

**The Representation of Islam and Muslims
in the Media**
(The Age and Herald Sun Newspapers)

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I. Introduction

The media is a significant social agent, with the potential to influence community perceptions. Its influence can seriously impact on minority groups by subjecting them to exclusionary pressures by implying that they hold 'alien' characteristics which do not correspond with the values and ethos of mainstream Australia. This report explores how the print media in Victoria represents Muslims and Islam in news stories since September 11, 2001 until December 31, 2004. The report examines the extent to which negative images of Islam are reproduced in the pages of *The Age* and *Herald Sun* newspapers.

This report is concerned with the type of language these newspapers employ to describe Muslims and Islam; whether or not this language changes in response to major events; the frequency of coverage in relation to major events; if journalists explore the diversity of Islam and Muslim cultures by highlighting nationality, ethnicity, cultural practice, and theological differences; and the typology used to categorise certain groups, practices or modes of Islam. The aim is to gain an understanding of the ways in which the media plays a role in shaping perceptions on Muslims and Islam in the broader community and how they do so in response to particular events either at home or abroad. The following questions have provided the framework for this report:

- What images of Muslims and Islam are most frequently propagated in the media?
- Are certain misrepresentations recurrent?
- Is the press media in Victoria Islamophobic?

The report begins with background information on Muslims in Australia to contextualise the study, and then moves to a review of previous studies on the representation of Muslims and Islam in the Western media. Following this, the report discusses the particular methodology employed to gather and analyse the articles, before moving to the research findings.

II. Background

Australian identity is enriched by the fusion of many cultures and traditions. Multiculturalism has contributed to the complex social mosaic that makes Australia a tapestry of harmony. This process, however, has not been without its challenges. While European settlers have relied on similar religious and historical traditions to merge with the broader community, Muslims from the Middle East have found this process more challenging. This is in part due to religious and cultural differences and misperceptions that arise as a result. In the recent past, issues of international terrorism and security concerns appear to have made matters worse, as Muslims have at times been identified with extremism. The arrival of asylum seekers from the Middle East on Australian shores amid this heightened sense of insecurity has led some commentators to assume a connection between terrorism and Muslims. As a consequence, there appears to have arisen a disturbing sense that Muslims are un-Australian and that Islam poses a threat to the Australian way of life.

Muslim settlement in Australia dates back to early European expeditions when Afghan camel drivers assisted with the exploration of this great continent, now giving their name to the first train to connect Adelaide with Darwin (The Ghan). Today, the Muslim population in Australia numbers approximately 300,000. Indeed, Muslims in Australia come from diverse cultural backgrounds from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Albania, Lebanon, and Turkey. Although Muslims come from distinct cultural backgrounds and are heterogenous in many ways, their common belief in, and practice of, Islam binds them together. Perhaps more importantly for the purpose of this project, Muslims are seen as a unified community by many media commentators and the broader public. It is, therefore, important to assess some of the presumptions and misconceptions that permeate public commentary on Muslims and their religion.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the subsequent 'war on terror,' the refugee crisis and the 2002 Bali bombings put the Australian Muslim community under the spotlight. The term 'Islamophobia' has been used by some commentators in recent years to describe the increasing isolation and victimization of Muslims living in the West. This is a highly politicised term which denotes systemic discrimination against both the religion of Islam and Muslims. The term Islamophobia has gained increasing currency in the United Kingdom, where Islam is the fastest growing religion. A recent report, *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action*, released in June 2004 by the UK Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia argues that systemic discrimination against Muslims and the recurrent negative portrayal of Muslims has pushed UK Muslims to the very margin of society – a dangerous trend that threatens to alienate them. The risk of creating social outcasts is seen as a great challenge to the long-term cohesion of British society. The Commission recommended extensive education programs to address this challenge.¹

¹ Robin Richardson (ed.) *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action* (United Kingdom, Trentham Books, 2004). This publication was the result of research undertaken for the Commission of British Muslims and Islamophobia.

This study has obvious relevance to Australia. Although the term Islamophobia may be too strong to describe social bias and misperceptions, the UK report draws attention to a number of significant areas, including the role of the media, which deserve careful examination. Similar concerns in Australia prompted the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) to research and produce *Isma (Listen)*, a detailed account of harassment and discrimination suffered by Muslims in Australia. The report draws a direct link between growing anti-Muslim feeling, especially attacks on veiled Muslim women, and the terrorist events that have taken place outside Australia.² In the same vein as the UK report, the HREOC report warns of the dangers of victimising a minority group on the bases of its religion and the adverse repercussions of such occurrence for our multicultural society.

The HREOC report is based on extensive interviews with community activists and academics. It acknowledges the important role that the media plays in influencing community opinions. Media coverage of Muslims and Islam is obviously an important issue to be explored in detail and is addressed in the present report.

It is also important to acknowledge that a number of community organisations representing Muslims have tried to counter misperceptions surrounding their beliefs and loyalties. The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), for example, have issued numerous press releases to condemn terrorism and reject the link between Islam and violence.³ Sentiments expressed in such documents are in keeping with the perspectives of the overwhelming majority of Australian Muslims. Such public declarations, however, do not appear to have made a significant impact on the assumed link between Muslims and terrorists expressed in the tabloid press, as the next section explores.

² See the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission report, 'Isma: (Listen) National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice Against Arabs and Muslim Australians' available at www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/report/, released 16 June 2004.

³ See the Islamic Council of Victoria's website, www.icv.org.au. In addition to press releases condemning any violence against civilians (www.icv.org.au/extremists.htm) the ICV has issued specific rejections of the terrorist attacks in London, 2005, Bali in 2002 and the United States in 2001.

III. Previous Studies

“That people are suddenly more interested in Islam could be a positive development, but if the knowledge that is produced only reinforces an Orientalist perspective then this will be an opportunity lost” (Poole, 2002: 3).

This section of the report examines previous studies on the representation of Muslims and Islam in the Western media. It covers four significant areas which have been explored on British and Australian media: (a) the construction of Muslims and Islam as ‘Other’; (b) the role of race in the construction of Muslims and Islam as the ‘Arab Other’; (c) the role of the media and subjectivities of journalists in reproducing stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, and (d) the significance of international and domestic news reporting in creating images of Muslims and Islam in Western societies.

III.a. Constructing the Muslim Other

Islam is not homogenous; it is a diverse set of practices that vary from culture to culture. Yet the ways in which Western cultures have come to ‘know’ Muslims and Islam is largely through what is termed Orientalism, the historically situated Western construction of non-Western cultures as the Other; as alien, distant, antiquated, irrational, sensual and passive (see Said, 1978). Orientalism is “systems of representation framed by the hegemonic political forces of colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism, which act towards bringing ‘the Orient’ into ‘Western’ consciousness, Western dispensation and under Western dominion” (Richardson, 2004: 5). “[T]he orientalist approach to Islam can be summarised as essentialist, empiricist and historicist; it impoverishes the rich diversity of Islam by producing an essentialising caricature” (Richardson, 2004: 5).

The essentialist depiction of Muslims and Islam constructs them as the Other; as immature, even backward ethnic or foreign groups who need to be managed or tolerated in ‘our’ country. Kevin Dunn (2001: 292) claims, “social constructions of identity are given life through their articulation.” This means that recurring language used to describe Islam and Muslims (such as ‘Islamic terrorism,’ ‘Muslim fanatics’) can come to be representative of all Muslims and Islam as a religion. It is also important to note that these representations are gendered. Dominant stereotypes portray men as foreign (and more recently local) terrorists or extremists, where as women are constructed as repressed hijab wearers who need to be liberated from patriarchal oppression and violence. These Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims further suggest that Muslims are intolerant of other religions and Western cultures.

Indeed, it is claimed that the media reproduces these images of Muslims and Islam as Other by describing them as fundamentalist, terrorist, sexist, militant, undemocratic, violent, suicide bombers, hijackers, orthodox/scripturalist, and fanatic (see Dunn, 2001). These stereotypes are linked to contexts of war, conflict, violence, disunity and sexism. Much of this scholarship reinforces the argument that the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ dialectic is manifest in Australia and that Muslims continue to be vilified in our community.

As the report develops it will become clear, however, that there are also counter-constructions in our media. A significant number of samples in our database represent Muslims and Islam in positive ways as peaceful, moderate, liberal, feminist, family oriented, anti-terrorist and community oriented. Such news coverage acknowledges that the Muslim community in Australia is part of our cultural make-up and contribute to the ongoing construction of our society.

III.b. Racism and Public Attitude

Race is interlinked with public attitude toward Islam because in most cases Muslims belong to ethnic groups, which in Australian society are predominantly viewed as Arabic. Yet it must be pointed out that Muslims as a community of faith are not 'a race' because they belong to no single culture. Not all Arabs are Muslim. Indonesia, our nearest Asian neighbour, claims the biggest Muslim population in the world. Yet dominant and frequent images of Islam come from the Middle East and spill onto Australian representations of men in white robes with long beards and machine guns and uneducated women laced in hijabs and burkas. These images come from television, magazines and newspapers, ignoring the diversity of Islamic practices and Muslim peoples.

These images which are presented to Australia's news reading public are often taken out of context, and supply little information about other Islamic practices and beliefs which condemn terrorism and the ill-treatment of women. As a result, people who lack understanding of Islam gather negative information and fearful images of Muslims. The combination of these images and a history tainted with intolerance have resulted in a difficult socio-political environment where Australian Muslims have been forced to repeatedly refute outrageous claims of 'un-Australian-ness' and pledge their loyalty to this land.

Muslims in Australia have experienced alienation, racism and vilification before the terrorist attacks in 2001. The racial stereotyping of all Muslims as Arabs and all Arabs as Muslims during the Gulf War led to series of physical attacks, racial insults and negative stereotyping of Muslims in Australia (Asmar, 1992). Similar stories of abuse to those recent ones reported in the Victorian news media after September 11 were also present a decade ago: assaults on women wearing head scarves; bomb threats against mosques and Islamic centres; and verbal abuse of Muslim women and children in public.

