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Religious Racism and the Media: Representations of Muslim Women in the Australian Print Media

Abstract

In analysing two Australian daily newspapers, the *Australian* and the *Advertiser*, this article argues that there is a climate of hostility and negativity towards Islam and Muslims currently in operation in the Australian print media. The article highlights specific instances of racism, stereotyping and general negativity towards Islam and Muslims. Examples of negative representations of Islam and Muslims included 'Muslims as terrorists', 'oppressed Muslim women', and 'Islam as a violent, barbaric and backward religion'. The article also discusses the scarcity of positive representations as well as the ambivalence of the few 'positive' representations that did appear during the collection timeframe. This article argues that, given the role and influence of the print media in Australia, daily newspapers are culpable, or at least complicit, in the religious racism experienced by Australian Muslims on a daily basis. Interviews with a number of Muslim women in South Australia (aged 18-30 years) provide arguments that negative media representations not only impact on the ways they are positioned and treated by others in society, but also result in young Muslim women viewing the media with cynicism and mistrust. This has implications for continuing relations between the Australian Muslim community and the Australian media.

Introduction

There is increasing anecdotal evidence that there is a link between racist or negative representations of Muslims/Islam in the media and the religious racism that Muslims in majority non-Muslim countries experience in their daily lives. Recent studies in Australia have focused on the increase in racism and racist attitudes towards Muslims (Mubarak 1996; Dunn 2001; Deen 2003; Dunn 2003; NWS Anti-Discrimination Board 2003; Lygo 2004; Manning 2004). A number of these have also focused on the increasing and overwhelmingly negative and hostile representations of Muslims/Islam in the media and current racist tensions (NSW Anti-Discrimination Board 2003; Lygo 2004; Manning 2004). Similar overseas studies have also identified these trends (Jackson 1996; Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998; Media Awareness Network 1998; Parker-Jenkins, Haw, Khan and Irving 1998; Franks 2000; Shain 2003).

Through a discussion of representations of Islam and Muslims in two Australian newspapers, the paper argues that there is a climate of hostility and negativity towards Islam and Muslims currently in operation in the

Australian print media which reflects and contributes to practices of religious racism. While this paper analyses media texts as to whether they are positive or negative representations, this is done with an understanding that all texts are contextual, polysemic and slippery. To attribute meaning is a matter of perspective, context and judgment in which individual analyses may differ. Therefore for any text there are always a range of meanings or 'readings' (Fowler 1991; Allan 1999; Bignell 2002; Thwaites, Davis and Mules 2002). The readings provided in this paper may not always be the 'preferred' or dominant reading but this is because my analytical perspective is as a young Muslim woman, a PhD candidate, offering insights into the discourses of negativity and hostility that I receive from these texts but which others may not always be aware of. These images are read from the perspective of young Muslim women, both through the interpretation of the researcher and through the words of interviewees who discussed a selection of images. This 'resistant' reading, or reading by those who are not the main audience addressed, is an important aspect of deconstructing or analyzing different ways that texts may be interpreted.

Methods and Methodology

The research for this paper comes from semi-structured interviews carried out with ten young Muslim women in South Australia as well as a content analysis of two major daily newspapers. The women whose voices are presented in this paper were participants in a PhD research project into the lives and experiences of young Muslim women in South Australia. They were aged between 18 and 30, actively self-identified as Sunni Muslim and had lived in South Australia for at least five years. Seven of the women wore hijab, while the other three were thinking about doing so. One of the women was a new Muslim while the others were all born and raised as Muslims. The women came from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Afghan, Uzbeck, Indigenous Australian, Turkish, Lebanese, Anglo-Saxon, Eritrean and Pakistani. Many of the women were recruited to the study through a young Muslim women's religious study group (usra) which met informally on a weekly basis to pray together and discuss various aspects of faith and spirituality. All of the women have at least one university degree (or were university students at the time of the interview) from an Australian university. Four of the women are married and two of them each have a child; of the remaining six women, one is divorced, one is engaged and four are single.

The media analysis used in this study was conducted during the period of 1 June 2003 to 31 July 31 2003. Interviews with young Muslim South Australian women began in August and it was important to have a record of any incidents or media stories that may have influenced the way the interviewees responded to certain questions. The *Australian* and the *Advertiser* newspapers were chosen for the study because these are the two daily newspapers with the biggest circulation and readership in South Australia where the interviews were completed. In total 179 articles/images were selected, 53 of which came from the *Advertiser* and 126 came from the *Australian* or the *Weekend Australian*. The representations discussed in this paper are drawn from this two-month period.

