

Case Study 3

Terrorism raids November 2005

Introduction

ASIO raids on the homes of people in Sydney and Melbourne in November 2005 resulted in charges being brought against 17 Muslim men. The reporting of four major newspapers shows that the papers made concerted attempts to be balanced in their reporting by running stories not only about the accused and their alleged crimes, but also about what were termed “moderate” elements of Islamic communities in Australia. The analysis shows that attempts to achieve balance by providing reports on “moderate” and “radical” elements of any community tend to oversimplify the character of the community. Indeed, the major problem such an attempt encounters is the perception that a community is monolithic, when in fact there are many Islamic communities in Australia. Additionally, the news media’s traditional reliance on conflict as a way of telling a story limits the capacity for explanation and contextualisation of issues; an increased reliance on News of Consequence as an approach would provide improved contextualisation of issues.

In the second week of November 2005, ASIO raided the homes of alleged Muslim militants in Sydney and Melbourne. The raids resulted in the arrests of 17 people and their later appearance in courts. This report looks at 271 news articles appearing in four newspapers from November 1 to November 14 in four discrete periods.

The articles show that the four newspapers attempted to deal with the issues by taking standard news approaches. For example, the newspapers attempted to provide balance by differentiating between “the Islamic community” in general and “extreme” or “militant” elements of Islamic communities. Further, the newspapers placed the accused squarely in the second category of extremists. While this separation may have benefited moderate Islamic communities, or Muslims in general, in terms of their perception in the wider national community, it may also have had the unfortunate effect of “convicting” the accused before their court appearances could be completed. Excerpts from alleged surveillance recordings and headlines like “Osama’s Aussie offspring” skirt dangerously around the laws of contempt of court.

In general, the reporting of issues during these periods can be loosely categorised into themes of stories dealing with the suspects themselves, stories dealing with Islamic communities in Australia, and the nation’s new counter-terrorism legislation. In the first category, a further subset of stories dealt with issues of radical Islam. Stories in the first category tended to take a News of Conflict approach, in which the “angle” or

introduction to the stories was invariably based on issues of conflict: conflict between militant Muslims and the wider community; conflict between militant Muslims and moderate Muslims; conflict between militant Islam and Christianity; and conflict between individual suspects and their family members. News of Conflict-type approaches to news events can lead to sensationalisation if they are not well contextualised.

Reports in the two other categories generally took a News of Consequence approach, attempting to explain how members of Islamic communities felt about the “terror raids” and how their communities reacted to the revelations. In these categories, an attempt was made to explain Islam to the wider community and to show commonalities in attitudes between Australian Islamic communities and other Australian communities. News of Consequence approaches tend to try to explain issues in the news and generally lead to better understanding by audience members of issues behind the news.

However, the attempt to show the newspapers’ audiences the face of Islam in Australia also tends to result in a portrayal of Islam and Islamic communities as monolithic and fails to show diversity or richness. Such reporting can lead to misunderstanding about issues such as “the reaction” of “the Islamic community” when context is lacking to such an extent. Journalistic approaches to community issues necessarily rely on verbal shorthand to make the most of limited space in newspapers’ columns. The Australian Arabic Council’s Roland Jabbour, in one report, asks the Australian media to be responsible in reporting arrests, as “ethnicity and religion should not be the focus”. In many cases, however, ethnicity and religion are interwoven into the issues, and untangling them can be time-consuming and editorial space-consuming and are either not addressed or insufficiently addressed in the stories under review. Under these circumstances, a News of Consequence approach, which attempts explain issues to a greater degree than a News of Conflict approach, is vital to audience understanding of complex issues.

This analysis of newspaper content also notes the use of value-laden terms to describe what are deemed to be radical elements of the Muslim community in Australia – in particular references to sermons being “shrieked”, clerics “preaching hatred” and repetitive use of the words “extremist” or “extremism”. Such terms require precise use in the context of stories providing limited contextual information.

