a cohesive society. The experience of a girl locked in a room in Afghanistan is traumatic, and it is difficult to compare this to the trauma of a girl attending a social gathering in Australia. Surely we must help our citizens come out of some of these limiting practices?

Quoted in LFOA is the general sentiment: *'Morally, Australia is not a good place to rear children. Smoking, drugs and illicit relations are a constant threat...'*

This quote no doubt reflects the views of the majority of Muslim people and shows how Australians are viewed as morally inferior. Shouldn't it be pointed out there are different moral standards to consider? Smoking is not a feature of western democracies alone and at least in Australia we have aggressive campaigns to help people quit, warnings on cigarette packs etc. Is it morally superior to be the supplier or the supplied? The Islamic world's contribution to the drug market is no secret. According to international speaker David Goldman, drug addiction in Iran is ten times that of the USA and prostitution is rampant. Should these statistics be revealed or would these things also be attributed to western influence?

Is it morally superior to sanction the practice of child brides, polygamy, temporary marriages, female circumcision, and capital punishment for the crime of changing one's religion? I don't think it is helpful for Muslims to make claims regarding morality. Statistics in Egypt highlighting sexual abuse of women and girls are rather alarming; someone freely choosing to enter a sexual relationship cannot be compared in moral terms to someone forced into that relationship, particularly when that person is a child.

And yet Islamic law may sanction all these horrors. Shouldn't we be assisting our Muslim citizens to alter their perspective a little and value 'freedom' – something that is often referred to in rather negative ways yet is the hallmark of western society? Freedom does allow people to make poor choices; but better freedom than tyranny! Islam certainly cannot claim the high moral ground.

Dr Clyne's interviews include the sentiment *'you cannot become part of mainstream Australian society due to the cultural difference. So for the sake of maintaining one's identity, you tend to find refuge in religion...'*

Isn't this a rather dangerous revelation? Muslim people are not able to become part of mainstream society – which our integration policy would support. But rather they remain 'on the fringe' and finding refuge in a religion which often views non-Muslims very poorly.

Dr Clyne's comment about Muslims *'not having enough homework'* is a concern of many parents and a sad reflection on our deteriorating education system. But the comment about the need to *harshly punish students* and the very different teacher/student relationship should speak to us about the nature of Islam.

I read earlier this year that the 'British schools secretary has refused to ban smacking at Islamic schools even though it is banned in all other state and private schools to *avoid upsetting Muslim sensitivities'*. Here we have two different standards, we have parallel rules being developed and in one school a teacher could be prosecuted for an act of

violence against a student while in another the same act is acceptable. Isn't this madness?

A further reflection of the UK's madness was highlighted in the UK Telegraph which noted that *British Police have sanctioned the throwing of shoes by Muslim protesters on the grounds that it is 'a symbolic' political gesture rather than a criminal act of violence. So whilst throwing a bottle or a non-Islamic shoe is considered criminal violence; shoe-throwing by a Muslim is an act of ritual protest! And Muslims have quickly used the concession to their advantage pelting Downing St with shoes during a recent protest against Israel. "Ski boots and clogs were also hurled at the US Consulate in Edinburgh in a related protest, in which three policemen were injured".*

But the propaganda that violence is not an inherent part of Islam continues to pour out in these types of publications despite concessions being made for violence all around the world.

It must be noted that one of Dr Clyne's interviewees stated that one of the *greatest disadvantages* for Muslim children living in Australia is *'too much freedom'*. Perhaps some education on how to manage this freedom may be a better investment rather than educating the rest of Australia's children how to appreciate a lack of it.

FACILITATING RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND CUSTOMS IN SCHOOLS

Of course the most obvious question to this statement is *why?* When did our schools ever take such an interest in facilitating religion; Especially a religion that undermines our own Judeo-Christian heritage, freedom, democracy and the Rule of Law? Is this helpful?

We are told to beware the wet, slippery floors from all that wasted water used in ritual washing before prayers– a precious commodity in Australia and something schools should be educating all students about. I have waded through the puddles myself and wondered why on earth we are promoting this in our dry land. There is Islamic precedence in law to perform another ritual if water is short. Surely in Australia some innovative alternative could be recommended?

HALAL FOOD

LFOA notes that *'some Muslims believe that meat slaughtered by the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), is also permissible, based on a verse in the Qur'an'... and by examples in the sunna of Prophet Muhammad confirming he consumed meat prepared by Jews and Christians'.*

Wouldn't it be wise to promote this understanding given it has Quranic support and would be helpful in enabling people to eat together freely? The underlying and sometimes stated premise is clear; non-halal equates to impure. Non-Muslims are in effect impure. This is not a healthy understanding of others.

