

## Case Study 2

### **Reporting on immigrant communities – Sudanese immigrants in two regional centres**

#### **Introduction**

News coverage of events outside Australia's capital cities often reflects different values and attitudes. This is sometimes the case with regard to immigrant communities, particularly when many members of those communities have recently arrived in Australia. Only in the past five years or so have significant numbers of Sudanese people arrived here and, indeed, they are one of the few groups classified as "new and emerging" by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Many [Sudanese people](#) have moved away from the capital cities to settle in such provincial centres as Newcastle, NSW, and Toowoomba, Queensland.

Located in the [Hunter Valley](#), 160km north of [Sydney](#), Newcastle is Australia's largest provincial city, with a population of about [500,000](#). The major local newspaper is [The Herald](#) (formerly *The Newcastle Herald*), which has an ABC audited circulation of 55,000+ (Monday to Friday) and 85,000+ on Saturdays. Toowoomba, 132km west of [Brisbane](#) in south-east Queensland, has a population of 113,687 (2003 ABS estimate) and is Australia's second-largest inland city. The local newspaper, [The Toowoomba Chronicle](#), is published six days a week, and has an audited circulation of 24,100 Monday to Friday and 32,700 on Saturdays.

Newspaper coverage of three incidents involving members of the Sudanese community in each city was examined. All of the papers examined published material which was sympathetic to the Sudanese communities and portrayed local Sudanese individuals in a positive light. Predictably, the local papers were more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to describe their own communities as culturally and racially harmonious. However, the analysis indicated that the language used in some of the reports in the Toowoomba newspaper was more blunt than similar reports elsewhere. An example of this was provided by the *Chronicle's* decision to quote directly some of the offensive language expressed in material published by racist groups.

Attempting to determine the reasons for this was beyond the scope of this project. However, it is possible to speculate that part of the explanation lies in the different demographics of the two cities. Newcastle has a more racially and culturally diverse population than Toowoomba, and it may be that newspaper editors and journalists in that city are more likely to favour caution in reporting such views directly because of a fear of offending – and thus possibly losing – readers. It could also be the case that, as Newcastle is a relatively short drive away from Australia's most multicultural city – Sydney – it is more likely to be influenced by "big city" values than Toowoomba.

Being more geographically isolated than Newcastle, Toowoomba's citizens may tend to be less influenced by liberal attitudes to minorities.

The analysis conducted for this case study raises a question which is central to journalism practice – how to report views which are likely to be considered offensive to many readers without losing those readers in the future, and without giving those views further airing. While directly quoting such views can be defended by journalists as a means of “telling it like it is”, such quoting not only further publicises those views but can also give an impression that both the journalist and the publication tacitly sympathise with the views being expressed.

The final issue raised by this case study is media use of the term “community”. It is understandable that, for practical reasons such as the pressures of time and space and to avoid confusing readers, journalists need to employ relatively simple terms in relatively straightforward ways. However, the notion of “community” is far more complex than indicated in any of the reports examined here. Any group of more than a few people will invariably consist of a number of “communities”, yet the Sudanese population in each city is consistently described simply as “the Sudanese community”.

## **Toowoomba – critical incidents**

1. Letterbox campaign – July 2005
2. Identification of letterbox campaign instigator – August 2005
3. Deaths of Sudanese community members – November 2005

### **1. Letterbox campaign (reporting period July 12-26, 2005)**

During this period, nine articles were published by two news outlets. *The Toowoomba Chronicle* published six articles, including one editorial. Four reports, and the editorial, directly addressed the letterbox campaign by the White Pride Coalition. This campaign was reported by [The Australian](#) in three articles. Shortly after the reporting period, follow-up reports were published in the *Chronicle* and the Brisbane [Sunday Mail](#).

The first report on the letterbox campaign was published in *The Toowoomba Chronicle* on July 12, 2005. This article, entitled “Racial hatred, direct to you”, reported that “extreme right-wing racist propaganda” was being circulated in the city. It published a picture of a White Pride Coalition Australia (WPCA) pamphlet being circulated, and included a quote outlining the group's aims, taken from its website. The opposing view was represented by Mark Copland, from the Social Justice Commission (SCJ) of the Catholic Diocese, who asserted that “the sentiments of this lunatic fringe have little sway with the broader Toowoomba community”. Dan Toombs, a lawyer and SJC member, stated that the material being distributed contravened the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act, and the article implied

that the SJC was considering legal action. Mr Copland reported that in 2004 an African refugee family had been the target of a “strategic” letterbox campaign, and had moved out of their home, fearing for their safety. There was no specific mention of the Sudanese community in Toowoomba.

The July 12 editorial addressed the WPCA campaign, but made no mention of the Sudanese community or any refugee communities in Toowoomba. The editorial focused on the importance of countering “these repugnant views” by “embracing the positives of tolerance and multiculturalism”. It referred to the success of Rockhampton’s multicultural fair, and called for “a greater celebration of multiculturalism” in Toowoomba. It was a measured piece that was relatively mild in its condemnation of the WPCA campaign, focusing instead on fostering positive attitudes within the community.