Dunn (2002 & 2004) has analysed these events in the context of 'racism,' as 'anti-Muslim' feeling. He suggests that Australia has an accumulated history of Islamophobia beginning with Malay pearlers and the Afghans who were seen as dirty and a danger to white women, and in the 1970s migrants from Turkey and Lebanon were constructed as sexist and backward, which led to their later construction, along with other Arab Muslims, as violent (Dunn, 2001). In the 1980s and 1990s the media in Australia questioned the veiling of Muslim women and carried stories about the genital mutilation of girls in Africa. As a result, Dunn (2001: 293) claims that "Muslims are one of the groups that have suffered from a worrying degree of racist violence in Australia," which has led to a sense of vulnerability of Australian Muslims.

III.c Media and Journalists as Image Makers

It is too easy to 'blame' the media for the negative imaging of Muslims and Islam. Barker and Galasinski (2001: 7) argue that "texts are unable to police the meanings to be constructed from them." It is clear that social forces other than textual discourse (in this case the print media) also contribute to dominant images and stereotypes our society constructs of Muslims and Islam. As social actors, humans do possess the ability to create different meanings and representations of Muslims and Islam.

Because the media plays an important social role in our community with the ability to influence people, this means that journalists too are shaped by various social forces which contribute to their understanding of Muslims and Islam. It is clear that how one perceives particular events is always influenced by factors including their background, education, and wider social and cultural environment. In addition to this, and perhaps more relevant to this report, is that the newspaper editorial practices and writing styles also significantly shape the type of language and images that will form portrayals of Muslims and Islam, and the type of information provided. *The Age* is a Fairfax publication, known for its liberal approach to social and cultural issues and more investigative reporting. By contrast, the *Herald Sun* belongs to News Limited and is known for its conservative attitudes and a focus on stories of experience rather than deep intellectual analysis. Rodney Tiffen (1992: 124) elaborates on two distinct styles of news reporting:

the contrast in appeals between the quality [*The Age*] and popular [*Herald Sun*] press has been described as a journalism of policy compared with a journalism of experience: 'The [latter] reports the experiences of particular individuals or neighbourhoods, but provides little analysis of how these experiences are related to larger social processes.' Its appeals include bringing out the human significance of events, heightening appreciation of the emotional dimensions involved, bringing clarity and certainty about the most salient features, and concentrating upon events and people most pertinent to the audience. The analytical style focuses more upon the activities of policy makers, presenting contending viewpoints, and more often probing the evidential bases of their claims.

Indeed, the media as an institution plays a significant and predominant role in the cultural production of knowledge (Poole, 2002) and depending on which newspaper readers have access to one's level of knowledge of Muslims and Islam may differ. Further, as the media is fluid and changing, so too is the way in which it portrays Muslims and Islam. In particular, this 'changing' and 'moving in and out' of perspectives is reliant on events that occur either overseas or at home.

III.d. The Significance of International and Domestic Reporting

There is an ongoing relationship between international events and domestic issues in terms of how Muslims and Islam are represented in our media. As Dunn (2001: 292) claims, “in Australia, local and national representations of Muslims are mutually reinforcing, and predominantly negative...there is an intertextuality between the local and national discourses, knitted together in a symbolic web.” In addition to this, it can be argued that there is an intertextuality between domestic (local) and international discourses on Islam and Muslims. That is, the way domestic events are written about is interconnected to what goes on overseas.

The majority of scholarship on Muslims, Islam, and the media in Australia in the pre- and post- ‘September 11’ periods suggests that the print media represents Muslims and Islam in negative ways by reproducing negative stereotypes and misinforming readers of Islam as religion and culture. Researchers (such as Peter Manning and Kevin Dunn who have researched Sydney newspapers) have connected this phenomenon to issues of race because the images we receive via the media of Muslims and Islam are largely from the Middle East, being the hub of the Islamic world. For example, Manning (2004) found that most images of Arabs and Muslims in Sydney newspapers come from foreign news media, and that most of this international coverage focused on the Middle East; half on the Israel/Palestine problem. In relation to domestic news he found that most images of Arabs and Muslims came from articles on asylum seeker issues. Manning concludes that the print media in Sydney are reproducing the orientalist tradition in their international and domestic reporting of Arabs and Muslims: “it is a portrait of deep and sustained fear. It is also a portrait of an Australian orientalism that has been successfully transplanted and developed on Antipodean shores” (Manning, 2004: 45).

In the pre-September 11 period Dunn (2001) found that in discourse on the development of mosques in Sydney stereotypes of Islam and Muslims were used in different ways to influence local perceptions. He concludes (2001: 306) that “the representations of Islam lie at the core of the problems that Muslims in Sydney have encountered in establishing places of worship...[and that]...once Muslims were constructed as different, as alien and treacherous, they could then be treated as non-citizens.”

O Awass (1996) argued that news articles on Islam were derogatory and associated Islam with fundamentalism and terrorism. He also concluded that Islam was repeatedly associated with Middle Eastern people and culture, ‘jihad’ was misrepresented, and that Islam was a threat to Western security. He claims that these perceptions contribute to the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ divide and facilitates fear in the community. Similarly, B Lowe (1984) has found that international events that have nothing to do with local Muslim communities indeed do impact upon them.

It becomes clear, then, that Islam and Muslims have a problematic history with the media. As this report demonstrates, however, with the heightened attention given to Muslims and Islam because of the recent terrorist attacks, while there has been an increase in racial and religious vilification, at the same time there has been an increasing desire to understand Islam and Muslims on behalf of the Australian public. This is not

simply a matter of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ because the boundaries are blurred, demonstrated most poignantly by the increasing number of Western converts to Islam.

IV. Methodology

A database of 451 news items was constructed from a search of the global online database *Factiva* for news articles that contain the words ‘Islam’ and/or ‘Muslim’ from *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* newspapers from September 11, 2001 – December 31, 2004. Searching articles for the terms ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ in two major Victorian newspapers presents a general picture of how the words ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ are being used in news media.

The *Factiva* search returned approximately 1200 articles in total ranging from news and feature articles to opinion pieces, letters to the editor, editorials and television program guides advertising documentaries or reports on Islam. Of the 1200 hits, 451 news articles and news features have been selected. News articles have been chosen as the focus of inquiry for the following reasons. First, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 there have been a series of international and domestic events that implicate Muslims or Islam to varying degrees either through direct participation or default, including the US-led war in Afghanistan, the Catch the Fire Ministries case in Victoria, the Bali bombing, the Iraq war, and the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta, in addition to ongoing issues of asylum seekers, gender and racial vilification. Second, the scope of this project cannot accommodate the wide range of other print media discourses such as editorials, opinion pieces and letters to the editor. It is true that these styles of discourse also explicitly engage with, and reveal, a wide range of perceptions on Muslims and Islam held by journalists, the broader media, Muslims, Christians, and the general public. But they do not claim to be unbiased in reporting on events, where as news stories by definition do. It is therefore important to explore and unlock any ‘coded’ message that may be contained in such news coverage.

A number of major news-worthy events impacted on the Australian community in various ways, and implicated Islam or Muslims. The following list of chronological events has been constructed as a guide to the analysis:

Event	Date
• Terrorist attacks in USA	September 11, 2001
• US-led war in Afghanistan	October, 2001
• Catch the Fire Ministries Case	May, 2002
• Bali Bombing	October, 2002
• Iraq War	March, 2003
• Marriott Hotel Bombing	August, 2003
• Outcome of Catch the Fire	December, 2004

The methodology is divided into two sections. The first section is quantitative, where the number of articles that appeared in *The Age* and *Herald Sun* respectively have been recorded in response to these major events (note that this does not mean that all articles that contain information on Islam or Muslims are about these events) and determined particular patterns in relation to language use (recurrent terms used to describe Muslims

and Islam), themes and stereotypes. This section also classifies articles as positive, negative, neutral or mixed. Pie charts have also been composed to illustrate these numerical findings.

The second section is a qualitative analysis of the patterns established by the quantitative analysis and is based on major themes including racism, gender, terrorism and the interconnection between international and domestic reporting. The significance of news stories written in response to international and domestic events has been identified, and how this shapes the way Muslims or Islam is represented overall in the news article. Therefore, a frame of reference is used that locates news articles as either international or domestic as part of the analytical process because it was found that domestic news about Muslims and Islam was in some way interlinked with international events.

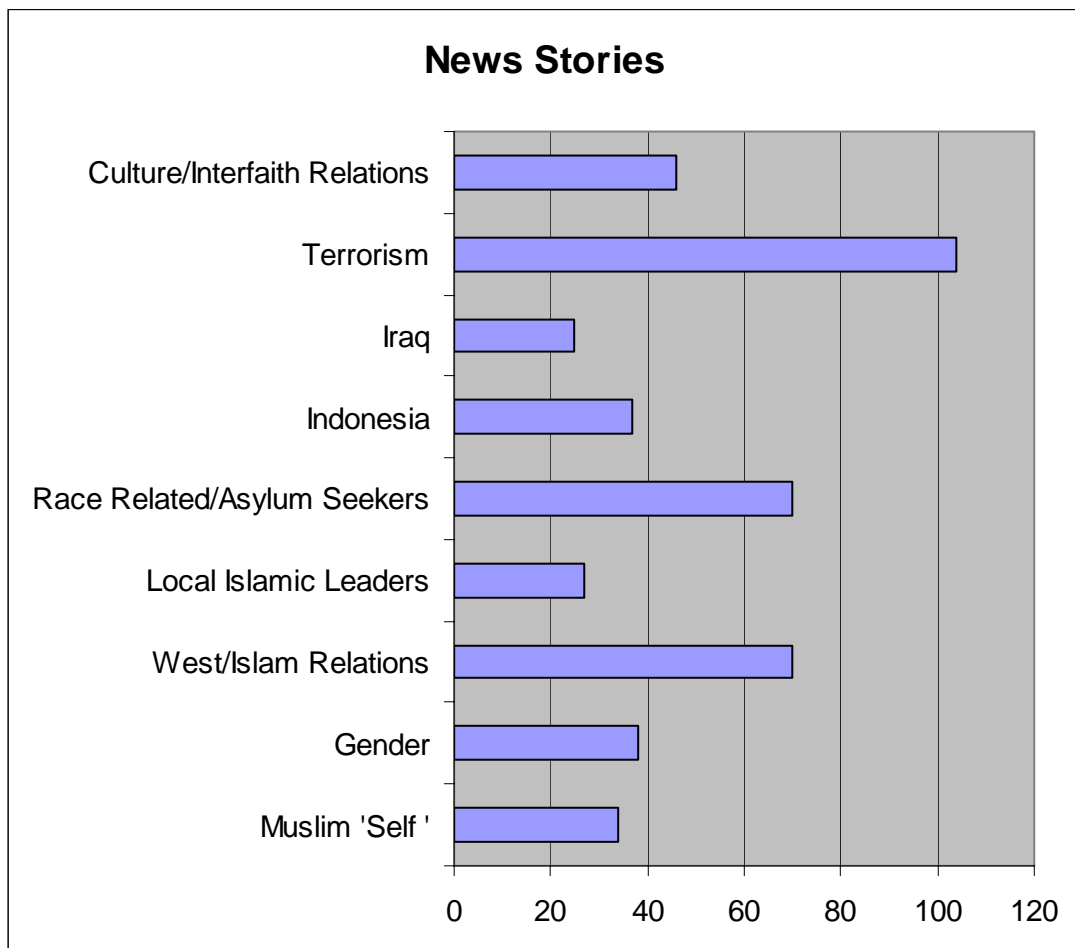
This highlights the complexities involved in the construction of Muslims and Islam by non-Muslims, the Australian media, and the general public more broadly. Images of Islam and Muslims are reproduced and reinvented in response to a variety of issues, which will be discussed as this report develops. As part of the analysis of news stories that contain the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' a framework has been developed to determine how to interpret and analyse the data. This framework will help explain the meanings the readers are likely to derive from these constructs.