Representations of Muslim Women in the Newspapers

A limited number of newspaper articles printed during the data collection period specifically referred to Muslim women. Out of 179 articles collected, only ten represented Muslim women in any way. Most, seven, were either the familiar stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman (ie dressed in black, often with face veils, subordinated to Muslim men, concerned only with domestic issues such as house and family) (Shohat and Stam 1994; Kahf 1999), or a representation of them as violent and threatening (Jackson 1996;

Shaheen 2000). The following sections focus on these representations.

Women Warriors

One representation of Muslim women that was quite unusual was that of the violent, threatening (or potentially threatening) and/or armed woman. The representation of the armed and/or violent Muslim was usually reserved for Muslim men. Out of 179 articles collected during the data period, 153 portrayed Muslim men as violent (usually as terrorists). However only 5 of the 179 articles portrayed Muslim women in this way. The first instance of this representation was an image accompanying a story about the rising tensions between Iran and western opponents to Iran's nuclear programme in the *Weekend Australian* ('Editor' June 21-22, 2003:1) ([Image 1](#)) The story itself bears no relevance to my analysis, however, as Islam and Muslims are not mentioned at all. The colour photograph appeared on the front of the 'Editor' liftout taking up almost the whole page, while the story appeared on page seven.

It is unclear to most non-Iranian readers whether the image is of supporters of the Iranian government, or, of opposition protesters[1]. Muslim women are represented as an active threat (brandishing guns) rather than the more usual representation as an object of pity or empathy. Among the range of possible meanings, it could be that these women are members of an official military organisation (state army or militant group) at a funeral for a fallen comrade and are 'presenting arms' as a tributary salute. Alternatively they may be protesting against violence and the placing of a white rosebud (a symbol of peace, purity and femininity) in the barrel of their guns (a symbol of violent masculinity, death and destruction) is an attempt to subvert the concept that military violence is a solution to any issue[2]. That the headline 'BOXED IN' appears beneath a group of women completely covered in long, loose robes, implies that, not only is the Iranian government feeling trapped by its opponents, but these women also feel trapped, hemmed in and oppressed by their clothing, their religion and their culture. The lack of a caption or attribution of the image leaves it open to interpretation. Indeed, it may be argued that the ambiguity of the image reinforces western constructions of Muslim women as an enigma.

On July 7 the *Australian* ran a story about two female 'suicide bombers'[3] who detonated their explosives at a rock concert in Russia (Campbell July 7, 2003:11). 'Deadly revenge of the "black widows"' described Russian concerns with the increasing numbers of mainly Chechen (Muslim) women who were carrying out attacks in Russia. Campbell writes that 'their emergence was an ominous break with the patriarchal Chechen tradition', going on to report the different explanations as to why these women chose to take part in the attacks: 'Russian officials say the onslaught has been modelled on the tactics of Arab terrorists who have taken control of the Chechen rebels' war of independence'. By contrast, observers say it is the brutality of Moscow's counterinsurgency campaign in Chechnya that has pushed women, traditionally keepers of the home rather than warriors, into the conflict' (Campbell July 7, 2003:11).

The description of these women as 'black widows' is evocative of the lethally poisonous species of spider the Black Widow (*Latrodectus hesperus*) known in western popular culture because 'the female is the deadlier of the species' (the female often kills and eats the male spider after mating). There is a long cultural association in the west between female killers and the Black Widow spider. As a result of stereotypical ideas about women's 'natural' tendency to nurture rather than harm, women who kill others (for whatever reason) are often seen as going against their 'nature' and defying their womanhood. Consequently when a woman kills she is constructed as being

particularly dangerous. The representation of the Chechen bombers as 'unnatural' women plays upon these gender constructions. However, the Chechens who are fighting Russian rule are also represented as particularly desperate and dangerous because it appears they are encouraging women to cross the 'normal' gender boundaries.

This article is based on the pre-existing assumption that Chechen (Muslim) women are always, and only, concerned with domestic tasks at the behest of their domineering 'patriarchal' menfolk. This makes their role in the war against Russia particularly startling. However, it is not Chechen men's opinions, which are reported, but rather Campbell's own assumptions and expectations. Rather than the article being concerned with the details of the bombing at the concert it is more concerned with the phenomenon of women warriors. Although this particular article does not state explicitly that the Chechen women were Muslims it does contain an anecdote describing the blowing up of a military personnel carrier en route from Russia to Chechnya in which a 'Chechen woman shrieked '"Allahu Akbar" (God is great)' (Campbell July 7, 2003:11). The discussion of the 'Arab terrorist groups' is a further implication of Islam drawing on long-standing western assumptions concerning armed Arab groups.