Why should it be recommended that schools source halal certified products when students can either choose to eat freely based on the above understanding, or simply

choose to adopt a vegetarian diet on this occasion? Why foster halal? Had it occurred to NCEIS and ACSA that some non-Muslims may object to eating halal? At our local kindergarten some years ago halal food was the only food available. My Iranian friend was most distressed about this and wondered why Australian kindergartens had been Islamised. Some might be offended that the Australia's famous 'Vegemite' is now halal. Is there an option for those who don't want to support halal and want non-halal Vegemite? It seems that little freedom has been removed.

Many people do not want to support the Islamisation of Australia. And even some who dispute the common spiritual heritage of Christians and Muslims would even view halal food as 'food sacrificed to an idol'. It would therefore be unclean to them. However this minority would be overlooked, despite this being exactly the position of many Muslims concerning non-halal food.

HIJAB

The condition some Muslims put upon Muslim clothing '*not imitating the clothing of non-Muslims*' again just reveals the absolute disdain for all things western. I believe accommodating these thoughts is the wrong response if we want to really achieve a socially inclusive society. How can intolerance be tolerated? This is a wrong attitude implying westerners are so bad we cannot even copy their clothing.

And the idea of *hosting hijab fashion shows* just makes a mockery of the whole business. If, as this workbook claims, the purpose of hijab is to *not* attract attention it hardly seems consistent to then roll them out as fashion statements and gather a crowd! Why promote something for modesty's sake and then flaunt it?

At the outset of this section it is noted that hijab implies '*a barrier*'. While I personally don't see the headscarf as a barrier, I don't think anyone in their right mind could honestly argue the *niqab* (face covering) is not a real barrier to communication and integration. It is completely out of place in our open and transparent society and should not be tolerated. Whether freely worn or not, it is a symbol of oppression and an impediment to normal interactions; not to mention a growing security issue.

CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

It is noted that the objection to Muslim girls' participation in school camps is based on '*Islamic legal opinion*' forbidding her to travel more than a day and a night without a male relative. This is a good example of why the ancient legal arm of sharia should be severed: it prohibits closer interaction and limits some of our citizens in participating in things they may well want to participate in and would benefit from. And they are denied this *due to a foreign legal opinion*. Shouldn't our education system be encouraging the Muslim parents to allow participation, reassuring them of the supervision arrangements and safety provided? Why should they continue to think their daughter would be defiled on a school camp? Why can only a Muslim in attendance address this problem? When will non-Muslims ever be trusted?

SHAKING HANDS

It is said '*while not shaking hands in an Australian context might be seen as rude, this perception can easily be changed by increasing intercultural understanding*'.

Oh I see, we can easily change our long held cultural practice of shaking hands because a Muslim cannot! Why can't a Muslim perspective be changed so that they understand there is nothing wrong with shaking hands, it's good business practice, polite and part of adapting to Australian culture? Why are the majority so flexible in adapting and the minority so unwilling? Perhaps it is these small things that may have a negative impact on some Muslims' ability to secure suitable employment? Don't all these small actions of submission on the part of Australians just validate a theology of superiority on the part of Islam?

KEY MUSLIM BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

It is true Islam believes all human beings are born in a state of purity (*fitra*) but I've heard it taught in Islamic lectures on several occasions that this state of *fitra* is actually synonymous with *Muslim*. The normal teaching in Islam is that all people are born Muslim however our parents can corrupt us and lead us into other wrong religions or no religion at all. When one 'converts' to Islam it is actually not a conversion but a *reversion* as they are returning to their original perfect state as a Muslim.

What is presented in this workbook omits the inconvenient truth that while simultaneously claiming to be an 'Abrahamic faith' Islam considers Jews to be condemned and Christians to have gone astray. Indeed the compulsory prayer five times a day includes the affirmation that a Muslim is not to be like a Jew who has earned God's anger or a Christian who has gone astray. Others have put what I just said more strongly suggesting Jews and Christians are actually cursed daily in ritual prayers. This workbook does not reflect the truth about how Islam views others.

PILLARS OF FAITH

The workbook highlights some dispute over the use of the name *Allah* for God in South East Asia where use of this by non-Muslims is not highly regarded. However, the authors neglect to mention the enormous divergence of opinion on this by other 'People of the Book'. In short, it is publicly argued that Allah and Yahweh (the revealed covenant name of God in the Bible) are two quite different characters. Not all subscribe to the belief that an Islamic veil can be cast over the entire Biblical history in order to satisfy Islamic belief. This is not a very scholarly approach.

PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS

Explaining why Islam claims to *not* be a new religion, the authors highlight that the Quran calls all the prophets Muslims. This is indeed what the Quran says yet there is a historical reality to who these other characters actually were; they were predominately Jews both ethnically and religiously.

Muslims have a narrative centered on Mecca. Jews and Christians have a narrative centered on Jerusalem. Redefining things appears to be what Islam does best. As part of encouraging a robust education system wouldn't a discussion on the merits of these claims be warranted or at least some effort to highlight the fact that these claims are highly contested? Knowing the Islamic narrative is not that helpful when so many Australians would not even know the Biblical narrative. Social inclusion should be just that. If religious books are to be taught in school then students should also be familiar, Muslim and non-Muslim, with the religious text that shaped the Judeo-Christian worldview of which they are now a part.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD

It is Islamically not permissible to present Islam's prophet in any other way than favorably. Unfortunately, this is not conducive to historical integrity. It is sad that our education department has submitted themselves to this Islamic norm in keeping with sharia standards rather than upholding academic integrity. Muhammad is said to be a man of the highest moral character and conduct despite his well-documented appetites for women, booty and war. Contrary to this workbook, Islamic sources confirm his '10 other wives' were not for reasons of sympathetic kindness at all. Islamic hadith confirm that he was attracted by beauty. His wives included the acquisition of his stepson's wife, and Ayesha a child bride. Some were women whose husbands, fathers and brothers were slain by Muhammad and therefore up for the taking. The promise of women as war booty was part of the lure for the following he attracted. This was a promise of women in life or death, with a theology developed of eternal virgins in large numbers for those that made the ultimate sacrifice in battle and could not consummate their victory on earth.

This section concludes with: 'Islam had now spread to all corners of Arabia...' It's an oversight not to mention that Islam was spread by conquest; not just of Mecca and the rest of Arabia, but the surrounding nations Islam attacked. Muhammad was not just a religious leader; he was a statesman and a military man who personally led dozens of battles.

This is not to say that Islam's prophet did not possess any qualities. However the workbook's portrayal of Muhammad disregards great volumes of Islamic history to paint a whitewashed picture for western consumption. Why would educational institutions do this? This is not education. This is merely proselytism.

THE THIRD PILLAR OF ISLAM – SCRIPTURES

The authors omitted noting that the 5 pillars of Islam are not in the Quran but can only be found in the hadith. Also omitted is what many Islamic commentaries refer to as the sixth pillar of Islam, which is jihad.

Quote: *'The fight for the holy city of Jerusalem between Jews, Christians and Muslims demonstrates the common history that these religions all share'*.

Well, actually it does no such thing. When Islam attacked Egypt did this demonstrate a common history with the Egyptians because Islam fought for their cities?

Jews and Christians have a history with Jerusalem because of the book they share which states it's God's Holy City, the place where he chose to place His Name forever, and because the Jewish people resided there. Jesus of course was a Jew. He was crucified there and is expected to return to Jerusalem.

But Islam flew in from Arabia. The only claim to Jerusalem as Islam's holy city is based on a mythical night journey made by Muhammad to the temple in Jerusalem, which at the time of Muhammad didn't actually exist. Islam's presence in Jerusalem was much, much later. And apart from this one allusion to Jerusalem, which is not even mentioned by name, there are no other references to Jerusalem in the Qur'an. Mecca is the holy city of Islam. So Jerusalem offering common ground is quite contentious.

QURAN

The Quran is noted as a source of guidance in belief, law and ethics and the importance of recitation emphasized. However 80% of Muslims are non-Arabic speaking, and even for the Arabic speakers, they cannot often comprehend the ancient Arabic. So this guidance does not come directly from the Quran but more often from Quranic scholars who both interpret and translate it. Today, the Quran is not '*plainly understood*' as it actually claims. Those who follow what some would call the 'plain teachings' become what we call Islamists or terrorists. This is a text that must be handled with great caution.

THE SIXTH PILLAR OF FAITH – DIVINE PREDESTINATION

'Most Muslims believe God has predetermined the fate of everything'

This particular philosophy can be quite dangerous. My Muslim friend maintained because of this philosophy, that for those who were murdered in the Bali bombings it must have been – 'their time to die'. This attitude demonstrates a difficulty with this type of thinking which is not addressed at all in the workbook. If we attribute all things to the will of God it somewhat removes personal responsibility for our own actions, and in this case for robbing others of life.

THE SECOND PILLAR OF ISLAM – PRAYER

The recitation of prayer from the Quran includes al-Fatihah; thanking God 17 times a day that one is not a Jew or a Christian who have earned God's anger or gone astray. The meaning of al-Fatihah is omitted in the workbook.