The four reporting periods:

1. Preceding week (November 1-8)
2. The story breaks (November 9)
3. Aftermath (November 10 & 11)
4. The dust settles (November 12-14)

Newspapers sourced from Newsbank:

- ◆ [*The Australian*](#) (Monday-Saturday)
- ◆ [*The Canberra Times*](#) (7 days)

- ◆ [*Herald Sun*](#) (7 days) (Melbourne)
- ◆ [*The Age*](#) (7 days) (Melbourne)

1. Preceding week (reporting period November 1-8, 2005)

- ◆ 107 articles across four media outlets (includes collective letters to editors as one article)
 - 16 in *Herald Sun* (Melbourne) over 7 editions
 - 18 in *The Canberra Times* over 5 editions
 - 29 in *The Age* (Melbourne) over 7 editions
 - 44 in *The Australian* over 6 editions

Approximately three-quarters of the articles concerned either the new counter-terrorism legislation then being debated by Parliament or the amendments made to current legislation at the Prime Minister's instigation. The remaining articles explored the possibility of a terrorist attack in Australia, discussed the Australian "Islamic community", explicated Muslim extremism both in Australia and internationally, and speculated about the possible identification and arrest of Australian terrorists. These articles are discussed in detail below.

Australia's "Islamic community"

Although a number of articles discussed the possibility of Australian-born Muslim extremists, only three touched on the "Islamic community" generally. Two articles published by *The Age* on November 4 and 6 concerned the potential alienation and marginalisation of Australian Muslims through targeted application of the new counter-terrorism laws. The first article presented the views of non-Muslim civil rights advocates, worried that the Islamic community was being demonised and homogenised despite the wide array of cultural and ethnic backgrounds among its members, and the moderate beliefs of most Muslims. The second article presented the views of Keysar Trad, founder of the Islamic Friendship Association of Australia, who is regularly interviewed as an "Islamic community spokesman" by the Australian media. Mr Trad expressed fears that the counter-terrorism legislation would inevitably target Muslim Australians but that this would not be recognised by the general public due to legal restrictions on reporting detentions. He urged the families of detained people to publicise their "disappearance" and criticised the Federal Government for intimidating the Australian population. The third article was a short piece by federal minister Tony Abbott, taken from the Liberal Party journal and republished by *The Australian* on November 2. The headline given to this piece by the newspaper was "No worries, mate – Muslims will naturally integrate". Mr Abbott revealed his conversion from a sceptic to supporter of multiculturalism, based on his experiences of working alongside "Chinese, Greek, Islander [and] Aboriginal" Australians for Constitutional Monarchy. He contended that demanding Muslim women abandon their headscarves would make them more vulnerable and different, not more Australian. He assured readers that Muslim Australians would adapt in their own way

and at their own pace, as no one is "... resistant to the gravitational pull of the Australian way of life ..."

Islamic extremism

The majority of articles concerning Muslim Australians published during this period were opinion and analysis pieces that focused on extremism and the threat posed by extremists. On November 1, *The Age* published an opinion piece by Ted Lapkin, director of policy analysis at the Australia/Israel Jewish Affairs Council. This piece, entitled "When at war, words can kill", quoted substantially from "jihadist propaganda" sold by an Islamic bookstore associated with "radical" cleric Sheikh Mohammed Omran. Mr Lapkin asserted that the terrorist attacks committed in New York, Bali, Madrid and London demonstrated that "we are at war", and so counter-terrorism measures must target "enemy propaganda" which potentially incites violence. On November 8, *The Age* published a response to this piece, written by Amjid Muhammed, advisory committee member of an Islamic education and welfare society (ASWJ) led by Sheikh Omran. Dr Muhammed contended that the media depiction of Omran's views had distorted his message about terrorism's incompatibility with Islam, deliberately creating a climate of fear and distrust that was used to advance political agendas. He noted that the books of "jihadist propaganda" referred to in the earlier article were available from university libraries, and that these books garnered no attention from visitors to the society's bookstore until media coverage brought them to public notice.