V. Research Findings

This section of the report is divided into two parts. The first part is the quantitative analysis which contains a series of pie charts to determine patterns in news reporting. The second part is the qualitative analysis which examines in detail particular themes that were identified as a result of reading through each article in the database for the quantitative analysis.

V.a. Quantitative Analysis

(1) What makes news in both newspapers?



This chart is a general representation of the major newsworthy stories in the database. The purpose of this graph is to provide a general picture of the types of stories being written by journalists that use the terms 'Islam' and/or 'Muslim.' The categories in the chart are broad and serve only as a guide. This graph and the following descriptions of

each of its categories do not consider whether articles are positive, negative, neutral, or mixed – that question is explored below (see question 4). From the graph it is clear that both newspapers are dominated by news on terrorism matters (22%), West/Islam relations (16%), and race and asylum seeker issues (16%).

Articles about terrorism in the database related to international terrorist attacks, international terrorists/terrorist cells, Osama bin Laden, Australian government security issues in relation to terrorism, and more particularly the ASIO raids of Indonesians in Australia suspected of having connections to Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Bakar Bashir. Also included in this category are stories about local terrorists such as David Hicks and Jack 'Jihad' Thomas. By 'West/Islam' relations is meant stories that make reference to, or are about, differences and/or relations between the West and Islam in terms of culture and religion. Of this 'West/Islam' category, the majority of news stories by far were about the first racial and religious vilification court case in Victoria, which involved the Catch the Fire Ministries and the Islamic Council of Victoria; a domestic issue which is directly interlinked with international acts of terrorism. The 'race related and asylum seeker' category refers to articles about racial abuse of Australian Muslims and Muslim women by non-Muslims, asylum seeker matters and detention centre issues related to Muslims and/or terrorist suspects.

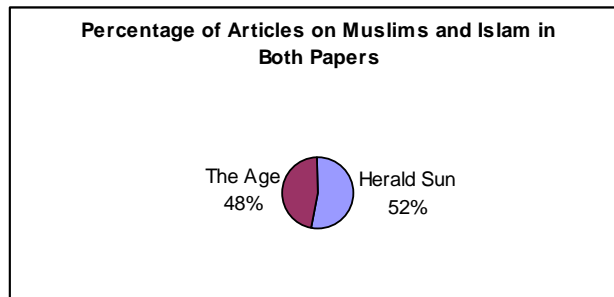
Next to this, 10% of news articles in the database sample were about local cultural issues such as food, activities, religious celebrations and local council matters. This 10% also includes interfaith-related stories about local religious leaders calling for unity, community gatherings of all faiths, and other stories about religious unity and healthy interfaith relations. These domestic stories especially focussed on local religious leaders urging for religious tolerance and cooperation in Australia's multicultural society.

Gender, features on Muslim individuals (or 'Self' Stories), and Indonesia also received significant coverage (8% each). The large proportion of articles about gender issues demonstrates that the issue of women in Islam is still pertinent in our media. Therefore, this report explores the significance of gender in the media's construction of Muslims and Islam in the qualitative section that follows shortly. 'Self' stories are articles about Muslim individuals that emphasise personal experience, positive subjectivities, opinions, and are concerned with explaining the diversity and peacefulness of Islam as a religion. 88% of 'Self' stories in the database were from *The Age*.

The majority of articles on Indonesia were concerned with terrorism in the region, the Bali Bombings, Jemaah Islamiyah, Australians and Westerners living in Indonesia being targeted by Indonesian Muslim extremists, the Megawati government's response to Islamic terrorism, and Indonesian Muslim protests against the American-led invasion of Afghanistan.

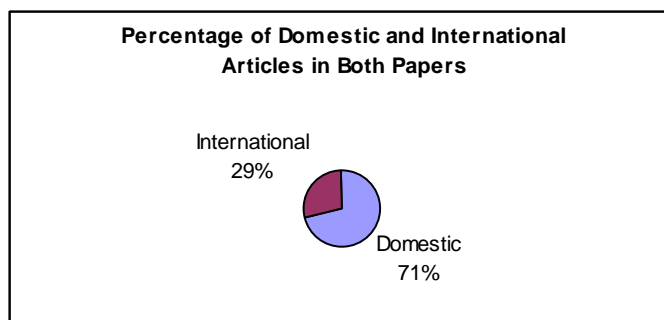
Iraq received 6% of coverage. Articles about Iraq were not explicitly about 'Islam' or 'Muslims,' but mentioned the terms in relation to religious identity or culture. The majority of articles on Iraq were about the war (international) or domestic asylum seeker related matters and Iraqis who now live in Victoria. News articles about local Islamic leaders such as Sheik Al-Hilaly and Sheik Omran also received 6% of coverage.

(2) What proportion of all articles comes from each of the two newspapers?



The different styles in reporting between *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* newspapers reflect the general approaches the two newspapers take in their journalism. From this pie chart it is clear that the *Herald Sun* has slightly more news articles than *The Age* based on the database sample. It is important to note briefly that overall, *The Age* contained many more opinion pieces, editorials and letters to the editor on Islam and Muslims than the *Herald Sun*.

(3) Domestic/International divide:



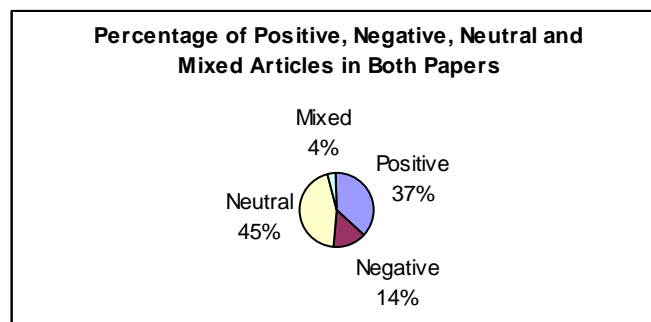
This pie chart shows that almost one third of news articles in the database are about international events. Given that there was a series of major international events that implicated Muslims and Islam in relation to terrorism and war (September 11, Bali bombings, Iraq) the question arises as to why the majority of news articles are about domestic issues. This report has already identified that there is a direct and significant link between international events and local news stories. This means that international acts of terror or war that involve Muslims and Islam has repercussions in local communities in Victoria, and no doubt the rest of Australia. The other important point is that international events that implicate Muslims and Islam do not necessarily discuss 'Muslims' and 'Islam' in their reporting, but rather use particular terminology such as 'Islamic terrorism,' 'jihad,' 'Muslim fanatics' and so on to describe and contextualise the type of violence being carried out.

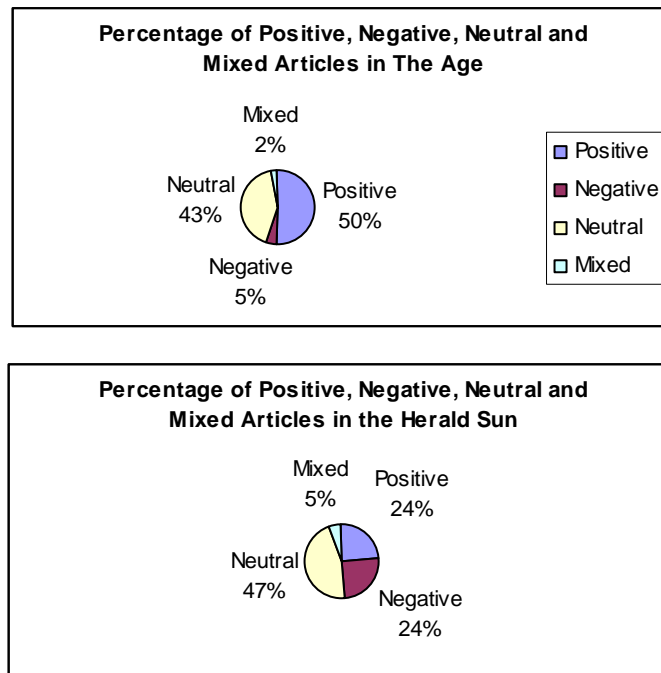
- (4) What percentage of articles in both newspapers are positive, negative, neutral or mixed?

This study categorises news articles as positive, negative, neutral or mixed based on *language* and *the way the story is constructed*. The 4 categories have been shaped by drawing on theoretical frameworks employed by other researchers, and an assessment of the collected news items from *The Age* and the *Herald Sun*.

- Positive articles in the database are those that represent Islam and Muslims in ways which enhance the reader's knowledge of Islam by explaining its teachings, its diversity, and reveal a degree of understanding of the religion as well as representing a range of opinions, and feature stories on the Muslim 'Self.' Positive stories use non-inflammatory language.
- Negative reports reveal a lack of understanding of Islam and its diversity, as well as primarily or solely referring to social discord, conflict and immorality. Negative stories essentially reproduce the notion that Muslims and Islam are alien and somehow un-Australian. Negative articles also omit certain relevant details which could contextualise the story, thus giving an out-of-context account with negative connotations.
- Neutral articles are neither positive nor negative, and are especially non-inflammatory. Neutral articles rarely engage in discussion of Islam and/or Muslims.
- Mixed articles combine positive, negative and neutral aspects.