ZAKAT

It is said zakat is intended to purify one's wealth and is a form of wealth redistribution usually given to the poor and destitute, orphans, poor relatives and so on. However, while this is true, it is also true that zakat may legitimately be given for jihad. Why

should this be omitted? This particular use of zakat is one of the problems associated with the promotion of sharia finance.

HAJJ

This fifth pillar of Islam is said to have an equalizing effect. 'During the hajj, everyone is equal'. This comment overlooks the fact that under sharia law men and women are not equal at all and more importantly in our global village, non-Muslim and Muslim are not equal. This is evidenced by the banning of non-Muslims from entering Mecca altogether. It should be highlighted that only those Muslims in Mecca at this time are really considered equal while non-Muslims are forbidden entry.

WHO ARE MUSLIMS?

We are told some interesting facts here. There are moderate and extreme Muslims but nevertheless, all who call themselves Muslim share some common basic beliefs. One of these is honesty and another kindness.

Yet 'extreme' elements do not share these as basic virtues at all. They subscribe to an Islamic doctrine called 'Taqiyya' – which is ordained deceit in the cause of Islam. There are Islamic legal books on the subject of Taqiyya outlining permissible deceptions. I think it's fair to say that many eastern thinkers are more concerned about 'honor and shame' concepts rather than 'truth.' And as regards kindness, the Quran speaks of many kindnesses toward other Muslims, but I'm not so sure you could reach this same conclusion exegetically reading the comments about non-Muslims. Shouldn't the whole spectrum be presented rather than just the niceties?

A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM

It's noted here that 'Mecca...was a meeting place for poets and story tellers...' wouldn't it be a good exercise to see the Quran in this light and consider the environment which shaped Islam's theology?

The history outlined once again omits the unpleasanties. It's not mentioned that the *Rightly Guided Successors* were assassinated and what a bloody history Islam was founded upon. After Muhammad's death Abu Bakr (the first Rightly Guided Successor) with other loyal followers of Muhammad enforced Muhammad's command 'whoever relinquishes his faith, kill him!' During the next two years (632-634AD) about seventy thousand former Muslims were killed in the 'Wars of Apostasy'. Reading the history portrayed in LFOA one could be forgiven for thinking there was a small family tiff leading to a division of Sunni and Shiite Muslims. We read about 'theological conflicts' rather than war and murder.

The suggestion that non-Muslims were allowed to live peacefully and practice their faith as long as they abided by the law of the land (sharia) and paid the jizya is very misleading. The law towards non-Muslims was very harsh and discriminatory. The jizya was paid as a 'head tax' – in some cases literally paying to keep your head on your shoulders. Much is written about this and Dr Mark Durie's recent book 'The Third Choice' is an excellent resource. This does not appear to be a 'happy-clappy' age of social

cohesion at all. Surely in the pursuit of academic integrity what is referred to here as the 'Islamic Golden Age' should be challenged with the corresponding history which records the same period as the 'Dark Ages?'

THE MODERN PERIOD

Here the global focus of Al-Qaeda is mentioned as '*giving Islam global dominance once again.*' There is no mention of terrorism at all connected with this, which the world knows well, is their means. This may make students wonder why the early expansion of Islam was any different from the terrorist efforts of the expansionists today. They are both just set on expansion! LFOA describes the fundamentalism just noted as '*Islamic revivalism.*' It is hard to say this terrorism is not Islamic if it is defined here as 'Islamic revivalism!'

ORIGINS OF ISLAM IN AUSTRALIA

It is said that particularly after September 11, 2001, some Muslims have actively promoted interfaith dialogue and have sought to teach more about Islam and Muslims to the wider public. This is true. But what has been taught is very much in line with LFOA. In the spirit of 'avoiding shame and bringing honor' only positive interpretations have been presented and often at the expense of truth.

What is presented is 'dawah' – or Islamic proselytism. Muslims have gained ground in acquiring their own prayer rooms, separate toilets, segregated public meetings, Islamic schools, mosques and dawah centres, and sharia compliance in the food and financial markets. We can only anticipate the sharia courts already operating in the UK. This all fits nicely with the extremist agenda to impose sharia, in preparation for the Islamic state or *Caliphate*. But it doesn't fit all that well with Australia's agenda to see all people integrated under one law.

MISCONCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

1. ISLAM IS INTOLERANT OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Quote: 'Muhammad was always respectful of people of other faiths *who did not harm him*'. (italics mine)

It must be noted that those who 'harmed' Muhammad by criticizing him – saying 'injurious things' – could pay for this with their life. Islamic history details the assassination of both male and female poets for this crime. And the sharia blasphemy law upholds the death penalty to this day.