The five remaining articles were published in *The Australian* between November 3 and 7. Four articles formed a series reporting on extremist preaching by Muslim clerics in Sydney and Melbourne. The first article, "Clerics still preaching hatred of West", revealed that the author had spent four weeks attending "controversial" mosques to research the story. The story identified Sheikhs Omran and Zoud as the leaders of radical clerics preaching "against the West". It quoted extensively from sermons praising the mujaheddin fighting in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan and denigrating the actions of the Australian and US governments in the "war on terror". The apparent hypocrisy of their preaching was revealed by contrasting the clerics' speeches in Arabic with the public comments denouncing terrorism that they had previously made to national media outlets. It also cited their "contempt" and "open defiance" of Prime Minister Howard's call for Islamic community leaders to denounce terrorism. The report stated that one cleric "screamed ... inflammatory rhetoric" while another "gloated over the fears held by Westerners". A second article was published the following day, expanding on the author's "undercover" experiences and providing an insider's view of the "controversial" mosques. The same provocative quotes were included, and the views of Sheikhs Omran and Zoud were expanded on. The report provided descriptions of the diverse range of men attending the sermons, including Western converts, and the reactions garnered by the sermons. The men listened in a "trance-like, meditative state" and "nod approvingly" when Zoud praised mujaheddin fighters in Iraq. The report stated that both clerics teach Wahhabism, a "fundamentalist branch of Islam" that inspired Afghanistan's Taliban regime and is followed by Osama bin Laden. The article then shifted tempo, stating that the views of "such home-based extremists by no means define the majority of Islamic messages being preached by Muslim clerics across the country". A brief description of a sermon focusing on questions of faith rather than political issues

followed before the article reverted to outlining accusations of terrorist links made against Sheikh Zoud. More provocative comments from Sheikh Omran were quoted, alongside those of Harun Abu Talha, one of his followers. Tahla's quip about the dangers of discussing mujaheddin in the present climate "elicits sniggers and laughter" from his congregation. The article concluded with a quote from a man attending a Sydney mosque "known for its moderate preaching": "You got all kinds of Muslim here [in Sydney]. But it's always the few extreme ones who ruin it for the majority, brother."

A short article, published on November 4, reported that the new counter-terrorism legislation could see mosques being proscribed as terrorist organisations, if preaching by clerics contravened laws about supporting or praising terrorism. The Attorney-General's Department gave a statement which did not deny or confirm this possibility: "We can't offer a legal opinion. We ultimately take advice from our agencies on these matters." An Inquirer feature article entitled "Beneath the minaret" was published on November 5 in the *Weekend Australian*. This piece focused on radical Islam in Australia, its growing number of followers, and ongoing [ASIO](#) investigations. It began by describing "the changing face of radical Islam" as young Australian-born Muslims and Caucasian converts are drawn to the teachings of a few fundamentalist clerics. The article again identified Sheikhs Omran and Zoud as central figures, citing their support for mujaheddin fighters overseas and their separatist views of Muslim life in Australia. Isolationist attitudes were assigned to those gathering in radical mosques and prayer halls, where "conspiracy theories abound" and the "perception of 'us and them' is a striking feature of conversation". It reported that a number of young men raided by ASIO in June 2005 feared arrest following the legislative amendments enacted by Parliament after Prime Minister Howard's announcement of a "potential terrorist threat". These men were identified as followers of Muslim cleric Nacer Benbrika (aka Abu Bakr), who formed his own prayer group after declaring Sheikh Omran "too moderate". A substantial proportion of the article described ASIO's ongoing investigations and speculated about the likelihood of arrests following Parliament's legislative amendments.

The final article was an opinion piece by James Morrow, editor of *Investigate* magazine, arguing "the conservative case against the anti-terrorism laws". He asserted that Australia had not been subjected to a terrorist attack or Muslim uprising because it "has managed to strike a balance between integrating the vast majority of moderate Muslims ... and exposing the evil that is radical Islam ...". Morrow expressed fears that the new legislation would drive fundamentalist views underground, allowing terrorist groups to thrive out of public view. He stated that Australians would believe radical Islam posed no threat until a terrorist attack occurred, as we "would have fallen for the Islamic doctrine of al-Taqiya: ... 'lying to one's enemy in order to defeat him'".