This study classifies news articles as positive, negative, neutral or mixed based on language and the construction of the story. This means that adjectives used to describe Islam, Muslims and their behaviour or activities affects the tone of a story. Also, the inclusion or non-inclusion of various voices and opinions, such as Muslims, contribute to how the story is constructed. If Muslim perspectives are not included in the construction of the story then it may lead to negative reporting, for example.





It is clear from these pie charts that *The Age* had more positive news items than the *Herald Sun*. Almost one quarter of *Herald Sun* news items were negative, compared to only 5% from *The Age*. In both newspapers the majority of news items were neutral.

V.a.1 . Negative Stories and Negative Reporting: Are They the Same?

It is important to note that categorising news items is highly subjective, and does not represent a general truth. The process of classifying news articles is subjective because interpretation differs from context to context, and largely depends on who is doing the interpreting. This study is aware that the context of a story may also affect how it is classified. For example, a story such as a suicide bombing in Israel is negative, because it involves murder, death, and social discord. Journalists writing this story may use neutral, non-inflammatory language to describe this negative event, yet because of the negativity of the story the impact on the reader is likely to be negative. This means that the more negative the context of a story, the meaning and image derived will more likely be negative, regardless of whether neutral or non-inflammatory language is used in the article. So even though a news item may be classified as neutral in this study, the overall impression it generates is very likely to be negative (although this is not always the case).

Consequently, neutral articles about Muslim extremists in Indonesia may contain non-inflammatory language as events are reported. But the reader may eventually derive a negative image of Islam in Indonesia due to a series of articles that link them to extremism, violence and conflict. Therefore, the effect from reading a neutral article may be negative. This, then, has little to do with the journalists who simply report the event (as news stories), and has more to do with the wider social environments and attitudes of the reading public.

This means that reporting a *negative story* does *not always* mean that it is *negative reporting*. Rather, it is the *language* and *construction of a story* that determines whether it is negative for the purposes of this study.

It is important to point out, again, that the process of interpreting texts/discourse as positive, negative, neutral or mixed is highly subjective and does not solely determine how the media represents Muslims and Islam. Therefore, it is important to be aware of other social forces that contribute to the construction of Muslims and Islam in Australia. These include, for example, the images the public are presented via television, magazines, and opinions discussed on talkback radio.

V.a.2. Examples of Positive, Negative, Neutral and Mixed Articles

- 'Muslims in Melbourne Denounce Holy War,' *The Age* 11/10/2004

David Wroe with AAP

Positive:

Islamic community leaders in Melbourne yesterday condemned the call for Muslims worldwide to declare a holy war, saying Australian Muslims would not be swayed by violent rhetoric. Sheik Fehmi El-Imam, secretary of the Board of Imams, said Melbourne Muslims stood united against any form of holy war or terrorism. "They won't be influenced by the message. They will repudiate the message immediately," Sheik Fehmi said. "We have no room here for calling for jihad or making terrorist acts."

This excerpt is positive because it uses strong language to inform readers that Muslims 'condemn' 'holy war' by describing it as 'violent rhetoric.' A Muslim voice is present in this article – that of Sheik Fehmi El-Imam, who is making the point that Australian Muslims (united) have no desire to participate in terrorism.

- 'Kinders slap ban on Santa,' *Herald Sun* 28/11/2002

Nikki Protyniak, Leela de Krester and Ashley Gardiner

Positive:

More than a dozen centres across Melbourne yesterday said they will not let Father Christmas in the door this year. ... Ethnic community leaders also say the ban is wrong. They have called on the 14 kinders to bring Santa back. ... "There is a Muslim family in one of the groups and we didn't want to offend them," a worker said. But Australian Arabic Council chairman Roland Jabbour said the no-Santa ruling was going too far. "Santa's part of the Australian way of life. We don't know how such a thing could be offensive."

This excerpt from an article in the *Herald Sun* is positive because it demonstrates commitment to Australian tradition and rejects simplistic stereotypes that Muslims are intolerant of Christian belief. Additionally, the journalists have included Muslim/ethnic perspectives to demonstrate that Muslims are part of, and contribute to, Australian culture.

- 'Baptism of Fire for Believers,' *The Age* 4/02/2003

Barney Zwartz

Negative:

But complaints to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the testimony of clergy who visit the centres suggest that Christians and other minority groups face persistent harassment and abuse by Muslim extremists, and management indifference to their religious needs. According to representatives outside the centres, Christians, Tamils and Sabian Mandaean (followers of John the Baptist) in the centres live in fear ... Madaeans have claimed Muslims would not allow them to mingle or use facilities and forced them to conform to Muslim dress codes. They also have to eat food prepared to Muslim religious requirements, which contradict their own. Having fled Islamic persecution, these groups find it humiliating to have to conform to Islamic dietary laws in Australia. Madaeans say Muslim extremists have defecated on them, and set fire to Madaean and Christian accommodation when these groups don't join planned disturbances. Madaeans say an extremist religious leader in detention has issued a "fatwa" that killing Madaeans is sanctioned in Islam.

This excerpt demonstrates the point that a negative story can be read as 'negative reporting.' Indeed, this is a negative story that implicates Muslims and Islam because of the acts of a few individuals who identify themselves as Muslims. But the language used in this article tends to homogenise Muslims and Islam. Take for example, "Muslims would not allow them to mingle or use facilities and forced them to conform to Muslim dress codes" – this implies that there is something inherently Islamic about this kind of behaviour. Although Zwartz does mention that this abuse is by "Muslim extremists," in particular an "extremist religious leader...[who]...has issued a 'fatwa' that killing Madaeans is sanctioned in Islam," the wider context is not made clear. Absent in this story is any sense of how other Muslims responded to these acts. There are no Muslim voices in the article to challenge this abusive behaviour and point out that not all Muslims are intolerant and violent. Based on 'what was missing' from the content of this article (i.e how it has been constructed), this article is classified as negative because the repercussions of its coverage of a negative story tie Islam and Muslims to conflict, abuse, and intolerance.

- 'Jinx fear on asylum ship,' *Herald Sun* 28/7/2004

Ainsley Pavey

Negative:

Muslim asylum-seekers refused to let members of a sect stay aboard their doomed boat, a court heard yesterday. Sect members were kicked off the boat before it left Indonesia for Christmas Island because passengers believed they were jinxed, Brisbane Magistrate's Court was told. Muslims also tore out pages from the Koran -- and threw them into the sea hoping the gesture would calm the waters.

Again, this is a negative story that has been written in a negative way. Pavey has not identified what nationality 'the Muslims' are, the wider context for their seeking asylum, nor has she included Muslim perspectives to counter- or elaborate on the accusations. This thus gives a 'negative' feeling to the article and contributes to orientalist imagery of Muslims as intolerant, superstitious and violent.

- 'JI man says Bashir was boss,' *The Age* 22/12/2004

Tim Johnston

Neutral:

The case against the alleged leader of Jemaah Islamiah, the terror group behind the Bali bombings, was boosted yesterday when Abbas, a confessed senior member of JI, gave a detailed account of Abu Bakar Bashir's involvement in the running of the group. Until his testimony, the case had been in danger of collapsing after witnesses withdrew their confessions and convicted JI members would not confirm that Bashir had anything to do with the group.

This article is neutral because it does not directly discuss 'Islam' or 'Muslims.' Jemaah Islamiah in this excerpt is described only as a 'terror group' despite the article being laden with Arabic terms and names (Jemaah Islamiah, Abbas, Bashir), which imply a connection to Islam. This is an example of a journalist reporting the facts of the story and using non-inflammatory language.

- 'Jews calm but wary,' *Herald Sun* 13/09/2001

Fay Burstin

Neutral:

The Australian Jewish community is on high alert in the wake of the US catastrophe. All Jewish schools, synagogues and organisations have stepped up security as fears grow that fundamentalist Islamic terrorists may be behind the attacks. But Executive Council of Australian Jewry president Nina Bassatt refused to speculate on who was responsible and said it was too early to point the finger at Islamic groups.

This article focuses on Australian Jews and their concern for safety following the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States of America. This article has been interpreted as neutral because it does not engage in explicit discussion of Islam and/or Muslims, but rather makes reference to the "fundamentalist Islamic terrorists [who] may be behind the attacks."

- 'Asylum seeker claims flawed,' *The Age* 13/11/2002

Russell Skelton

Mixed:

The Federal Government has identified more than 200 Pakistani nationals masquerading as Afghan asylum seekers, many of whom are suspected of being linked to al Qaeda and other extremist Islamic groups. But *The Age* believes the final figure could reach 1500 as investigations continue into the backgrounds of more than 3700 temporary protection visa holders. ... Australian authorities are also acting on information provided by Muslim communities in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Mr Ruddock confirmed that he had been given three lists of 101 suspected Pakistani nationals by a member of the Afghan community and that his department found that it already had information on 28 of those named. In Adelaide, Afghan community leaders, who asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals, said 70 per cent, or 700 of Afghan TPV holders living in South Australia had been identified as Pakistani.

This article is mixed because although it implies that Pakistanis ("many of whom") in detention are "linked to al Qaeda and other extremist Islamic groups," it also includes voices of Afghans (presumably Muslims also) who are helping authorities to identify the nationalities of individuals seeking asylum. In this way, the article does not homogenise Muslims. There are, however, mixed messages going to readers about Pakistanis. Indeed, although a significant proportion of Pakistanis claim to be Afghan, this does not mean that all of them are making this claim, and it certainly does not mean that all Pakistanis are Islamic extremists.

- 'Extremist's dire warning,' *Herald Sun* 19/10/2002

Danny Buttler

Mixed:

Relatives of a Melbourne woman missing since the Bali bombings have condemned controversial comments by radical Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir. A chief suspect in last weekend's terrorist attack, Mr Bashir has caused widespread outrage by claiming victims' relatives should convert to Islam. ... Paul Watson, whose partner's daughter, Jessica O'Donnell, is still missing following the Bali attacks, said understanding, not threatening rhetoric, was needed to help families through this tragic time.

'If he was as religious as he thinks, he would have nothing but compassion - instead, he is issuing threats,' he said. Mr Watson pleaded with people of all religions to look after each other. 'I'm sure a majority of Muslims would not agree with his comments,' he said. 'I would repeat a comment I saw on the steps of Parliament this week: we are one, we are Australians.' Deborah Collins, whose son Andrew is Jessica O'Donnell's boyfriend, said she would expect nothing less from Mr Bashir. 'I wouldn't expect him to say anything different, because that is how they think,' she said. 'We're running on a different tram; we have a different culture.' Mr Bashir is thought to be the

leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, a shadowy organisation that has been blamed for a series of attacks on Western embassies in Singapore this year.