On July 14, the *Chronicle* published a page 1 article entitled “Net closes on racists”, which reported on the search for identifying information about the people behind the WPCA campaign. This report focused on the activity of the Sydney-based campaign group Fight Dem Back!, describing its online surveillance of neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups and extensively quoting campaign co-ordinator Mat Henderson-Hau. He revealed that the group had traced the WPCA campaign to a resident of Crow’s Nest, a township about 45km north-east of Toowoomba. The article also included one paragraph outlining the reactions of SCJ members Copland and Toombs, and the possibility of legal action. There was no mention of who was being targeted by the WPCA campaign, nor of the Sudanese, African or refugee communities in Toowoomba.

The following day, July 15, the *Chronicle* reported that Mr Copland had lodged a complaint with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) about the campaign material distributed by the WPCA. Mr Copland reiterated that the campaign did not represent the majority views of Toowoomba residents, stating that “we’re proud we’ve got diversity and we support it”. The article also reported that Fight Dem Back! had found that the man believed to be behind the WPCA campaign was planning a meeting in Crow’s Nest the next day. Local police had no knowledge of the meeting, but asked for information from the public. The president of the Crow’s Nest RSL, which was reported to have some link with the WPCA campaigner, asserted that “there is no room in our organisation for that type of rot”. The previously reported views of Dan Toombs, Mark Copland and Mat Henderson-Hau were paraphrased. There was no mention of any community being targeted by the campaign.

The last article directly addressing the WPCA campaign was published on July 16. It reported that Crow’s Nest police had not received any call about a planned WPCA meeting in the area, and provided a summary of the *Chronicle*’s reports over the previous week. The only new information included was that the Executive Council of Australian Jewry had been informed about the anti-Semitic nature of the WPCA material, and was “examining its options”. It quoted Mr Copland and paraphrased Mr Henderson-Hau. The article also quoted the WPCA campaign material, but no mention was made of who was being targeted by the campaign.

The final *Chronicle* article in the reporting period, published on July 18, was a positive piece about a multicultural lawn bowls event in Toowoomba. The article opened with a reference to “... troubling rumours of white supremacists at work in the

community...” It reported that Aboriginal elder Jim Hagen had organised the event to bring together people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Mr Hagen was quoted at length, opining that: “Toowoomba has its social justice problems but we have to accept that our population is multicultural.” A Singaporean student from the University of Southern Queensland was interviewed and quoted, as was a visiting Turkish academic. A young Sudanese man was also interviewed, but his contribution was paraphrased. The article mentioned that many of the people taking part in the lawn bowls event were from Toowoomba’s Aboriginal and Sudanese communities. The photograph included with the article showed an elderly white man demonstrating the game to a group of young African men.

On July 23, two page 6 articles in the *Weekend Australian* reported on the WPCA campaign in Toowoomba. The first article, entitled “Refugees from Africa focus of hate campaign”, reported that the WPCA had established a “cell” in Toowoomba. It noted that a substantial number of Sudanese refugees had been settled in the city and reported that one family had been forced from their home, while others had been assaulted with rotten food and subjected to regular verbal abuse. Mark Copland and Sudanese community leader Angelo Geng both described harassment and assault of refugees in Toowoomba, while Mat Henderson-Hau was reported as saying the racist campaign had also targeted African refugees in western Sydney. Mr Geng said the “Toowoomba community was overwhelmingly supportive” and the negative experiences were generated by a minority. The SCJ complaint to HREOC was mentioned, and it was noted that the WPCA could not be contacted for comment. The article also reported on the controversial views of Macquarie University law professor Andrew Fraser, which were paraphrased in the article. Professor Fraser was quoted, alongside Patriotic Youth League (PYL) spokesman Luke Connor. The article included a short paragraph outlining the number of African and Sudanese refugees being resettled in Australia, and briefly described the conflict which is displacing the Sudanese population.

The second *Australian* article was a humanising piece presenting the story of one Sudanese man living in Toowoomba. Daniel Abot related the story of his flight from southern Sudan and the experiences of his family in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. He said most of Toowoomba’s residents were welcoming and the harassment was nothing “when you [have] lived like we have”. The director of Anglicare Toowoomba, Daniel’s employer, discussed the difficulties refugees face finding work, stating that it “is especially hard in a town like this”. (A similar humanising piece was published in Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* on July 27. This article reported on a job-training scheme targeting refugees and presented the story of a young Sudanese man living and working in Toowoomba. It made no reference to the WPCA campaign.)