ASIO investigations

Seven articles, published by *The Age*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Australian*, reported on ASIO's investigations of Australian terror suspects and the possibility of a "home-grown" attack revealed in the ASIO annual report. The first article, on November 7, revealed details from the ASIO report regarding terrorist training undertaken by Australian Muslims, and the likelihood of control orders being implemented after the

passage of the new counter-terrorism legislation. Quotes from the ASIO reports included the perception of Australian extremists that they were engaged in a conflict between “Muslims and infidels” and that their interpretation of Islam engendered “a sense of hostility and isolation towards the broader Australian society”. A second article also quoted the ASIO report: “Some in Australia view the Coalition action in Iraq as an attack on all Muslims.” Four reports, published from November 4 to 6, revealed that ASIO and the [Australian Federal Police](#) were continuing surveillance, identifying the followers of Benbrika and Sheikh Omran as the targets. The articles reported that some of the men under surveillance had attended terrorist training camps overseas and in Australia. Some of the men revealed that they expected to be placed under control orders once the new legislation was passed. The final report, on November 7 in *The Australian*, revealed that surveillance operations had been substantially increased, and speculated that raids were imminent. Attorney-General Philip Ruddock refused to comment on reports that ASIO was monitoring a terror cell formed by the “Australian-born offspring of Muslim immigrants”, responding only that “typecasting is never helpful. To suggest it is a particular group and to characterise it in a particular way isn’t helpful either”.

Descriptive language

Sheikh Omran was repeatedly identified as a “radical firebrand”. Clerics were described as “preaching hatred”, “attacking” government policy and “ridiculing the US”. Sermons were “screamed” and “shrieked”. The terms “extremist”, “extremism”, “fundamentalist” and “radical” were used to describe the views and beliefs of the people and groups identified. They were contrasted with the “moderate” and “mainstream” views of most Australian Muslims. The language used varied little and was extremely repetitive.

2. The story breaks (reporting period November 9)

- ◆ 52 articles across four media outlets
- ◆ Includes five collective Letters to the Editor pages across three outlets
- ◆ One article, from *The Canberra Times*, did not directly report on or refer to the raids
- ◆ The main foci of the reporting were:
 - Description of the raids and suspects;
 - Details about the suspects, including family backgrounds and extremist beliefs;
 - Reactions from family, friends and neighbours of the suspects;
 - Community reaction to the raids (both Islamic community specifically and Australian community generally);
 - The nature of Islamic extremism in Australia and internationally;
 - Vindication of the PM’s decision to go public and seek the legislative amendment;
 - Continued debate about the necessity of the new counter-terrorism laws.

Case against the suspects

About half of the reports described the raids, identified or described the suspects, and outlined the case against them. Police reported that the arrests had averted “a large-scale terrorist attack”, while the reports stated that the arrests had averted a “catastrophic” and “imminent” attack. The arrested men were identified as followers of “radical Islamic cleric” Abdul Nacer Benbrika. Benbrika’s “praise” for Osama bin Laden was noted in numerous reports, and he was repeatedly identified as the spiritual leader of the “terror cell”. One man was reported as wishing to become Australia’s first suicide bomber and martyr, as “revenge for infidel activities in Iraq”. Others were reported to have trained in terrorist camps overseas. Surveillance recordings were reported to reveal “a constant theme ... directed at violent jihad ... embracing the notion that it’s permitted ... to kill innocent women and children”. The more striking headlines included “Osama’s Aussie offspring”, “Smashing a plot to kill”, “Accused ‘wanted to be suicide bomber’” and “Aussies schooled by al-Qa’ida”.