This article is mixed because it contains different perspectives on Muslims and Islam, which are not elaborated on in an analytical way. Mr. Watson's comment that "a majority of Muslims would not agree with his [Bashir] comments" is a positive response to Abu Bakar Bashir's call for relatives of victims of the Bali Bombs to convert to Islam. Yet Ms. Collins' comment that "that is how they think ... we're running on a different tram; we have a different culture" reflects the 'Othering' discourse of negative stereotypes – the differentiation between 'Us' and 'Them' that casts "Them" as lesser, barbaric and violent, and certainly as a homogenous group that practises Islam.

V.b. Qualitative Analysis

This section of the report examines three aspects of news reports about Muslims and Islam. First, the analysis considers what is being written about Muslims and Islam and how it is being said. Here the language journalists use to describe and categorise Muslims and Islam is revealed, which directly or indirectly contributes to the construction of positive or negative images.

Second, there is a detailed examination of particular themes that have been identified from reading the 451 articles in the database. These themes are (1) terrorism; (2) race; (3) gender; and (4) the connection between international and domestic events in news reporting.

1. The analysis of terrorism considers the ways in which international and domestic issues are interlinked and contribute to the negative stereotyping of Muslims;
2. The examination of race highlights issues of asylum seekers, the link between Arabs and Islam, cultural issues associated with food, places of worship, and violence perpetrated against Muslims;
3. The gender theme examines the ways in which Muslim men and women are represented in news stories;
4. The significant link between international and domestic events demonstrates how the Muslim and non-Muslim divide is not that clear-cut, and how events overseas impact on local communities; included are examples of terrorists, asylum seekers and Western converts to Islam.

In addition to the above there is recurring themes about the ongoing historical 'conflict' between Christianity and Islam. All of these themes are interlinked to varying degrees and may be revisited for discussion in all four sections.

Third, following these examinations the report moves to an analysis of counter-constructions of Muslims and Islam in the press to illustrate the 'positive' portrayal of Muslims and Islam. This demonstrates that while 'negative' stereotypes continue to be reproduced and reinvented, there is also a counter construction process at play which reflects the desire to know more about Muslims and Islam. These concerns are illustrated by what are called 'Self' stories – news features about individual Muslims, which reveal their opinions, perspectives and experiences in Australia or their country of origin. 'Self' stories contribute to the deconstruction of the 'Us' and 'Them' divide, where Muslims are the unknown and feared Other, by bringing real people's stories to the public.

V.b.1. Language

The analysis of news articles revealed that non-inflammatory language was generally used in articles about international and domestic events that involved Muslims or Islam, as can be seen by the majority of news articles that were classified as 'neutral' in the graph on page 13 of this report. The context in which these articles were situated, however, is generally negative. As the graph on page 10 further indicates, the majority of news articles in the database can be placed in the context of 'the war on terror' – a negative context. This means that the majority of articles either discussed the direct connection between Muslims, Islam and terrorism, or issues and events that have occurred in response to the war on terror such as the backlash against Australian Muslims since the September 11 terrorist attacks (as domestic issues).

The analysis of the news articles found the following terms are frequently used by both newspapers to describe Muslims and Islam in connection to terrorism in both international and domestic cases: Fanatic, fundamentalist, purist, terrorist, radical, hardline, extremist and militant. For example, 'radical Islamic group,' 'fundamentalist Islamic terrorists,' 'extremist Islamic group,' and 'militant Muslim fanatics.' These groups and/or individuals are described as fighting a 'holy war' or 'jihad,' and are depicted as opponents to Western culture and democracy.

The terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' (and their derivatives, such as Islamic) are also used in news articles as adjectives, for example 'Islamic fundamentalism,' 'Muslim hardliners,' 'Muslim fanatics,' 'Muslim extremists,' 'Muslim protestors' and so on. These terms are mostly used in articles about international events such as terrorist attacks or wars overseas (in Afghanistan for example), threats of terror or terrorist groups (in the Philippines, Indonesia, Palestine, Afghanistan for example, as well as domestically in Australia) that involve Islam or Muslims. The use of 'Islam' or 'Muslim' as adjectives implies that Islam sanctions terrorism. These terms also appear in domestic articles about local terrorist suspects and Islamic leaders who are accused of having connections with 'radicals' or who engage with 'extremist Islamic groups,' or in relation to Muslim detainees 'making trouble' in detention centres (see example of the negative article in *The Age* on page 16 of this report).

These articles generally do not contain lengthy discussion about Islam or Muslims. Further, the terms are used interchangeably. There is no consistency in relation to how the terms fanatic, extremist, fundamentalist, and militant are used in news articles. This raises the issue of typology and how we understand the meanings given to these terms. Further, adjectives used to describe Muslim individuals or the activities of these Islamic groups include 'blood-letting' and 'angry,' as those who 'threaten,' 'trigger' and 'attack.' This 'fear-based' discourse implies that 'we' should 'fear' 'them' because essentially Islamic terrorists are fighting a 'holy war' or 'jihad' against Western culture and values.

International news articles are overall often neutral and non-inflammatory in language, but actually reproduce negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam because they lack explanation of the wider context and do not include a range of opinions of Muslims themselves. Because these types of international articles are situated within the context

of the 'war on terror,' they tend to focus on physical events that occur in these 'war zones' and in doing so recreate the image that Muslims in the Middle East are violent jihad fighters who need to be stopped and controlled by the West. The implied assumption is that Muslims are connected to conflict, disunity and militancy.

The majority of articles about the hunt for the September 11 terrorists (Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda members) and the US-led war in Afghanistan do not engage in discussion of Islam or Muslims. These articles are more concerned with military, strategic and political details rather than a discussion of Islam as such. They often contextualise the 'war on terror' in terms of Islamic jihad or holy war, but provide little discussion of Islam and Muslims.

On the counter-construction side, terms such as 'moderate' and 'mainstream' are used to describe Muslims who we do not need to 'fear.' These terms are used in articles that juxtapose 'extremists' and 'moderates,' and usually in domestic articles that seek to reinforce that not all Muslims are 'extremists' or 'terrorists.' We also found that 'Islamic' and 'Muslim' are used as adjectives in domestic articles in relation to non-terrorist activity, such as 'Muslim police officer,' 'Muslim school children,' 'Muslim worshippers,' and so on. It appears that journalists and the editorial staff in *The Age* and *Herald Sun* feel compelled to continually mark Muslim identities in news stories.

The marking of Muslim identity often means that one's degree of participation in Islam is made the subject of news articles or is implied as the cause of the 'negative' event. For example, a story about a Muslim Turkish couple that burned down their kebab shop explicitly links the 'barbarism' and 'sexism' of Islam to the act. The article, called 'Forced to obey husband,' in the *Herald Sun* (29/05/2002) reads, "Religion led a devoutly Muslim woman to join her husband in a plot to blow up their kebab shop, a court heard yesterday. Fadime Cubuk, 24, always stuck strictly to the teachings of the Koran - which included obeying her husband, Muhammed." This is a negative story and Islam is placed squarely at the heart of criminal activity. The sub-text of this article tells the reader that the Koran teaches women to obey any order by their husbands, including criminal activity. This is an over-simplistic generalisation and will be discussed in more detail in relation to gender.

Many of the news articles in the database are about the abuse and violence Muslims have experienced since September 11, 2001. In these domestic articles Muslims are the subjects (whose identity is again marked because they are Muslims) – as victims of abuse. It is often the case that the abusers' identities, or suspected identities, are not at all mentioned, making Muslims the most visible players in these stories of violence and conflict. Although it may be true that the police do not know who is committing these violent acts against Muslims, there seems to be a lack of news stories about the police search for these criminals. Additionally, there are many news stories about community leaders calling for calm and tolerance, but again, the criminals and racists who make trouble remain invisible in the media. This means that these criminals and racists are not made responsible for their actions, reinforcing the assumed link between Muslims and violence.

V.b.2. Dominant Themes

This section explores themes of terrorism, race, gender and the direct link between international and domestic events to understand the ways in which the news media contributes to the reproduction of negative stereotypes. As discussed earlier, terrorism, race, gender and the ongoing relationship between international and domestic events have been chosen because the first three are pertinent social issues which significantly contribute to the construction of Islam and Muslims, and the latter provides a frame for understanding the reproduction and recreation of negative stereotypes and (mis)informed understandings of Islam.

1. *Terrorism*

The identification of Islam with acts of terrorism, or terrorism in the name of Islam, is commonly known as 'Islamic terrorism.' Because these 'Islamic jihad fighters' and 'Muslims' come from 'other' parts of the world – namely the Middle East and 'conflict zones,' they have occupied a 'foreign' place in the Australian imagination. But events have brought Muslims and their religion to Australia either as asylum seekers, residents, students, religious leaders, or terrorists with an agenda. More recent events in London in July 2005 and the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks have contributed to the West's fear and (mis)understanding of Islam and have raised the issue of 'home grown' terrorists. The 'war on terror' has a sub-text which many perceive as a 'war on Islam.' This war has no boundaries. It is a war fought in metaphysical and ideological spaces; and this includes Australian space.

It is possible to say, therefore, that acts and threats of terrorism (as executed by Islamic extremists), as they make news, particularly demonstrate how the link between international and domestic news reporting contributes to the construction of Islam and Muslims in Australia, because international acts of terror become domestic issues when Western homelands are subject to attack. In fact, the threat of terrorism collapses the perceived separation between 'Us' and 'Them' because nowadays 'They' are living in 'Our' communities. Although 'They' remain the 'Other,' there is a new sense of fear of 'Them' because they are now near 'Us' in 'Our' society. Therefore, the way in which the public understand 'Us' and 'Them' has been recreated to adapt to the new climate of fear. With the inclusion of Western converts to Islam, the frames for interpreting the 'Other' are shifting and are no longer reliable.