On July 31 the *Australian* ran a story entitled 'Voice of Saddam honours his "martyr" sons' (Philp July 31, 2003:7) which appeared shortly after the deposed leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, lost his two sons and political heirs in an American bombing raid. Accompanying the story was a large colour photograph of a graffitied wall in Baghdad. The image was captioned '**Resistance Call**: An Iraqi woman walks past Arabic graffiti reading "Struggle with your souls and money, don't sit still" in central Baghdad' (Philp July 31, 2003:7) ([Image 2](#))

When the photograph is analysed in conjunction with the caption the implication is that the woman is taking notice of the graffiti and is somehow a potential threat to the American troops and their allies, including Australia. That she is walking across the frame of the photograph conveys a sense of purpose which, combined with the message on the wall, her facelessness and her obviously Islamic identity, is menacing. Although she is not represented as carrying out violence, she is positioned as a figure of latent violence that could erupt at any moment - possibly in retaliation for the deaths of Saddam Hussein's sons.

Other Representations – A Book Review

Representations of Muslims, including Muslim women, were not confined to the obvious 'political' or 'foreign' news spaces but were sometimes located in sections such as the financial section, book reviews and special profiles. Some of these representations were the most offensive and blatant examples of racism and negativity to be found in either newspaper. This following section discusses one representation of Muslims and Islam that occurred in a non-news section of the newspaper.

In the *Weekend Australian* Books liftout on June 7-8 a book review by Greg Sheridan of Bernard Lewis' book The Crisis of Islam (Sheridan June 7-8, 2003:10-11) was placed on the same page as another book review, Peter Rodger's review of Barnaby Rogerson's *The Prophet Mohammed* (sic): *A Biography*. Greg Sheridan has been a foreign affairs journalist for many years. He has spent a significant amount of time in Asia and is considered the 'leading foreign affairs analyst in Australian journalism' (The Australian 2003). In his opinion pieces he often takes a conservative approach to issues and has long been a strong advocate of neo-liberal policies in relation to globalisation, free trade, Australia's engagement with Asia and Australia's alliance with the USA (ABC 2002). Peter Rodgers is described in the by-line

as 'a former diplomat and journalist with wide experience of the Islamic world' (Rodgers June 7-8, 2003:10-11). In fact Rodgers was the former Australian ambassador to Israel (Rodgers 2003). As a journalist, he writes mostly on issues relating to Israel, which has never been considered part of the 'Islamic world'.

Sheridan's review began with a large headline proclaimed 'Behind the HATE' with the word 'hate' written in a much larger orange font while the preceding part of the headline was in standard large black font. The sub heading stated that 'Bernard Lewis offers a scholar's guide to why many Muslims see the West as the enemy' (Sheridan June 7-8, 2003:10-11).

Throughout his book review, Greg Sheridan's writing is marked by vitriolic language and a hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims. He extrapolates from Lewis' arguments that 'fundamentalism is a crisis of modernisation, in many ways an inevitable part of modernisation' and that this hostility to 'modernisation' by Muslims leads to 'hostility to the West, including Australia' (Sheridan June 7-8, 2003:10-11). Thus he equates Islam with backwardness and life in the 'west' with success and triumphant modernity. He mournfully states that one has to come to a

> melancholy conclusion [that] this psyche, and these causes, took a long time, more than a millennium, to build. They won't be changed easily or quickly. Nonetheless, Lewis is also surely right to think that the more successful Arab societies become, the more likely they are to change their minds about the West.
>
> (Sheridan June 7-8, 2003:10-11)