Two articles, in *The Age* and the *Herald Sun*, focused on Abdul Nacer Benbrika. The history of Benbrika’s immigration status was revealed, as was the seizure of his passport by ASIO. Details about his clerical teachings were reported, along with personal details about his family. Benbrika’s marginalisation from the mainstream Muslim community was highlighted in both articles. Sheikh Fehmi Naji el-Imam, who vouched for Benbrika in his immigration appeals, described him as “hot-headed” and revealed that they had parted ways as “he thought maybe I’m too lenient”. A third article focused on two Anglo-Australian men who had converted to Islam, and become followers of Benbrika. One, Shane Kent, known as Yasin, was arrested in the raids, while the other, known as Abu Jihad, remained under surveillance. The report detailed the men’s time in an al-Qa’ida training camp overseas and their place in the “network of radical Islamists” in Australia.

Islamic community reaction

Four articles presented reactions from Islamic community leaders regarding the raids and arrests. *The Age* published two articles, the first focusing on the arrest of Benbrika. Waleed Aly, from the Islamic Council of Victoria, asserted that “Benbrika’s place in the Muslim community was hard to define because it was so marginal ...”. He described Benbrika as a cult leader, with “no more sway over the Muslim community ... than any cult leader would have over the religious communities from which they are splintered”. The second article focused on reactions from community leaders, including Mr Aly and Sheikh Fehmi. Mr Aly expressed relief that the raids had resulted in arrests, as this would bring the suspects into the judicial system, where the claims against them could be properly tested and scrutinised. Sheikh Fehmi expressed concerns that the arrests could lead to a backlash, stating that “our duty is to talk to the community, to appease them, to tell them this is only a procedure and no harm has been done ...”. Roland Jabbour from the Australian Arabic Council asked the media to be responsible in reporting the arrests, as “ethnicity and religion should not be the focus”. He revealed that many people feared going out into the wider Australian community, as they felt the Arab community was being blamed for the terrorist threat. A spokesman for Sheikh Omran claimed that the arrested men would not receive natural justice in the court system, as “politics has got

so involved”. He said the Federal Government was mounting a campaign against Muslims, asserting that “there is a constant feeling of isolating Muslims” in reference to the “children overboard” claim, the hijab debate and calls for Muslims to leave Australia if they want to live under sharia law.

The *Herald Sun* also reported the views of Waleed Aly and Sheikh Fehmi. Mr Aly revealed that “it would sadden me that Muslim people would be doing things that warrant prosecution” but acknowledged that “it’s a matter now of letting justice prevail”. Sheikh Fehmi said his congregation would be praying for the suspects and their families, and for the safety of all Australians. Amjad Ali Mehboob, from the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) said the Muslim community was worried about the fallout from the raids: “This is not going to end speculation about the Muslims and the religious and racial profiling of people which we fear from the new terrorism laws.” Abu Yusuf, a media spokesman for Sheikh Omran, said that while they hoped the raids had averted a terrorist attack, “these raids have been done in a very public way ... and it is destroying people’s lives”.

The Australian reported that Muslim leaders were calling for calm among the community as they sought more information about the raids. Ameer Ali, president of AFIC, revealed that members of the Muslim community feared reprisals and had asked for government protection for the community. Sheikh Fehmi’s intention to lead prayers for the suspects was mentioned, while a lawyer acting for the accused asserted that comments made by politicians regarding the arrests could be infringing upon the suspects’ legal rights. Sheikh Zoud refused to comment on the arrests, but some of his followers revealed that they intended to offer help to the families of those arrested. Abdul El Ayoubi, spokesman for the Lebanese Muslim Association, said the organisation had received many calls from members who felt the raids were targeted at Muslims rather than terrorists. Keysar Trad, spokesman for the Islamic Friendship Council, questioned the media presence at the locations of the raided homes. The articles emphasised the worries among the Muslim community and the desire to see the criminal justice system run its course free of political interference. The headlines also reflected this: “Appeals for calm among the faithful” and “Leaders put faith in the courts”.

Two articles, in *The Age* and *The Canberra Times*, reported the reactions from the neighbours and families of those arrested. Numerous neighbours of one raided family expressed their surprise, saying “they’re kind”, “they’re very good people” and “we’ve never had any problems with them”. The neighbours of another raided family were equally surprised by the arrest. In both cases, neighbours reported that police had been seen undertaking covert surveillance in the street in the months leading up to the raids. While most of the families of the arrested men were avoiding media contact, a few of the women complained about police treatment of their children, who had been woken and rounded up to be watched over by officers while the raids took place.