This excerpt from the *Herald Sun* (20/11/2001) illustrates how 'They' have infiltrated 'Our' land:

Australian Islamic groups have fundraising and merchandising ties to a UK company that has been recruiting Muslims to Osama bin Laden's terror groups. ... The ties shed new light on the relationship between pro-Osama bin Laden networks in the UK and minority groups in Australia's Muslim communities, academics say. ... This week Insight was also able to log on to Melbourne-based IISCA's web site and down

load an order form from Azzam Publications for the controversial pro-jihad video *The Martyrs of Bosnia*. ... IISCA this week denied any financial relationship with Azzam but defended the video and IISCA's web site links. IISCA secretary Amjid Muhammad said: "If you think it is in bad taste, that is your opinion. Don't go to the site."

And,

... reports emerged yesterday of people of Middle Eastern backgrounds cheering the terrorist attacks against the US. Melbourne Airport spokeswoman Bianca Polidori confirmed some taxi drivers had been seen shouting anti-US slogans. "It's very inappropriate behaviour and people were shocked by it," she said. "But I don't want people to think a lot of taxi drivers were involved. There's no organised group." In Queensland, Muslim students reportedly cheered as TV images of the New York plane crashes were played at a university library. Melbourne workers arriving at a city office yesterday were shocked to see pro-terrorist slogans daubed on the entrance doors. "Victory to Islam", "Allah" and "Death for Jews" were spraypainted on a five-storey building at the corner of Collins and King streets. Cleaners arrived to remove the graffiti about 8am. Mr Hazou condemned the incidents and said the overwhelming majority of Arabic and Muslim Australians were horrified by the attacks (*Herald Sun* 14/09/2001).

In this news story the journalists (John Masanauskas and Philip Cullen) try to make clear that not all Muslims are terrorists and not all support extremist ideologies. Yet readers are still faced with the reality that there are Muslims in our society who do support extremist acts of terror.

The fact that Muslim extremists are in Australia raises alarm and creates the illusion of a link between Muslims and terrorists, or at least that we must be suspicious of Arabs and Muslims. The stereotype that depicts terrorists as strict Muslims also contributes to (mis)understandings of Islam. For example, Michael Beach from the *Herald Sun* (4/10/2001) writes of Muhammed Atta who played a lead role in the September 11 terrorist attacks:

Hijak ringleader Mohamed Atta left a will barring women from his funeral and instructing mourners not to cry. He also asked his fellow Muslims to "pray that I will go to heaven". The will was found in a bag left at Boston airport along with a five-page instruction manual for his fellow hijackers. ... "The person who will wash my body near my genitals must wear gloves so that I am not touched there. I don't want a pregnant woman or a person who is unclean to come and say goodbye to me. "I only want to be buried next to good Muslims, my face should be directed east towards Mecca. "Women must not be present at my funeral or go to my grave at any later date."

Clearly, this article attempts to expose the strict orthodoxy of Islam as being partly responsible for Atta's barbarism. By emphasising the sexism and intolerance of Islam in Atta's will, the reader is confronted with a set of images of Islam as not only a religion that sanctions terrorism, but also sexism, extreme piety and is puritanical.

Furthermore, articles with headlines such as “Australia Islam’s enemy, Muslims told” (*The Age* 10/12/2002), which tell readers that “Australia has been accused of being an enemy of Islam in speeches to mosques in Asia, increasing the risk of terrorist attacks, according to a leading defence expert,” contribute to the fear of the Muslim Other because not only do non-Muslims have to fear Muslims in Australia, but abroad as well. An examination of terrorism also implicates ‘race’ issues because terrorists are stereotyped as non-Western, and usually Middle Eastern.

This stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists and all Middle Easterners as Muslims has led to serious problems for asylum seekers from Middle Eastern backgrounds and Muslim nations. Not only do these people become terrorist suspects because of their ethnic and religious identities, but also their stories that make the news contribute to the reproduction of negative stereotypes of asylum seekers, Muslims and Islam. The *Herald Sun* (2/10/2001) reported the following,

Members of a Muslim fundamentalist group now waging a holy war against the US have been granted refugee status and live in Victoria. In granting permission for the Egyptian husband and wife to remain in Australia, the Refugee Review Tribunal "noted that the applicants have been implicated in the activities of an extremist religious/political group, the al Jihad". Further evidence of refugees with links to terrorist groups has surfaced after reports last week that a suspected bomber and follower of Osama bin Laden has been living in Victoria for the past three years awaiting deportation. But the Refugee Tribunal heard the Egyptian couple, although implicated in al Jihad, had refused to be involved in acts of violence.

And this excerpt from *The Age* (23/11/2002),

Terror Islamic militants from Egypt with links to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden have successfully sought asylum in Australia to avoid arrest and interrogation by security forces. It is believed they have targeted Australia as a haven since the mid-1990s because of its relatively open immigration system and lengthy avenues for appeal, Refugee Review Tribunal records show. While records show many were rejected by the tribunal after their claims of persecution were dismissed, *The Age* believes a significant number were approved. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said a man with links to the terrorist group suspected of the Bali bombings was living in Australia.

These stories are negative both in relation to topic, and narrative (in the case of the *Herald Sun*). They are about Muslim individuals who indeed engaged in extremist Islam, the repercussions for the social image of ordinary Muslim asylum seekers and Muslims more generally is reproduced as negative because there is a sense of fear that ‘They’ can slip through the system and become part of Australian society. The direct link between international terrorists and domestic Australian Muslims is reinforced in this article because although there are a minority of individuals who resonate with extremist Islamic ideology, the majority do not, but yet the majority become suspects by default.

2. *Race*

Muslims are somehow conceived of as a 'race' of people because dominant stereotypes portray them as Arabs (from the Middle East/or of Middle Eastern background). This study reveals that this link is still being reproduced in our news media.

For example, an article entitled 'Mosques go on alert' in the *Herald Sun* (13/09/2001) reports,

...Muslim and Arabic leaders called urgent meetings yesterday to discuss the tragedy and its possible effects on their communities. ...Mr Jabbour said despite isolated pockets of support for the attacks in the Middle East, the overwhelming majority of Arabs and Muslims would condemn the actions.

Similarly, this excerpt from an article in the *Herald Sun* (14/09/2001) entitled "Hate attacks sweep nation" reinforces assumptions that Arabs and Muslims are one and the same in America:

Dozens of anti-Muslim attacks were reported across the United States in an ugly backlash to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Police stopped 300 protesters from marching on a mosque in the southwest Chicago suburb of Bridgeview yesterday. There were no injuries but three people were arrested. "I'm proud to be American and I hate Arabs and I always have," said Colin Zaremba, 19, who marched with the group from Oak Lawn. In Chicago, a molotov cocktail was tossed at an Arab-American community centre and a firebomb was hurled at a mosque in Montreal.

Again, the assumed link between Arabs and Muslims is not only revealed by Colin Zaremba, the 19 year old who "hates Arabs," but in the meaning implied by the journalist who introduces the story in terms of an "anti-Muslim" attack and later finishes it with another assumed link between Arabs and Muslims: "a Molotov cocktail was tossed at an Arab-American community centre and a firebomb was hurled at a mosque." As in most domestic articles about 'attacks on Muslims' the reader is left wondering who the perpetrators of these attacks might be.

Indeed, these reports reflect the level of (mis)understanding in our community in relation to the linkage of Islam (as religion) and Arab ethnic groups (as race) – as other Muslim groups such as Indonesian, Sudanese or Chechens (as non-Arab) for example, do not appear in news reports as targets of anti-Muslim sentiment. The attacks against Arabs (all who are assumed to be Muslim) are framed in terms of racism, and reinforce the assumed link between all Muslims and Middle Easterners, and thus reproduce the homogeneity of Islam and Muslims.

The following excerpt from an article in *The Age* (14/09/2001) entitled "Call for Unity as Muslims Attacked" reveals how these attacks are understood as racism:

In Perth, police said a mosque was defiled with human faeces. The Australian Arabic Council said a hotline for people to report racist attacks had been swamped by calls. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock urged Australians to remain united and to not seek scapegoats following the terrorist attacks in the US. Head of the Uniting Church in Victoria, Reverend Alistair Macrae, asked people to "resist the temptation to retaliate against innocent people, especially Muslims". Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell told a prayer service: "It's quite unjust to scapegoat our Islamic community because they too reject these murders." New South Wales Premier Bob Carr also moved to quell racial tensions, saying hate attacks would not be tolerated.

The article shares overtones of religious, hate and racial attacks. Similarly, this article from the *Herald Sun* (14/09/2001) called 'Tensions rise in Australia,' reports attacks against Arabs and Muslims and defines them in terms of 'race:'

Rising tension over the US tragedy has led to several racist attacks against Arabic and Muslim Australians, it was claimed yesterday.

The understanding of Muslims as a 'race' is a partial truth because not all Muslims belong to the same ethnic background and therefore cannot be called a 'race.' And Anglo-Saxon Western converts to Islam would not be described as part of the 'Muslim race' because 'race' refers to 'ethnicity' rather than religion. Adopting reference to race in the media also reproduces the notion of homogeneity in Islam and of Muslims. Although Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, media stereotypes do not frame it in 'racial' or 'Islamic' terms except in relation to terrorism. Indeed, Indonesia has in the past been consistently referred to as an Asian neighbour, rather than a Muslim one. But the context of terrorism has changed that. The idea that Indonesian Muslims are a threat to Australia is present especially in articles about Indonesian Muslims fighting with the Taliban against the USA-led war in Afghanistan.

Racist notions are reproduced by the implied meanings of news texts, particularly in stories which report on negative aspects of Muslim cultural practices. Thus, the negativity of Islam and Muslims extends beyond terrorism and into the portrayal of Muslim practices more broadly. The following excerpt from an article in *The Age* (25/09/2003) exemplifies how Muslim cultural practices are the subject of debate among non-Muslim Westerners. It particularly demonstrates how positive stories can be read in negative ways. The story is about Muslim and Western differences in relation to the treatment of animals, which touches on a debate about animal cruelty. The story is positive because there is sufficient explanation about the practice in question by referring to Yasser Soliman's comments. Yet the negative image of Muslims and their cultural practices as alien and uncivilised is nonetheless reproduced:

The quivering animal is pierced precisely around the neck with a sharp knife. Blood pours out of its arteries and spills on to the floor. Thanks is given to God. It is now ready for consumption. The slaughter of animals must be carried out in a specific way in order for it to be considered halal meat. Contrary to claims by animal rights activists, the animal must be

dealt with "humanely" and must be in a healthy state before it is killed, according to Islamic Council of Victoria president Yasser Soliman. "It should be quick and done with a very sharp knife," he said. "It should be as painless as possible. The animal should be healthy and the food that they've eaten should be wholesome. As much as possible the blood should be drained from the body because that also tends to be one of the first things that germs like to breed in." The person conducting the slaughter must be facing the direction of Mecca, to acknowledge God. Diseased animals are not acceptable. Nor are animals that are afraid, as it is believed fear releases a hormone into their body that is unhealthy. Animals cannot see other animals being killed. The spinal cord should not be cut because that hinders the animal's muscular movement, which will lessen the amount of blood discharged.