Sheridan's attitude towards Islam is aptly reflected in the accompanying photograph and caption which is placed to the upper right of the photograph and says '**Anti-modern**: Is Islam trapped in the past?' (Sheridan June 7-8, 2003:10-11) ([Image 3](#)). The photograph shows a group of Muslim men as well as women, and a child. The representation of the women in the photograph is a good example of common representations of Muslim women in Western media. They are covered completely in black including their faces. They are accorded no individuality or scope beyond the domestic: it is no coincidence that the child in the photograph is sitting near the women rather than near the men. The women are stationary, stagnating, stuck, and, while the men are also represented as 'backward', at least they are moving, making progress, going forward. The woman who is difficult to distinguish from the darkened doorway is symbolic of the Western view that Muslim women are viewed through the lens of Islam as insignificant, blending in with the domestic décor, trapped by the 'darkness' of Islam and Muslim societal expectations. The women's clothing, particularly their veils, are presented as being indicative of their backwardness and their uncivilised state as well as 'proof' of Islam's inferiority. Their appearances add credence to the contention that they are 'trapped in the past'. Thus these women embody 'backwardness', 'fundamentalism' and Islam. However, the child is wearing 'western' clothes, blue overalls and a t-shirt, and is therefore representative of the future of Islam; an imagined, possible future in which Muslim (women) have the chance to escape the 'traditions' and backwardness of the present.

Positive Representations?

While the overwhelming representation of Muslims in both the *Australian* and the *Advertiser* during June and July 2003 can be described as negative, a few articles presented Islam/Muslims in a different light. While these were positive in comparison to the representations already discussed, they were not articles that glowingly portrayed the Muslim community, or Islam, as a way of life. Interestingly each of these articles appeared in the *Advertiser*. It

may also be that, because the *Advertiser* is a tabloid in format and caters for a local South Australian readership, it places higher news value on 'human interest' stories with a local content than the *Australian*[4]. Even more interesting, there were no positive representations of Muslim men, or of Islam, only of Muslim women. It may be argued that this is because Muslim women are seen as less threatening than either Islam or Muslim men, and that this then allows for the occasional positive (or at least ambivalent) representation to occur (Ang 1996:36-49).

On July 17 Rebecca Jenkins wrote that 'Muslims and Arabs speak out on prejudice' (Jenkins July 17, 2003:28). This was an article that raised awareness of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) consultations with Muslim and Arab Australians on the issue of racism. The article was accompanied by a photograph of a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and whose face is reflected in the glass fronting a tapestry of religious verses (Image 4). The article, including the photograph, takes up only a quarter of the page. Indicating the relative insignificance the editor gave to this story, it is on p 17 while most of the page is devoted to an advertisement for the TXU electricity company featuring a dog lying at the entrance of a kennel ('We're excited by electricity even if you're not').

This is one of only two occasions in which a Muslim woman's voice was heard in either newspaper. The woman featured in the photo, Arnesa Pleho, is quoted describing the difficulties some Muslim women face in the community on a day-to-day basis. The tone of the article is sympathetic and encouraging of those women who were taking the opportunity to speak about their experiences. However, it may also be argued that the representation of Ms Pleho and other Muslim women in this article is simply a 'new angle' on the popular stereotype of Muslim women as suffering and in need of assistance. Instead of these women being seen as victims of Islam they are positioned as victims of the wider Australian community. A follow-up article appeared on July 21 entitled 'Education needed to stop prejudice' (Caruso July 21, 2003:8). This brief article suggested that one solution to racism was education. The only voice heard in this article is that of the South Australian Equal Opportunity Commissioner, Linda Matthews, who spoke about the importance of finding 'solutions'. Muslim women, who were ostensibly the focus of this article, were not given a voice.

The second instance where a Muslim woman was given a voice was in an article entitled 'Women who make the world better' (Williams June 21, 2003:5). This was an article that announced the winners of the Women of Achievement Awards. It focused on the winner of the award for services to the multicultural community, an Iraqi refugee, Ferial Al Khil Khali. Ms Al Khil Khali is a volunteer assisting refugee women with language and providing sewing lessons, as well as caring for her four children and her husband. The accompanying photograph shows Ms Al Khil Khali with three of her children and her husband. She and her three daughters are wearing hijab (Image 5).

Ms Al Khil Khali is portrayed as an exceptional woman who overcame a series of obstacles in her life and still manages to assist others in need. Although her religious identity is only mentioned as the precipitating factor in becoming a refugee (her and her family's lives were under threat from the Iraqi government for their religion), it was nonetheless an unusually *ordinary* representation of a Muslim. In fact, this representation was the closest either newspaper came in June and July 2003 to representing a Muslim as a valuable member of society. This story also confirms popular ideas of Australia as the 'lucky country' in which migrants and refugees can build new and successful lives. It invites readers to think well of themselves for being part of a nation that provides people with a new and better start to life[5]. This portrayal thus suggests that, for a Muslim woman to become

'successful', she must locate herself in a 'western' liberal democracy which can offer her the 'freedom', 'equality of opportunities and skills which her 'backward' third-world (and predominantly Muslim) originary country cannot. This representation sets up a hierarchy in which Australia, as a free and welcoming 'western' country, is seen as superior to Iraq, an oppressive and hostile 'third-world' nation.