The “terror threat”

Three articles provided broader discussion of the terror threat in light of the raids and arrests. *The Canberra Times* published an analytical piece that reported on the findings published by ASIO in its annual report, and the likelihood of a terrorist attack in Australia. It identified potential threats and possible suspects. This piece also noted that “moderate Muslims have distanced themselves” from anti-Western rhetoric and

“have been embraced by the Government in a new advisory group to build bridges with the Islamic community”. *The Australian* published an opinion piece by the paper’s foreign editor detailing the advantages Australia has in averting terrorist threats and identifying a number of people facing charges under counter-terrorism laws. It provided an international perspective on the terrorist threat and noted the bipartisan support for counter-terrorism legislation in Australia. The *Herald Sun* published an opinion piece by a columnist who generates regular debate in the paper’s letters to the editor. This piece berated those who questioned the necessity of the PM’s legislative amendment and the proposed counter-terrorism laws. It linked the possibility of a terrorist attack in Australia to protests and riots among Muslim communities in Europe, attacks against Christians in Indonesia, and the social collapse of Muslim societies in the Middle East. It condemned immigration decisions which had “imported preachers of this new Islamist hate” and called for an end to multiculturalism in favour of promoting “true integration”.

3. The aftermath (reporting period November 10 & 11, 2005)

- ◆ 68 articles over two days across four media outlets
- ◆ Includes 10 articles of collective Letters to the Editor.
- ◆ 10 articles focused on the proposed counter-terrorism legislation or Islamic extremism more generally, referring to the raids only in passing or not at all
- ◆ The main foci of the reporting were:
 - The court hearings and cases against the suspects;
 - Descriptions of the suspects;
 - Reactions from the Muslim community;
 - Assurances about the Muslim community by outsiders;
 - Opinion pieces about the impact of the arrests and revelation of a potential terrorist attack in Australia.

The suspects

About half of the reporting related the court hearings of various suspects, providing details of the charges and the cases against them. These included new details about potential targets for an attack and the chemicals and equipment police believed could be used to make bombs. One report focused on al-Qa’ida documents in the possession of the suspects, extensively quoting references to jihad against the “rotten regimes” in the West. Two reports focused on the bail hearings of two suspects. Both were refused bail, and the articles reported the magistrate’s focus on evidence of the men’s willingness to engage in “violent jihad” and belief that “the killing of innocent women and children is justified”. *The Age* reported extensively on the reactions from family members of the suspects, citing their disbelief that their loved ones had been involved in a terrorist plot, and provided substantial details about the men’s backgrounds and occupations. Three articles focused on details about particular suspects. One focused on the only Anglo-Australian suspect, while another provided details about the “downfall” of a young man who was well-known and liked in his local neighbourhood. The third article revealed that two of the suspects had only recently

begun practising their Islamic faith after growing up in moderate Muslim homes, with friends expressing surprise at their apparent move into extremism. Two articles focused on the lawyers acting for the suspects, one providing extensive career and personal details about one of the lawyers. The other reported on the lawyer's concern that his clients had little chance of receiving a fair trial because of the extensive media coverage and political commentary about the arrests. This article also presented views from academic law experts who agreed that the coverage was potentially prejudicial but emphasised the ability of juries to overcome such problems in their deliberations. The lawyers' concerns were briefly mentioned in two other reports.

Islamic community

The reactions reported among the community ranged from condemnation of the arrests as a political stunt to criticism of the proposed counter-terrorism laws and shock, sadness and shame that members of the Muslim community would intentionally inflict pain and suffering on others. Two brief articles revealed that some of the arrested men had previously been approached by members of their community trying to persuade them away from extremism. Quotes from an online discussion forum were published revealing that some members were aware these young men were being drawn to radical teachings and that attempts to bring them back to mainstream beliefs had failed. When asked why the police had not been informed earlier, forum users responded that to report them without first giving them a chance to change their ways would be "a betrayal of Muslim principles".