The third *Australian* article was published on July 23. It extensively quoted WPCA spokesman Terry Davis as he revealed the group’s intention to extend its campaign to other parts of the country. Toowoomba’s mayor, Di Thorley, was quoted refuting WPCA assertions that African refugees posed a crime risk in their new communities, and assuring Sudanese refugees that “they are welcome in our city”. The complaint lodged with HREOC was mentioned, as was the furore over the comments by Andrew Fraser.

### **White Pride Coalition Australia**

*The Toowoomba Chronicle* published direct quotes from WPCA material in two reports, on July 12 and 16. The first article quoted the group's website, stating that its aim is to "... combat the lies and bring down the Jewish/Zionist Government ... and restore Whites to the positions of power that they are rightfully entitled to". It also published a picture from WPCA material of a blonde white woman framed by the words: "The World's most beautiful endangered species! White People." This pamphlet was also described in the July 16 article. Two of the three articles published by *The Australian* included quotes from WPCA material. The first article quoted the pamphlet describing "white women as the 'world's most endangered species'". This report also quoted a PYL spokesman stating that "the fact is that the Africans have a culture of tribalism and violence that we don't want". The second article published numerous quotes from the WPCA spokesman, including his assertion that "when you get crime in these areas, you know it's going to be the blacks". He reported being pleased that "our Queensland branch has been rather active", but denied members' involvement in physical attacks on refugees. He explained that frustration was behind these attacks, stating: "We'll be seeing a lot more of this. It's frustrating when your television is stolen or your daughter is raped."

### **Toowoomba community**

Only two articles, both published by *The Australian* on July 23, presented views from members of the Sudanese community in Toowoomba. Both men interviewed stated that the WPCA campaign had been perpetrated by a minority and that most of Toowoomba's residents had been helpful and supportive toward the Sudanese community. Only one article in *The Toowoomba Chronicle*, published on July 18, specifically referred to Toowoomba's Sudanese community, in the story about the multicultural lawn bowls event. This was the only *Chronicle* article to present the voice of a Sudanese resident, but it focused only on his lawn bowls experience. This piece also referred to Toowoomba's Aboriginal community and international staff and students at Toowoomba's USQ campus. None of the four articles reporting on the WPCA campaign referred directly to the Sudanese community, and only the first report mentioned the African refugee community in Toowoomba. Assurances that Toowoomba is supportive of a culturally diverse community were given in three of the six articles published by the *Chronicle*, and all three articles published by *The Australian*.

### **Descriptive language**

The four *Chronicle* articles that covered the WPCA campaign used the terms "racists", "race hate" or "racial hatred" in their descriptive content. All of the articles included racism references in the headlines. The initial report described the WPCA material as "extreme right-wing racist propaganda", and the remaining articles referred to the group as "white supremacists". Three of the articles referred to possible breaches of racial vilification laws, while the multicultural lawn bowls piece referred to "troubling rumours of white supremacists". The editorial did not directly focus on

racism, instead referring to the “repugnant views” of the WPCA. It focused on positive descriptions of multiculturalism and racial diversity.

*The Australian* referred to “racism” or “race hate” in two of its headlines. The first headline mentioned a “hate campaign” against African refugees. The WPCA was described as “right-wing extremists” and “neo-Nazis”. The group’s actions were described as a “race-hate campaign” and “anti-refugee hate campaign”. The first article linked the White Pride Coalition and the Patriotic Youth League, which was responsible for a similar campaign in Newcastle in January 2005, but did not refer to the Newcastle incident.

### **Follow-up**

Three articles were published between July 31 and August 2, providing information on further developments. Two news outlets published reports on a meeting that took place on July 30 between the Federal Multicultural Affairs Minister and the Sudanese community in Toowoomba. The Brisbane *Sunday Mail* reported on July 31 that “the minister made a lightning visit ... in a bid to defuse simmering racial tension”. In its only coverage of this issue, the paper published quotes from members of the Sudanese community and from the online messages of the Crow’s Nest man purportedly behind the WPCA campaign.

An August 1 report in the *Chronicle* was the paper’s first article to present the voice of Toowoomba’s Sudanese community regarding the WPCA campaign. Community leader Albino Chol Thiik assured the Minister that the Sudanese community had been welcomed in Toowoomba and “we feel at home”. The positive attitudes of the Sudanese residents towards Toowoomba were emphasised and the Minister praised the city for its refugee program. The second article, published on August 2, reported that the Mayor of Crow’s Nest Shire had defended the town on national radio, denying “redneck” allegations made by a resident who linked the WPCA campaign with homophobic behaviour displayed by locals.