Quote: '*The Quran treats the People of the Book's scripture with respect.*'

Actually, it instructs that the scripture of the Jews and Christians is corrupted and abrogated. Let's be honest.

2. ISLAM IS AGAINST DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Well I have heard this taught in Australia in several places – ‘democracy is a system of kufr’ (the infidel). And it makes sense theologically because *shura* is no doubt consultation between Muslims – not consultation between Muslims and non-Muslims - who are second-class citizens under sharia (and should not be in a position over Muslims). While the authors may disagree with this statement they will be at odds theologically with a vast amount of Islamic theology. This is a real concern for all democracies.

3. WOMEN ARE INFERIOR TO MEN IN ISLAM

Again, the testimony of a woman is not equal to the testimony of a man in a sharia court. There are a number of other inequalities but suffice to say this legal position is enough to illustrate the inferior position of women.

4. MUSLIMS WANT TO BE DIFFERENT AND DRESS DIFFERENTLY

The authors mention the hijab but not the burqa or niqab. Head coverings are not really the issue; it's face coverings. Facial recognition is not only important for security but for genuine integration. Australia has an open and transparent culture and for trust to be built surely people should be willing to show their face? If Muslims want to live under the burqa shouldn't they be living in a land which meets this need? Why insist on changing the open culture Australia is characterized by? If I were to go to Saudi I would lay down my personal 'right' to dress as I please for the greater goal of integrating with the people. Can't Australian Muslims do the same? As a matter of interest, it appears a number of women who don the burqa/niqab are not from Islamic culture at all but Australian converts making a very loud political statement and rejecting Australian culture. Burqa wearing women *do* want to be different.

5. MUSLIMS DO NOT WANT TO INTEGRATE

Quote: *'The majority of Muslims in Australia wish to be equal members of Australian society'*.

The suggestion that Muslim citizens are not equal members of society cannot be substantiated. They are legally entitled to the same benefits as any other citizen. In many cases additional services are provided to assist immigrant families and of course a great many Muslim citizens are second and third generation Australians who do enjoy living in a safe and secure environment.

Rather than 'prejudice' being the cause of Muslims withdrawing from society I would suggest in large part it is not prejudice *towards* Muslims but a theology of segregation and fear of being westernized. If anything, a prejudice against all that is non-Islamic underpins a theology which therefore considers all things western as 'unclean': this includes people.

I believe this is the barrier, which is mentioned in LFOA, to healthy participation in Australian society. And the more we cater to this by affirming it is acceptable to consider music as evil, or give place to the physical barriers to real integration like

Islamic face coverings, the more we can expect to foster these unhealthy attitudes. Why should we be teaching sensitivity to ideas we do not wish to encourage?

6. MUSLIMS WANT THEIR OWN LAW

It's good to read the admission that *'some Muslims want this.'* What is sad is that we do not have a group of Muslims willing to oppose this tendency. While most may abide by the Rule of Law in Australia sharia is still being facilitated in various forms. At its core sharia is opposed to freedom of speech, freedom of religion, democracy and human rights.

The admission that Muslims in Australia already practice Islamic law in the form of personal and family law, is also worrying. According to a 2009 report by independent think-tank Civitas and academic and Islamic specialist Denis MacEoin, there are now 85 sharia courts operating in Britain. Zachariah Mathews, the President of Australian Islamic Mission, has publicly stated how he would like to see sharia recognized as a parallel legal system in Australia. Do we want to go down the same path as the British?

What this means is that Australian citizens who subject themselves to a sharia court will be denied the full rights of the Australian law. Women are severely disadvantaged in sharia courts and the British have discovered how inequitable these courts are. Shouldn't we be protecting Muslim women and children from sharia outcomes? Polygamy has already become a problem in all western nations, as is FGM, a practice which is mandated under the Shafi'i school of Islamic law and likewise the Hanbali school teaches this is mandatory in certain areas. Child brides are another big problem as is honor related violence. Shouldn't we be strongly opposing sharia rather than affirming and tolerating it?

To conclude, below is the link to a TVNZ documentary in March this year where New Zealand's child brides are interviewed. And their Muslim population is less than Australia's.

<http://tvnz.co.nz/sunday-news/sunday-march-14-child-brides-3402971/video>

I wish to implore Australia's educators and government to please consider what it is we are actually fostering and to remove this propaganda, or government funded dawah, from our schools and our society. Let's foster a united Australia under one law where people from a Muslim background are welcomed and valued, but let's not welcome or value sharia; let's not give Islamic law any place in Australian society.