Continuing this theme, as well as representing Muslim women in a positive way, was the small article that appeared in the *Advertiser* on June 23 entitled 'Enjoying fruits of freedom' (Devlin June 23, 2003:12). This article discussed the opportunity that many Afghan women refugees had to attend school in Adelaide. The article says that these learning opportunities are very important for Afghan refugee women because many of them were prevented from attending school during the reign of the Taliban. While the representation shows women taking control of their lives, it also draws upon other, less positive representations such as patriarchal Muslim men who deny women the opportunity to attend school. Again the message is that Australia is the lucky country where these women gain an education and the professional skills that will facilitate a prosperous future. Interestingly this article appears in the 'Articles of Faith' section devoted to faith-based issues. Apart from these women wearing hijab, there is nothing to connect the story or the photograph to religious issues. These women are effectively reduced to a symbol of their religion, the hijab, rather than being seen as individuals with a story, who simply also happen to be Muslim[6].

Impact of Representations on Muslim Women in South Australia

The young women who were interviewed for this research all had very strong opinions and attitudes towards the representations of Muslims and Islam in the media. As part of the interview process they were shown a selection of images which depicted Muslim women, but not all of which were selected from the two-month period of the content analysis. They were asked to give a response to the representation of the Muslim women in the images. One of the images that they responded to most strongly was the photograph of Janette Howard (wife of the then Australian Prime Minister) speaking to Nazra Ibrahim (Image 6). This image appeared on the front page of the *Australian* with a caption that Nazra Ibrahim whispered to Janette Howard about family and children during a Prime Ministerial (John Howard) 'meet and greet' at a mosque as part of the 2001 Federal election campaign (Rintoul October 18, 2001:1). This particular image presented Muslim women in Australia as heavily veiled in black, as focused solely on personal familial and domestic issues, as being too oppressed and subordinated to even speak above a whisper and as inferior to Janette Howard who was presented as the embodiment of 'liberal', tolerant, sophisticated and liberated 'western' women.

The interviewees strongly rejected this dichotomy as false and misleading. For them, Nazra Ibrahim's willingness to attend a public event, be photographed by newspaper photographers, and to meet the Prime Ministers' entourage was evidence of her personal freedom, her intelligence and desire to be involved in non-familycentric events. They rejected the notion that Nazra Ibrahim's choice of veiling automatically meant that she was 'oppressed' or 'backward' and they questioned whether in fact she *had* only spoken to Mrs Howard about 'family and children', and if so, whether or not this was no more than polite chit-chat between two women trying to make conversation about a topic of mutual interest.

The primary feeling that Australian mainstream media representations of Muslims evoked was anger. For one interviewee, Ellen, this anger was not simply a response to media representations per se, but included a discussion of how these negative media representations impacted on the way non-

Muslim Australians treated her. Another interviewee, Zakiyah, agreed with this but said that her anger was directed at the whole media industry rather than only at specific journalists or outlets. Zakiyah tried not to let her anger affect her daily life. She did this by cultivating a 'thick skin' that allowed her to guard against the self-destructive effects of anger. Latifa and Barakah also said that they tried hard not to 'let it annoy me too much' (Latifa) because they did not want their anger to rule their lives. While most of this anger was directed towards those in the news media, one of the interviewees said that negative reports or stories about Muslims made her angry with Muslims for not taking adequate measures to counteract these representations. This, however, was an isolated response[7].

Often the emotion or response that accompanied anger was frustration. Many of the women were frustrated by their belief that, no matter what measures Muslims took to counter negative representations, the media industry appears determined to maintain the perpetuation the stereotypes. As Barakah said, 'it's the powerlessness that gets to me the most'. The anger and frustration at constantly being bombarded with negative images and stereotypes resulted in significant emotional distress for some of the women. Kulthum said that she doesn't 'like watching the news anymore because I get too frustrated or I'll end up crying because of what I see and because I've got so little power to actually stop any of it'. Naima, too, avoided the news media as much as possible because of the distress it causes her[8].

Despite all the negativity that media representations caused, the women were able to create spaces for laughter, as became apparent when the women commented on specific media representations. The women did not find the representations comic per se, but rather, they found them so 'ridiculous' (Barakah) that they became funny. This laughter was a strategy through which the women enacted their agency and resisted the subordinating implications of racist representations[9].