## **2. Identification of letterbox campaign instigator (reporting period August 22-25, 2005)**

On August 22, 2005, *The Australian* reported that the Crow’s Nest man behind the July WPCA campaign in Toowoomba had been identified as Jim Perrin, and that police were tracking his activities. The article quoted extensively from Mr Perrin’s online messages, and reported that residents believed his views were common knowledge around the town. The curator of the Military Museum where Mr Perrin volunteers opined that support for white supremacist groups was widespread in Toowoomba. Darren Abbott is quoted asserting that “...they are not extremists, they’re patriots standing up for their country. They say what the majority of Australians think”. The article paraphrased Sudanese community leader Angelo Geng, again stating that the majority of Toowoomba’s residents were sympathetic and supportive. A brief follow-up report was published in *The Australian* on August 23. This item stated that the Defence Department had rejected calls from Toowoomba’s Aboriginal community to stand down Mr Abbott, curator of the Military Museum,

following his comments describing WPCA members as “patriots”. *The Toowoomba Chronicle* published an article on August 24 reporting that Mr Abbot had denied his statements were racist. He contended that his comments were taken out of context and the report misrepresented his views. Mr Abbot denied knowing that Mr Perrin held racist views when he referred to him as a “good bloke” while speaking of his former membership of the museum committee. The article made only a passing reference to the accusations against Jim Perrin and did not refer directly to the WPCA campaign.

*The Toowoomba Chronicle* reported on August 23 that racist graffiti had been painted in a local park overnight. The article included photographs of the graffiti and quoted one piece which read “all niggers deserve to die”. Local residents were quoted expressing their outrage about the graffiti, some focusing on the message and others on the vandalism. The article made no reference to the WPCA campaign or the reactions of African or Aboriginal residents. The final *Chronicle* article was a short piece reporting that the Sudanese Community Association had found a permanent location on the local TAFE campus after searching for a year. Community leader Albino Thook<sup>1</sup> is quoted describing plans for the new meeting place.

### **Follow-up**

On October 19, the *Chronicle* published a report that racist material had been distributed to a street to which a Sudanese family had recently moved. The article quoted Sudanese community leader Angelo Geng refuting perceptions that refugees lived on hand-outs which were spent at the pub or on holidays. Mark Copland from the Social Justice Commission was paraphrased asserting that refugees received very little government or community assistance, relying on relatives and church groups to provide them with basic necessities on arrival in the community. The report included a brief overview of the racist campaign, including the graffiti incident and a March 2004 incident in which a Sudanese family was targeted.

### **3. Deaths of Sudanese community members (reporting period November 23-December 5, 2005)**

The deaths of two Sudanese community members in a house fire were extensively reported by *The Toowoomba Chronicle* and the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*. The story was broken in an AAP news report on November 23. The report noted that the bodies had not been identified but were believed to be those of a Sudanese woman and her teenage daughter. The woman’s 21-year-old son had been taken to hospital in a serious condition. Police were treating the fire as suspicious until investigations demonstrated otherwise. A second report was published on November 24, identifying the victims as Rita Sula and her daughter Connie. The report noted that son Jerry Sula was still being treated in hospital and had been interviewed by police. Police released a statement that the deaths appeared to be a murder-suicide and that there was no

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<sup>1</sup> Previously identified by the *Toowoomba Chronicle* as Albino Chol Thiik, in the August 1 article “‘We like it here’. New Federal Minister listens as Sudanese scuttle allegations of racist community in Toowoomba”.

evidence to back up speculations that the fire was racially motivated. Police also stated that there was no intention to bring criminal proceedings over the incident. The report stated that the family were the first Sudanese refugees to move to Toowoomba. The *Northern Territory News* also published a brief article on November 25, based on the information published in the AAP report.

Three articles were published in the *Courier-Mail* between November 24 and 26. The first article reported that the deaths were being treated by police as possible murders, under the headline “Hearts choked in grief as hero dies in blaze”. The article referred to Rita Sula’s position as a matriarch in Toowoomba’s African community and her role in helping other refugees settle into the community. It noted that the Sula family were the first African refugees in the city and had sponsored other family members who also settled in Toowoomba. Connie Sula’s school principal described her as a “beautiful, bubbly, cheerful” young woman with many friends, whose classmates were in shock over her death. The second article, published on November 25, revealed that police believed the deaths were the result of murder-suicide, and refuted claims the incident was racially motivated. The report included information on the family’s history, and their life in Toowoomba since their arrival in 1991. It also revealed that a suicide note had been found at the scene. The final article reported that Rita Sula, now believed to have killed herself and her daughter, may have been suffering from mental illness brought on by the trauma of her past experiences. Her estranged husband, Charles Sula, revealed that no one in the family had received counselling since their arrival in Toowoomba and said he believed Mrs Sula had not been able to resolve the trauma. It was reported that Rita Sula had been raised in Uganda by her aunt after her older sister’s death, and had fled to Sudan as a teenager after war broke out, and then on to refugee camps in Kenya.