The article ends by contrasting 'humane' Western practices and 'slaughtering' Muslim practices:

In Australia, an animal's brain is stunned before a killing. RSPCA national president Hugh Wirth said this did not occur in the Middle East. "We certainly have been pointing out to the Federal Government in the last two years that the killing of cattle and sheep in the Middle East in particular is not humane like we do it," he said.

The information in this article also reproduces the homogeneity of Muslims which can be contrasted to 'Us' as Westerners. The association of Muslims with cruelty to animals and 'barbarism' also leads to the notion that Muslims are outside our accepted norms and value system.

The Age (27/3/2002):

Food samples were taken by Department of Human Services officials overnight, with results expected in the next few days. Victoria's acting Chief Health Officer, Dr John Carnie, suspects a bacterial infection, causing an outbreak of gastroenteritis, was the cause. "There is some evidence that suggests (the rice) had been prepared the day before and then reheated yesterday (Monday)," Dr Carnie said. "Clearly this is one of the risk factors." An investigation team from the department was at the centre early yesterday examining the food preparation area and conducting a thorough clean-up of the centre. ... "In this case it's food which was provided on a voluntary basis. It's not a commercial outfit," Dr Carnie said. Pamphlets on guidelines for community food events are available in languages other than English, but comprehensive kits on the guidelines - which have been available in English for more than 12 months - will not be available in other languages until next month. Dr Carnie said language might be a problem but a greater problem was people trying to cater for lots of customers in kitchens that were not suitable for that sort of catering.

This particular case of food poisoning is a negative story occurring during a time of heightened focus on Islam, which only contributes to the ongoing negative imagery associated with Muslims. This article implies that Muslims are unhygienic, as they had not read the "guidelines for community food events" and had prepared food in unsuitable kitchens. It is understood that although the journalist, Orietta Guerrera, is reporting the story based on the information gathered, the fact that Muslims and Islam are the source of 'fear' in our communities contributes to the negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam as different to 'Us' as the 'Other.'

The media's concern for Muslim dietary laws is further illustrated by coverage of the Hume Council dilemma surrounding the banning of ham from its council lunches.

Ham sandwiches are off the menu in Hume. Council staff have been ordered to stop serving ham and pork at hundreds of events out of respect to the area's large Muslim population. Hume chief executive Darrell Treloar said he had ordered the ban because 12 per cent of the area's population - and two councillors, including the mayor - were Muslim. "Rather than having a situation where staff or members of the community are made uncomfortable or put in a position where they are unable to participate in the meal we share, I felt it would be better to remove the meat," he said. "Instead of ham and cheese sandwiches, we can have tomato and cheese." (*Herald Sun* 23/5/2003)

This domestic issue is interesting because the ban was put in place in order to show respect for Muslims in the area, but was met with a backlash when non-Muslim and Muslim residents described the ban as discriminatory. The case shows that since the September 11 terrorist attacks that the Australian public has become increasingly aware of the vilification of Muslims, and is doing what it can to let Muslims know that they are aware of Muslim culture and want to express that awareness. In response, Muslims are informing concerned and sensitive members of the public that they are part of Australian multiculturalism and see no need for 'Australian' practices to change in order to meet Islamic laws or cultural practices. This interesting dialogue is taking place at the local level (domestic) in response to international events (terrorism).

Yet not all local dialogues are positive. The following excerpt from the *Herald Sun* (2/10/2003) demonstrates hostilities among residents in Altona East:

A PLAN to build a mosque on parkland in Melbourne's west has divided a community. Scores of protesters have taken a stand against plans for a mosque and community centre on a section of Paisley Park in Altona East. Protesters say they are angry Hobsons Bay Council is considering selling a 9000sq m section of the park to the Islamic Society of Newport. They say the council has no right to sacrifice public open space for the development. Save Paisley Park Action Group president Jason McHale said he felt the mosque had priority over other projects. "People have been asking for a skate park for years and there is no park -- then a mosque comes along and we're in the throes of losing our park." Mr McHale said locals agreed the Lebanese community needed a new mosque but said Paisley Park was not appropriate.

The negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam contributes to already existing racist attitudes held by Australians. Reports such as the following from the *Herald Sun* (11/11/2001) demonstrate how elements of racism are alive in our community in relation to asylum seekers:

THE boat people row blew up yesterday when Liberals were accused of urging people to "vote for John Howard and keep the Muslims out". As more than 12 million Australians turned out to vote, a tearful Labor campaign worker on the NSW central coast complained about comments being made by Liberal supporters handing out how-to-vote cards. Senior Labor sources said the woman reported that Liberals at the Wyong Grove Public School advised voters to "vote for John Howard and keep the Muslims out". In the seat of Robertson, Labor campaign manager Paul Howes said Liberal campaign workers told voters: "A vote for the Liberals will keep out the people you don't want in Australia." They also told people: "The queue-jumpers and the refugees won't come in under the Liberals."

Although this story is quite neutral, it reminds readers of the link between domestic and international issues and reveals a persistent streak of racism which is tolerated by Liberals.

3. *Gender*

The issue of 'women and Islam' continues to make news in our media in complex ways. The ways in which the media represents men and women, and the relationship between men and women in Islam varies depending on what is in vogue, what events are taking/or have taken place, and with which media format we engage. Television, for example, produces powerful sets of images through camera footage, and magazines and newspapers also print powerful images to suit their angle. But the text of news articles also contributes to our understandings of Muslim men and women by adding more information to that which we collect and make sense of via imagery.

Where Muslim men are generally depicted as fanatics, terrorists, extremists and militants from Middle Eastern backgrounds (images which usually place men in mosques praying in Muslim garb or in camp training settings wearing balaclavas and holding machine guns), or Asian men with white robes and long beards (such as Abu Bakar Bashir), women are depicted in various way which may demonise Islam or generate sympathy for Muslims depending on the context of the story. The veil that marks a Muslim woman's religious identity has been the subject of much discussion and debate between Muslim and non-Muslim women and men alike. A significant number of Western women in particular have questioned the use of the veil and have argued that it is oppressive. Many Muslim women interpret their use of the veil as non-oppressive and empowering, a view that now seems to be 'tolerated' or accepted by the broader community more generally.

In any case, Muslim women's bodies and sexualities have become a contested site for discussion among the public. This sense of needing to manage and control Muslim women's bodies and religious expression is exemplified by France's introduction of a law banning religious symbolism through clothing in public schools. A binary has thus emerged in the news media where on the one hand Muslim women are depicted as

oppressed and on the other as empowered. This largely depends on the newspaper in which the article is printed. Based on the articles in the database constructed for this report, *The Age* printed more positive stories about Muslim women which were balanced and progressive, whereas the *Herald Sun* tended to print stories that portrayed Islam as sexist and women as oppressed.

The example used earlier in the report of the Muslim Turkish couple that burned down their kebab shop illustrates how the *Herald Sun* framed the news story in terms of an 'Islamic event,' which serves to reinforce dominant stereotypes which claim that Muslim women are oppressed by their husbands and the Koran. In this way, women are used to illustrate the demonic and alien characteristics of Islam. In another article on the same matter, the *Herald Sun* (13/06/2003) writes,

The Turkish Islamic tradition of wives obeying their husbands led a woman to join in a \$150,000 insurance scam over an exploded kebab shop, a court heard yesterday. ... Her barrister, Reg Marron, said Ms Cubuk's strictly traditional Turkish Islamic family believed it was the wife's duty to obey her husband. He said Ms Cubuk's marriage was an arranged one, with Cubuk, who came out from Turkey, chosen by her parents. Mr Marron said that wives who disobeyed their husbands risked being beaten and that this was "straight from the Koran".

Another example from the *Herald Sun* (25/09/2001) portrays elderly Muslim men as sexual predators and women as highly sexual beings who are ultimately weak and dependant upon men:

Kuala Lumpur - Elderly Muslim men who marry young virgins but are unable to satisfy their brides' sexual demands have been accused of torture by a leading Malaysian cleric. Nik Aziz Nik Mat, spiritual leader of the Parti Islam SeMalaysia, said aged men wanted young brides as trophy wives and could not consummate the marriage. "This (is) tantamount to torturing the wives who are helpless and prohibited to turn to other men to seek matrimonial pleasures," he was quoted as saying during a weekly religious lecture.

These negative stories may be contrasted with the significant number of stories on rapes of Muslim women in Victoria, which portray Muslim women in a different light. A number of sub-texts could be derived from such stories, but ultimately they express concern for the abuse Muslim women are suffering as a result of the backlash against Muslims since September 11. These stories do not suggest that 'Islam' is the cause for the rapes, but rather that they were generated by 'racism.' In this way, Islam and Muslims are not 'blamed' for the attacks, but racism is. *The Age* (17/06/2004) reported the following on the matter:

Two young Muslim women were raped in Melbourne's northern suburbs just days after the September 11 terrorist attacks in what were believed to be racially motivated assaults, according to the Islamic Council of Victoria. The women and their families did not report the rapes to police for fear of repercussions, council president Yasser Soliman said. "Racist remarks were made . . . as a revenge type thing," he said. "The victims and their families are refusing to report because they don't want to be dragged into anything further that might mean more backlash or discrimination against their daughters." Mr Soliman said police were aware of the issue but the young women, believed to be in their late teens or early 20s, and their parents, were reluctant to discuss the rapes.

The fact that these women fear the repercussions of reporting the rapes to the police suggests that the affected family feels abandoned by the Australian community and outside its normal rules. It could also suggest that women are scared of members of their own community who may oppose them reporting the crime for fear of bringing shame to the family, and again reinforce stereotypes that Muslim women are oppressed and abused victims of men and Islam.