The Age reported that Sheikh Omran had declared the raids a "show-off exercise", asserting that police would have arrested the suspects following their earlier raids if they had any case against them. *The Australian* reported that Sheikh Omran believed inequality and injustice, not Australia's involvement in Iraq, would drive Australian Muslims to commit terrorist attacks. *The Australian* also reported that support for the raids was widespread amongst the Muslim community, as discussed in an opinion piece by Waleed Aly, from the Islamic Council of Victoria. Mr Aly noted that online forums and community radio talkback had revealed that the arrests of suspects on concrete charges had addressed fears the community was being needlessly targeted and demonised. Calls for calm by Muslim community leaders were again reported, responding specifically to incidents in which young Muslims attacked the media outside the court hearing of Melbourne suspects and a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a police car in Sydney. Fears that "rednecks" would instigate revenge attacks against mosques and Islamic schools were reported in two articles, with calls for the police and government to provide increased protection in the community. The shock and horror expressed by Islamic community leaders that Muslims would consider undertaking terrorist action in Australia was reported across the four media outlets. Articles in *The Canberra Times* and *Herald Sun* reported on renewed assertions by Islamic community leaders that the new counter-terrorism laws would oppress freedoms and unfairly target the Muslim community. *The Age* featured a letter entitled "The day I felt ashamed to be a Muslim in Australia", the author of which reiterated the Koran's condemnation of violence, and related his own experiences of both discrimination and inclusion since arriving in Australia.

A subset of articles assured readers that the mainstream Muslim community posed no threat, including assurances from Prime Minister Howard. Editorials in *The Age*, the

Herald Sun and *The Australian* noted that the vast majority of Australia's Muslims were moderate and did not support terrorism in any way, asking readers not to allow the arrests to taint their view of the mainstream Muslim community. *The Australian* also published a radio interview with Prime Minister Howard in which he assured listeners that Australian Muslims were against terrorism and that the arrested suspects and their intentions were "totally unrepresentative of Islam". The *Herald Sun* published a piece by the Prime Minister in which he noted that the majority of victims in international terrorist attacks were Muslims and insisted that police actions were targeted not against the Islamic community but against potential criminals.

Curtailing Muslims

Most of the reporting and the opinion pieces called for tolerance and emphasised that the vast majority of Australian Muslims posed no threat to the Australian community. A number of opinion pieces asserted that Muslims would inevitably be targeted under the new counter-terrorism laws and that non-Muslim Australians would view the community with suspicion following the arrests. A number of articles reported on comments by various politicians calling for the freedoms of Muslim Australians to be restricted in various ways. *The Age* reported that Liberal backbenchers were again calling for a ban on headscarves in schools and proposing that people inciting violence should have their citizenship revoked. *The Australian*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Canberra Times* reported that Peter Costello had announced that Muslims wanting to live under sharia law should not come to or remain in Australia.

Headlines included:

- ◆ "Terrorism spotlight now firmly on Muslims"
- ◆ "Top Muslim seeks PM's help to stop backlash ... Political fallout – Call for ban on headscarves in class"
- ◆ "The day I felt ashamed to be a Muslim in Australia"
- ◆ "Individuals, not a community, stand accused"
- ◆ "Perverted and fanatical jihadists do not represent Islam"
- ◆ "Most Muslims support these anti-terror raids"
- ◆ "We feel targeted: Muslims – Leader says laws go too far"
- ◆ "Brothers were new Islamic followers"
- ◆ "Sharia law fans should go"

4. The dust settles (reporting period November 12-14, 2005)

- ◆ 44 articles over three days across four media outlets
- ◆ Includes four articles of collective Letters to the Editor
- ◆ The main themes were:
 - Further reports and details about the suspects;
 - Reports describing the development of radical Islam in Australia;
 - Reactions from the Muslim community.