*The Toowoomba Chronicle* published six articles covering the incident, between November 24 and December 5. The first article, published on November 24, noted that the fire was being treated as suspicious and that the son’s injuries appeared to be the result of an assault. The victims were identified as Rita, Connie and Jerry Sula, and an old photo of the family, including Charles Sula, was published with the report. The article also noted that the family were the first Sudanese refugees to move to Toowoomba. It stated that Charles was being supported by members of the Sudanese community. A second article was published the same day, describing the family’s tragic past and noting that Rita and Charles had been married in a Christian ceremony after their arrival in Australia. It also revealed that the couple had been separated for five years.

On November 25, the *Chronicle* reported that police suspected murder-suicide was the cause of death but did not intend to bring criminal proceedings. The article revealed that a suicide note had been found, but that the author had not been confirmed. This report also noted that Charles and Rita had been separated for several years. The third article, published on November 26, focused on the reaction of Toowoomba’s Sudanese community. One community member is quoted as saying: “We are shocked. We never heard of the Sudanese doing this in our country.” The article quotes a police officer as stating that Jerry Sula’s wounds were “quite violent”, and the headline describes the murder as “brutal”. An interview with Charles Sula was published on December 1, in which he revealed his confusion over his estranged wife’s actions. He spoke of the expressions of sympathy from Toowoomba’s community, both Sudanese and Australian, saying: “It has shown me that when we

came here, we were not foreigners after all.” The final article was published on December 5, describing the funeral service for Rita and Connie Sula, including the eulogies delivered by family members and friends.

## **Newcastle – critical incidents**

1. Brawl – Islington Baptist Church – December 11, 2004
2. Anti- rally & respondent pro- gatherings – January 22, 2005
3. Brawl – Islington Park – October 30, 2005

### **1. Brawl – Islington Baptist Church (reporting period December 4-18, 2004)**

During this period, only three articles referring to the Sudanese community were published in the Newcastle *Herald*. The first was a short article on December 14 that reported on a brawl between members of the Sudanese community at an Islington church on December 11. The article reported that the incident occurred during elections for a leader and board members for a new community group and that mediators had been asked to conduct a meeting between the opposing groups. Simon Parbek, who made numerous statements on behalf of the Sudanese community following the January 2005 critical incident, was reported as saying the altercation was based on personal issues.

The second article was an opinion piece published in the weekend magazine section of the newspaper on December 18. It related the story of one Sudanese refugee woman and some of the difficulties her family had experienced in adapting to life in Australia. The third article, also published on December 18, was a short piece describing a Christmas concert being held to raise funds for the Sudanese community.

These articles made no mention of any tensions or problems with the Sudanese refugees within the wider Newcastle community. The second and third articles made references to the contributions and support offered by Novocastrians to the Sudanese community, and implied that the refugees were a welcome addition to the city. The first article constructed the incident as an internal community issue and noted that although police had been called to the scene, no charges had been laid. This critical incident was later referred to in some of the reports on the January 2005 critical incident.

## 2. Anti-rally & respondent pro-gatherings (reporting period January 15-29, 2005)

### Articles

- ◆ 34 articles from January 19-29, 2005 (source: Newsbank, December 12, 2005)
  - 25 articles in Newcastle *Herald*
  - 4 AAP *Newswire* stories
  - 3 articles in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*
  - 1 article in Sydney's *Sun Herald*
  - 1 article in *Townsville Bulletin*

### **Descriptive language**

The Newcastle *Herald* generally avoided terms such as “racist” and “race hate” to describe the activities of the Concerned Citizens Collective (CCC) and the Patriotic Youth League (PYL). The articles instead referred to “anti-immigration” activists, groups or activities targeting the Sudanese community within Newcastle.

The article that broke the story (January 19, “Group link to racist leaflet drop”) was the only one to use the term “race hate campaign” and make references to “racist” activities in the descriptive content of the article. It also referred to the CCC as a “right-wing political group”. The remaining articles (January 20-29) used the term “anti-immigration” to refer to the CCC and its activities. Where these articles used the terms “racist” and “race hate”, it was only to quote or paraphrase statements made by those opposing and condemning the CCC’s activities, including government ministers. One article referred to “anti-Sudanese sentiment” (January 20, “Police alarm over meeting ...”). One opinion piece referred to “hatred” and “hate-mongers”, but made only implicit reference to the CCC (January 21, “The gift of refuge”). Another opinion piece referred to the “minority ... opposed to multiculturalism” as a “bunch of tossers” (January 25, “Concerned citizens cause concern among citizens”).

The activities of those opposing the CCC campaign were generally referred to as “pro-Sudanese” and “anti-racism”. One article referred to “left-wing activists and supporters” to describe a contingent of the opposing group (January 24, “Support vow for Sudanese”).

The remaining sources (AAP *Newswire*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Townsville Bulletin*) used the terms “racist”, “race hate” and “right-wing” to describe the Concerned Citizens’ Collective and its activities. The *Herald Sun* used the term “anti-immigration”.