Yet there have also been a significant number of stories which seek to show the agentic side of Muslim women. Since the rapes of Muslim women stories have been written about Muslim women seeking to empower themselves by learning martial arts:

Victorian Muslims are turning to martial arts for protection after a series of assaults. Two women claim racists raped them in the northern suburbs. Several Islamic centres and mosques are offering martial arts and self-defence courses following harassment and assaults in the period since the September 2001 attacks on the US. Islamic Council of Victoria president Yasser Soliman said the Muslim community had felt the need to increase self-protection. The Islamic Information and Services Network of Australasia, based in Sydney Rd, Brunswick, recently began a course on "kickboxing and self-defence for sisters". IISNA's gym offers the defence course to protect against assault and build a physical closeness to Allah. (*Herald Sun*, 17/01/2004)

The Age has particularly portrayed the Muslim female self as empowered. These 'Self' stories include articles on Victoria's first female Muslim police officer to wear a veil while working, individual Muslim women's experiences in Australia such as a Muslim school teacher's experiences in the class room and on the street, and Western women converts to Islam. This excerpt from *The Age* (26/04/2004) is a feature on a Muslim fashion designer:

Fashion designer Frida Dakiz has a quixotic approach to commerce. "I don't care about money," she says. "Girls come into my shop and act stuck up; I won't sell to them. If someone wants to wear my clothing, they should have a great personality. "If there's some scum thinking they're top dog wearing my clothes, I'd be embarrassed." So there. Dakiz describes herself as "feisty". She certainly doesn't mince words. . . . "My clothes keep the traditional guidelines - you can't show the figure of your body; you only show your hands, feet and face - but modernise it and use

different colours. I don't want to make it easier for someone to wear it. I just want them to look more gorgeous."

Her Muslim-dress designer clothes empower her and other women:

"Islamic women come in and even if they don't buy anything, I give them inspiration. The dressing rooms are huge; we wrap the dresses in paper - they (the women) feel they're special. They get the treatment they don't get in big city stores." However, she says she sells many clothes to non-Islamic women. "They get beautiful clothes and an education, too. Peace-workers going to Arabic countries, for example, come in and ask me what to wear and how to wear it. It's grouse. "Our religion is basically an instruction booklet for life. It gives me peace, harmony, patience. People say Islam is no good for women, but it's totally the opposite. Women have more rights than men do. People get confused by cultural things, which are different to religious things."

4. *The Connection between International and Domestic Events*

The analysis of terrorism, race, and gender suggests that the news media construction of Muslims and Islam is multi-layered, and is influenced by events overseas and at home. This suggests that the schism between Muslims 'here' and Muslims 'there' is not fixed and clear; it is multi-dimensional and complex and means that the binary between 'Us' and 'Them' is not clear-cut. This is particularly demonstrated by Western governments' concern for what are called 'home grown' terrorists: Western Muslim extremists who blur the boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them' because they fit into the popular social fabric of society and are undetectable.

Further, orientalist imagery of Muslims in the Middle East as barbaric, backward, sexist and violent has spilled onto stereotypes of Muslims in Australia. 'They' have penetrated 'Our' community and present a greater fear or threat to our way of life. The ASIO raids on suspected terrorists (mostly Indonesian) in 2002 demonstrate how 'They' are present in 'Our' lives and 'We' need to manage 'Them.'

But what of non-Arab Muslims (i.e. Anglo-Saxon Muslim converts) such as David Hicks and Jack 'Jihad' Thomas? How does the media define these men who blur the lines between 'Us' and 'Them'? Surely they cannot be defined in terms of joining the Muslim 'race?' Terms such as 'traitor,' 'terrorist,' 'Al-Qaeda sympathiser,' and 'camp trainee' are used to describe these men who fit into the category of 'home grown terrorist.' And it is interesting to note that the number of Western women converting to Islam is on the rise:

Despite family misgivings, more Australian women are turning to Islam ... Susan Carland can trace her forebears to the First Fleet. But strangers tell her "go back to your own country". "It's quite hilarious," says the 23-year-old youth worker, who has encountered this response from strangers since she donned a hijab (scarf) after converting to Islam in her late teens. "What country do you want me to go to?" ... The latest census figures showed a 40 per cent increase in Australian Muslims to more than

285,000 (1.5 per cent of the population) in five years. It is not known what proportion are converts. But the president of the Islamic Council of Victoria, Yasser Soliman, says it appears to be more common among women. (*The Age* 22/12/2002)

The high rate of Western converts to Islam taps into ongoing historical conflicts and tensions between Christians and Muslims. Indeed, the high number of articles in the database that engaged discussion of this issue suggests that it is still alive in the Australian community. The Catch the Fire Ministries case in Victoria, involving Pentecostal Ministers' vilification of Muslims after the September 11 terrorist attacks, particularly demonstrates this West/Islam divide. Again, this illustrates how international events have direct repercussions in domestic environments and religious circles, and indeed impacts on the wider community and wider socio-religious relations.

V.b.3. Positive Counter-Constructions

Despite the negative implications of reportage on international events that implicate Muslims and Islam, which do tend to homogenise Muslims and Islam, many news articles also contribute to counter-constructions of Muslims and Islam in domestic contexts. This means that the media identifies a difference between Australian Muslims who live here with 'Us' and non-Australian Muslims who live in international contexts. In the case of news reports in relation to domestic Muslim issues, there are frequent references to and positive direct quotes from key Muslim leaders which promote understanding of Muslims and Islam and condemn terrorist attacks and Islamic extremism.

These articles also distinguish between 'extremist' and 'moderate' modes of Islam, therefore emphasising the fact that not all Muslims are radicals. Such articles emphasise the peacefulness of Islam. There are also 'Self' stories that allow readers to learn about Muslim individuals and Islamic culture more generally, especially women from feminist perspectives. These articles portray Muslim children, women and men as part of Australian culture, as family oriented, anti-terrorist and good Australian citizens. 'Self' stories portray the normal, stable and sociality of Australian Muslims.

News headlines such as the following examples reveal an effort by the media to counter negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam and to demonstrate the Muslim community's active role in calling for religious and racial unity in Australian multiculturalism:

"Call for Unity as Muslims Attacked" *The Age* (14/09/2001), Gabrielle Costa (with AAP)

"Religions Unite to Call for Tolerance, Peace" *Herald Sun* (14/09/2001), author's name not printed

"Call for Calm after Rise in Attacks on Muslims" *The Age* (15/09/2001), Chloe Saltau

"Plea from Victorian Muslims" *Herald Sun* (16/09/2001), Kylie Smith

"Muslims in Melbourne Denounce Holy War" *The Age* (11/10/2001), David Wroe

"Muslims keen to help" *Herald Sun* (7/12/2001), Mark Dunn

"Grief without hate" *Herald Sun* (6/09/2002), Russell Robinson

"Proud Muslim recruit grins and wears it" *Herald Sun* (27/11/2004), Milanda Rout

"Constable makes Muslim hijab part of Victoria Police uniform" *The Age* (27/11/2004), Lorna Edwards

VI. Conclusion

The Age and *The Herald Sun* newspapers are not Islamophobic. But the representation of Islam and Muslims is not problem-free. This project has revealed that there are degrees of ignorance in the Australian community in relation to Muslims and Islam. Ignorance contributes to a sense of unease. This is a society-wide issue that finds its way into the pages of the press. Journalists are shaped by their social environment and are open to a range of political and ideological influences, some of which are openly hostile towards Islam.

The picture that emerges from the media coverage of Islam, therefore, is mixed. It reflects the level of journalists' familiarity with Islam and professionalism. *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* have at times printed news stories that reinforce the dichotomy of 'Us' and 'Them,' often with racial undertones. This representation tends to emphasise stereotypes and cast Muslims and Islam in an unfavourable light. In this respect, the *Herald Sun* has a record of recurrent stereotyping and negative reporting, accounting for a quarter of its coverage on Islam in the period under study. The image of Muslims as unclean, social deviants and security threats is being regenerated against the backdrop of the 'war on terror.' Heightened security concerns have made the Muslim community an easy target for an extra-ordinary level of media scrutiny. This implied guilt-by-association is socially irresponsible and hurtful to Australian Muslims.

The negative images of Islam and Muslim that are contained in *The Age* and the *Herald Sun*, however, are not solely due to the construction of news stories, and editorial choice of words. The content of such stories have a significant impact on the overall impression they leave behind. An obvious case in point is stories about terrorism which have dominated the front pages of most newspapers. News stories about war and conflict are anchored in the shocking negativity of these events, and the senseless nature of terrorism. Even an informed journalist with a high sense of professionalism and a commitment to avoiding stereotypes would find it difficult to avoid the negative impression that links Islam with violence and carnage. In such cases, journalists and their newspapers may not be faulted for this negative impression, and as such these stories were not identified as negative in the present study.

Consequently, while the proportion of negative reporting is relatively small (5% for *The Age* and 24% for *The Herald Sun*), the type of news stories and their content could still leave a negative impression which are far more significant than this study was able to assess.

The press media coverage of Islam and Muslims, it must be emphasised, is not all negative. Both *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* have printed news stories, carefully constructed with familiar and positive imagery, to present Islam and Australian Muslims in a positive light. Half of all news stories on Islam and Muslim in *The Age* and a quarter of such stories in the *Herald Sun* were constructed with a careful choice of words and a deliberate attempt to demonstrate the diversity of Australian Muslims and avoid stereotyping. These stories address the genuine public curiosity about Islam in recent years. Best examples in the positive category are 'Self' stories (most extensively employed in *The Age*) which explore the daily experiences of Australian Muslims, demonstrating the ordinariness of Muslims' family and professional chores, and in the process overcome the psychological wall that separates the non-Muslim readership from their Muslim neighbours. Self stories break the 'Us' and 'Them' dichotomy and make a significant contribution to overcoming religious and racial tension.

The unavoidable conclusion inherent in this study points to the importance of balanced and careful news coverage of events. Given the implicit influence of newspaper journalists on their readers, it is imperative that news on sensitive issues are investigated in depth and represented with due care to their impact on inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. This will mean avoiding stereo-types and reflecting the social, political and ideological diversity of Australian Muslims. Simplistic reports and recycling cliché do not inform readers. They reconfirm bias against a community that has become a subject of intense public scrutiny. The complexity of the Muslim community, just as others, requires careful news coverage which would give the readership a window into the sort of issues that affect the subject matter. Professional and unbiased reporting can contribute significantly to public education and inform the current debate about Islam and the future of Muslims in Australia.

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