Suspects

The Age revealed that further suspects remained under surveillance after the raids, while *The Australian* identified a man believed to be the informant whose information had led to the raids. The report used an alias for the man but published his first name. It revealed he was a Muslim convert who had trained at an overseas terrorist camp, and had previously been a part of Abdul Nacer Benbrika's prayer group. Benbrika was singled out as the group's ringleader by *The Australian*, in a page 1 report entitled "The day one man infected a community with hatred". The article detailed the conversion to radicalism of Benbrika and his followers following a visit to Australia by al-Qa'ida spiritual leader Abu Qatada. Following Qatada's sermons, a number of young men followed Benbrika when he split from the moderate Preston mosque and began pursuing a radical interpretation of Islam. The report detailed Benbrika's trajectory from a young immigrant learning more about Islam to a radical fundamentalist increasingly isolated and marginalised within the Islamic community. It described his followers as "hardened street boys ... who saw in Benbrika a father figure and a way to reclaim their lost souls".

The Age reported extensively on the family backgrounds, education and beliefs of numerous Melbourne suspects, in an article entitled "What went wrong?". The report noted that the suspects came from rural Lebanese families who had fled the sectarian conflict in the 1970s, coming to Australia for a peaceful life free from religious persecution. The prosecution case was also described in detail, as were previous arrests and police encounters among the group. The *Herald Sun* provided more details about the Sydney suspects and published a brief interview with one suspect's wife.

Radical Islam in Australia

Following Qatada's visit to Australia in 1994, described in *The Australian*, a few fundamentalist clerics developed prayer groups devoted to following the strict, radical interpretation of Islam that Qatada espoused. These clerics brought political issues into their discussion of Islamic faith, and small groups of militant fundamentalist followers coalesced. A subset of articles about the suspects described their place within this developing network of radicals, and a group of feature articles in *The Australian* and *The Age* described these developments in great detail. One article entitled "Self-confessed militants found refuge in Australia" described the background of numerous refugees accepted by Australia in the 1990s who were involved with fundamentalist and militant Islamic groups in their home countries. The development of radical Islam and terrorist networks was described in great detail in "Terror turns into a growth industry". The impact of the raids on the Australian community was explored in "Nervous nation, trying times ..." while the *Herald Sun* asserted that "War is here, so take it seriously". While these articles attempted to place the suspects and their beliefs in the wider discussion about the impact of radical Islam, they also had a distinctive "fear-mongering" element that was not present in the reporting of the previous days.

Muslim community

Reactions from the community varied but continued to emphasise the moderate views of the mainstream Muslim majority. While one Muslim cleric, Sheikh Hilali, condemned the raids as race-driven and stated that the new counter-terrorism laws would oppress Muslims, another expressed his regret for supporting Benbrika in his citizenship application. The experiences of young Muslim men who had been approached by ASIO were reported in *The Australian*. Solicitors representing members of the Muslim community revealed that they had received regular complaints from people who had been approached by ASIO on flimsy grounds. The president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Ameer Ali, rejected a call from Prime Minister Howard for the Muslim community to undertake surveillance of its own members. While acknowledging that community leaders played an important role in promoting positive perceptions of Islam, he noted that community organisations could not be expected to act like a police force. His comments were echoed by Keysar Trad, from the Islamic Friendship Association, who said the PM's request was "inflammatory". This reaction was contrasted in the same article with that of one Sydney Muslim family, who said: "If someone does something wrong – no matter if they are Muslim, Hindu or Christian – we would report it." The most poignant reaction came in the form of a letter in the *Herald Sun* "... from five Aussie teenagers who happen to be Muslim". The letter described the difficulties of living as a Muslim teenager in the current climate of the raids and increasing intolerance and racism being displayed towards Australian Muslims. The letter appeared on page 83 of the Sunday edition.

One final article of interest was published in the *Herald Sun* under the headline "The Aussie mates who aren't alert or alarmed". The report revealed how one Irish Catholic Australian woman decided to find out for herself what Islam was really about and met with a group of Muslim women attending a Melbourne mosque. This led to a friendship between their families, and she urged others to "do what I did ... go meet these people".