### **Image of Newcastle Sudanese community**

The Newcastle *Herald* built a sympathetic picture of the Sudanese community over the reported period. By referring to the CCC’s targeting of the Sudanese community as a “racist” campaign in the breaking story, the community was immediately established as victims deserving of sympathy. By making reference to previous

activities by the CCC, the racist and incendiary nature of the group and the affiliated Patriotic Youth League were firmly established from the outset.

The second article referred to allegations levelled at the Sudanese community by the CCC, which were refuted by police. In further articles the police repeatedly refuted allegations of gang activity among Sudanese youth made by the CCC, with the implication such allegations were an overreaction to teenage rebellion.

By January 21, some articles had begun describing the experiences of the Sudanese refugees and the conflict which had displaced them. In one article – the first of a series in which the voices of Sudanese refugees were presented – a refugee described his life before and after his arrival in Newcastle. A January 22 article provided the first statement by Simon Parbek, whose opinion was repeatedly sought by the media as spokesperson for the Sudanese community. By this point, community leaders were speaking out in support of the Sudanese community, and the director of the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) was making statements about the successful integration of the refugees into the community and the acceptance shown by the Newcastle community generally. On January 22, statements by NSW and federal ministers condemning the CCC campaign were reported.

Following successful pro-refugee events on January 22, and the minimal support garnered by the anti- protest, the depiction of the Sudanese community became even more sympathetic, and the community of Newcastle was repeatedly lauded for its acceptance of the refugees.

On January 29, a long article in the weekend edition of the Newcastle *Herald* gave an overview of the recent events and contextualised the issues nationally and globally. This article described the historical background to the refugee flows out of Sudan and contextualised the difficulties some of the Sudanese refugees had experienced in adapting to life in Newcastle. It also described the changing cultural demographics of both Australia and Newcastle, touching upon the role of migrants in maintaining economic growth.

### **Sudanese voices**

Two members of the Sudanese community (one male, one female) were interviewed, and their experiences reported in three articles (January 20, 24 and 25). These appeared on the same page as descriptive articles reporting on the anti- and pro-activities within the Newcastle community. They appeared to be direct attempts to humanise the refugees through naming and speech. They were sympathetic portrayals, referring explicitly to the hardships experienced and the refugees' desire to lead a normal life and be accepted in their new community. Experiences of Sudanese refugees more generally were described in a further eight articles. Eight articles also reported on the responses and views of the Sudanese community, usually presented by community spokesperson Simon Parbek or the director of the MRC, Violetta Walsh. Both of these spokespeople referred numerous times to the contributions being made by the Sudanese refugees and their desire to become part of the Newcastle community.

### **Letters to the editor**

Four letters referring to the Sudanese community were published over the reporting period. Two letters were written by (male) Novocastrian church leaders and two by Novocastrian women. All the letters stated their support for the refugees and condemned the CCC's campaign. One refuted the allegations made by the CCC against the Sudanese community, while another referred to positive experiences of working with the Sudanese refugees.

### **Opinion pieces**

The first opinion piece appeared in the Newcastle *Herald* on January 21 ("The gift of refuge"). It was a mild condemnation of the anti-immigrant sentiment, but focused mainly on describing the historical background of Africa and Sudan to provide some context. It called upon those who were attempting to rally sentiment against the refugees to consider what the refugees had experienced before arriving in Australia. It pointed out that it was to be expected that such traumatised people would have some difficulty adapting to their new lives in Newcastle. It was a sympathetic but measured piece which attempted to place the Novocastrian incident into a wider context.

The second piece followed on January 25, by which point the sympathies of the Newcastle *Herald* and most Novocastrians were firmly established as lying with the Sudanese community. It described the acceptance and welcome displayed by those participating in the pro-refugee events, contrasting this with the minimal support garnered by the CCC rally. It also related the experiences of one Sudanese woman and her happiness with her new life in Newcastle. This was a congratulatory piece, displaying pride in the supportive response demonstrated by the Newcastle community in the face of the CCC's allegations and activities. Another opinion piece was published in the same edition, in the *Orbit* section, which is aimed at younger readers (the Newcastle *Herald* website describes *Orbit* as "designed for the Playstation generation, sending sms messages with one hand, dialing up music from an ipod with the other"). The CCC and PYL were mildly ridiculed through the contrasting of their tiny number of supporters with those who turned out to support the refugees. This piece described the CCC and their supporters as a small "unrepresentative bunch of tossers" who need not be taken seriously as a threat to the supportive, multicultural majority of Newcastle.

The final opinion piece was a long article published on January 26 and written by the 2004 winner of the City of Newcastle Medal. This piece touched on the experiences of the Sudanese refugees, but focused on the practical support offered by "ordinary" Novocastrians to the Sudanese community. It also contextualised the anti-immigrant sentiment, noting the cyclic nature of such debates. This piece called on Novocastrians to demonstrate their support in practical ways and to undermine the objections of the minority by forging friendships with those newly arrived to Newcastle.

### **CCC material**

A large number of articles published quotes from CCC materials. The quotation "Humanitarian aid for locals, not Sudanese gangbangers" was published four times by three media outlets (AAP News two days running, *Daily Telegraph* and *Townsville*

*Bulletin*) but not by the Newcastle *Herald*. The *Herald* was the only outlet to publish other quotations from the CCC materials. On January 19, an article quoted from the materials, calling for an “isolationist policy rather than letting them [Sudanese] run riot in our neighbourhoods...”. On January 20, police refuted allegations in the materials that “Sudanese teenagers now roam the streets in ... gangs copying the African-American gang culture” and that “regular gang attacks now occur ... putting a dampener on the night life of locals”. The same materials stated that the CCC supported “isolated asylum” for Sudanese refugees as “Novocastrians will not be dictated to by refugee advocate loonies, universities or the council”. In a January 21 article, the PYL released a media statement that it would cancel the proposed CCC rally (which still went ahead) in the light of growing opposition “to keep our suburbs free of violence, freaks and loonies”.

Following the small CCC rally on January 22, Jim Saleam, a prominent anti-immigration activist, was quoted in two articles, and mentioned in others. In a *Sun Herald* article on January 23, Dr Saleam blamed the small turnout on Newcastle’s mayor, claiming he made a “threat that he would bring a large crowd of people to ensure that this meeting did not take place” and consequently people stayed away in fear of “mob action” if “the ferals and Trotskyites got loose ...”. Dr Saleam repeated these accusations in the Newcastle *Herald* in a January 24 article.

### **Image of Concerned Citizens Collective**

Over a series of articles the Newcastle *Herald* conveyed a sense of ineptitude and paranoia in their depictions of the CCC and PYL. By linking the CCC to the PYL in the first report, and describing a racist incident at Newcastle University involving PYL members, the CCC was initially depicted as potentially dangerous and overtly racist. This was contrasted with the majority Newcastle community, described as “compassionate and welcoming” by the MRC director. Allegations made by the CCC against members of the Sudanese community were repeatedly refuted by police and denied by church leaders and others working within the community. The continuous reporting of these unsubstantiated allegations implied that the CCC was fabricating and exaggerating problems to advance its own racist agenda.

The CCC attempted to soften its image by stating that “the situation in Sudan is abhorrent” and that it rejected “hatred of people simply because they are of a different race”. Instead, it restated its aims of slowing the threat immigration posed to the Australian economy and maintaining the isolation of refugee groups from the wider community. In a series of articles published from January 20-24, the CCC laid the blame for “refugee problems” on “refugee advocate loonies”, universities, the local council, “freaks and loonies”, governments, the business community and “feral bands of refugee supporters”. They also accused Newcastle’s mayor of “intimidating people from attending” the CCC rally to explain the very small number of attendees.

On the day of the rally, one article reported on statements published on the PYL website, asserting that “patriotic activists” from around Australia were arriving in Newcastle “to defend free speech and help Newcastle locals in their fight for freedom and local democracy”. Following the rally, which the PYL website proclaimed a “shining success”, as reported on January 25, numerous articles referred to the miniscule turn-out at the CCC rally and compared it with the much larger numbers of Novocastrians who attended the pro-refugee events.

A January 24 article revealed that Dr Saleam, a prominent anti-immigration activist making public statements for the CCC, was himself the son of a Greek immigrant, highlighting the hypocrisy of the CCC's activities. A second CCC member was also a focus of the media reporting – Stuart McBeth, founder of the PYL. In early reports, Mr McBeth refused to comment to the media about either the PYL or the CCC but provided statements to the media reiterating the groups' stance. Four days after the rally, the *Herald* reported that Mr McBeth's employment with the Salvation Army was being reconsidered in the light of his involvement with the CCC and his organisational role in the rally. The January 26 article also revealed that Mr McBeth had been suspended from his work in 2004 for his role in the PYL campaign against foreign students at Newcastle University. An article on January 28 reported that Mr McBeth's employment with the Salvation Army had been terminated, as his activities were in direct conflict with the organisation's ethos. Both articles noted that Mr McBeth had failed to comment to the Newcastle *Herald* despite repeated requests.

Over the course of the reporting, the CCC, initially viewed as a possible threat, was instead portrayed as an inept, hypocritical and somewhat hysterical group, out of touch with the majority of both the Newcastle and Australian communities.

### **Headlines**

Only the first of the articles in the Newcastle *Herald* used the term "racist" in the headline. Other headlines referred to the "immigration debate" or "anti-immigration" rally, while a number referred to community support for the Sudanese refugees. Four articles contained "Sudan" or "Sudanese" in the headline, while six headlines referred to the difficult transition between life in Sudan and in Newcastle.

### **Coverage outside Newcastle**

The AAP Newswire published two substantial reports on the incident, on January 20 and 21. The first reported on the CCC campaign and the proposed rally, including a quote from anti-immigration activist Jim Saleam. It also quoted Erin Killion, an organiser of one of the pro-refugee gatherings, asserting that the majority of Novocastrians supported the Sudanese community. Ms Killion did not appear in any of the Newcastle *Herald* articles. The article reported on the links between the CCC and the PYL, and referred to the incident at Newcastle University in 2004. The second article reported on the NSW Government's condemnation of the CCC campaign, including the Justice Minister's intention to monitor the group closely. This article also made the only reference to Dr Saleam's 1991 jail sentence for his involvement in an attack on an African National Congress representative living in Australia.

The *Daily Telegraph* provided the most substantial coverage outside Newcastle. A January 21 article reported on the CCC campaign and the counter-campaign by pro-refugee activists. It also reported that police had rejected the allegations made by the CCC against the Sudanese community. A very brief article on January 22 reported that the NSW Government had condemned the CCC campaign and that the Justice Minister had ordered the group be closely monitored. The final article, on January 28, provided extensive coverage of the anti- and pro- campaigns, but focused on the dismissal of Stuart McBeth from his employment with the Salvation Army. It also

reported that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission had warned the CCC that their activities might breach the Racial Discrimination Act.

The *Sun Herald* published a substantial report on January 23, referring to the small CCC rally and the larger pro-refugee gatherings. It quoted the contrasting opinions of the Newcastle mayor, Sudanese spokesperson Simon Parbek and anti-immigration activist Jim Saleam. The *Townsville Bulletin* published a brief report on January 21 referring to the CCC campaign, but it made no mention of the proposed rally.

### **Other issues**

During the reporting period, only two Newcastle *Herald* articles referring to the Sudanese community were not related to the critical incident. The first was a brief sport story on January 28, reporting on an upcoming exhibition basketball game between members of Newcastle's Sudanese community. The second article was a January 29 report on a police investigation into an alleged sexual assault by Sudanese youths. The report made no reference to the ethnic or cultural origins of the victims. It noted that Jim Saleam had referred to the alleged assault at the CCC rally on January 22. This report was located on page 6 of the edition, alongside two analytical pieces, one referring to the critical incident and the other to experiences of Sudanese teenagers attending a Newcastle high school.

### **Image of Newcastle community**

The articles over the reporting period portrayed the majority of the Newcastle community as being accepting and supportive of the Sudanese community. In the first report (January 19), the MRC director described the CCC campaign as reflecting only a "small sub-set" within the community, stating that Newcastle had been "extremely compassionate and welcoming" toward the refugees. This set the tone for the following reports, in which the majority Newcastle community was repeatedly described as supportive and inclusive. On January 20, the *Herald* first reported the proposed pro-refugee gatherings being organised in opposition to the CCC rally, followed by a January 21 report providing explicit details. The report stated that Newcastle's mayor would be speaking at the "Newcastle Welcome Town" gathering organised by the MRC, while the second gathering was described as a "refugees are welcome, racists are not" demonstration. The time and location for each gathering was reported in the article but only the location of the CCC rally was given. This article was entitled "Community rallies behind Sudanese".

Following the January 22 rallies, the *Herald* reported on the substantial turnout at both of the pro-refugee gatherings. Three articles referred to the applause and random hugging bestowed on a group of Sudanese people who arrived at the first gathering to express their thanks. These articles congratulated the Newcastle community for its demonstrations of support and welcome, asserting that this was the true face of Newcastle. The tiny number of supporters who gathered at the CCC rally were dismissed as being out of touch with the views and actions of the majority.

### **3. Brawl – Islington Park (reporting period October 23-November 6, 2005)**

Four articles were published in the Newcastle *Herald* during this period, all reporting on an “interracial” brawl in a Newcastle park that occurred on October 20, 2005. The first article, published on October 31, reported that Sudanese, Aboriginal and Caucasian people were involved but that police had stated the Sudanese men were from Sydney, not Newcastle. The MRC director stated that no local Sudanese people were involved and that some community members had tried to intervene in the altercation. A November 1 article reported that police were seeking community assistance to determine the cause of the incident, and were hoping to speak to Sudanese elders. This article also stated that Sudanese, Aboriginal and Caucasian people were involved in the brawl. A November 4 article reported on the outcome of a meeting between Sudanese community elders and Newcastle police. It reported that police still did not know what had caused the incident but that the elders had reported that no Aboriginal people were involved.

The final article, on November 5, was a long piece providing an overview of the incident and responses from various community members. Leaders from the Sudanese community made statements about the need for the refugees to adapt to Australian laws, attitudes and cultural differences. The MRC director stated that “our local Sudanese are law abiding ... They are well aware anything they do can trigger a public response”. The Newcastle Ethnic Communities Council president praised both the enthusiasm of the refugees in adapting to their new community and the level of acceptance offered by the wider Newcastle community.