The Muslim women interviewed in the Canadian study (Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998) argued that they would like to see Muslim women represented in the media in capacities other than as the embodiment of Islam or the Canadian Muslim community. As one participant put it:

> Why can't someone come and ask me, like 'what is the best way
> to compost?'. You know, why can't we know about those things?
> Why can't we have an opinion about Free Trade?
>
> (Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998:32)

The desire for Muslim women to be represented in ways that move beyond populist images and stereotypes was also strongly articulated by the women in this study. However, as in the Canadian research, a number of the women in this study described their attempts to engage with the media and directly challenge these entrenched attitudes towards Muslim women. They did this by 'writing letters to the editor' (Latifa) and taking part in television, radio and print media interviews. All these women said that their efforts, although not wasted, were insignificant in bringing about long-term change – an attitude which was mirrored by Jafri's Canadian participants (Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998:39-45). The frustration that they experience has, for each interviewee, led to a sense of disillusionment and cynicism towards all sectors of the Australian and international media. This lack of trust does not bode well for the women's wish that Muslim women and the media in South Australian and Australia (and more broadly) develop a more harmonious and understanding relationship in the future.

Conclusions

It is clear that the group of young Muslim women in my study believe that ongoing and persistent negative representations of Muslims in the media have a direct impact on their daily lives. For these women, such media representations mean that readers/viewers in the broader community hold an inaccurate concept of what it means to be a Muslim woman. Often these inaccurate ideas lead directly to racist stereotyping, abuse and discrimination, all of which have a damaging effect on the women who bear the brunt of religious racism. Despite – or perhaps because – they lead lives that often directly contradict dominant media representations of Muslims and Islam, the women in this study continued to feel threatened, degraded and angered by images and ideas such as 'the oppressed Muslim woman' and 'Islam as a violent and backward religion'. Other research indicates that these negative representations are on the rise in the Australian media (Deen 2003; NSW Anti-Discrimination Board 2003; Lygo 2004; Manning 2004). Until the media industry re-evaluates and re-thinks its attitudes and ideas towards Muslims and Islam, Muslim women in Australia will continue to experience religious racism on a daily basis. This is not a comforting prospect.

Notes

1. Although this image is indecipherable to most of The Australian's readers, an Iranian colleague told me that in an Iranian context it is clear that these women are members of one of the all-women army divisions of the official state Iranian army. They are dressed in official uniform.

2. This same Iranian colleague also explained that, within an Iranian context, the white rosebud is understood to be a symbol of womanhood, peace and purity but is closely associated with the post-revolution women's equality movement (supported by the Ayatollah) which led directly to the establishment of such institutions as women-only military divisions. Hence, the white rosebud in an Iranian context has quite different meanings to the western notions of passive femininity.

3. I use quotation marks to signal the debate surrounding the use of this term, eg for a discussion see Norris, Kern and Just 2003.

4. Rupert Murdoch's News Limited company owns both the Australian and the Advertiser. However, they cater to significantly different readership profiles. The Australian claims to be the nation's 'foremost agenda-setting newspaper' with an interest in the 'big issues' facing Australia (The Australian 2004). It boasts a weekday readership of 459000 with its average reader being highly educated, in a high socio-economic grouping, interested in arts, culture, finance and industry as well as local and international politics (The Australian 2004). The journalists and columnists who write for the Australian come from a wide range of positions on the political spectrum, from right to left, and consequently the articles reflect this range of opinion. The Advertiser is a much bigger newspaper than the Australian, but which targets a local South Australian audience. It is read by 580000 people each weekday and most of these are in the Adelaide (capital and largest city of South Australia) metropolitan area (The Advertiser 2004). Although the Advertiser used to be a broadsheet newspaper, its current format as a tabloid targets a lower socio-economic grouping than the Australian and focuses heavily on South Australian issues, sport and popular entertainment in keeping with tabloid conventions. As a tabloid newspaper the journalists and columnists often utilise a populist approach when discussing significant issues. This enhances notions of 'us' and 'them' and can give the impression that the newspaper is more 'right-wing' or conservative than it would otherwise seem.

5. Another reading of this article is that it fits within a prevailing framing of

the Iraq War as necessary to liberate people such as Ms Al Khil Khali from the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein (who is the reason why they are refugees). This 'angle' also makes Ms Al Khil Khali's story more newsworthy than that of, for example, a Bosnian Muslim refugee.

6. This article could be connected to religion if it is interpreted to argue that an 'extremist' expression of religion in the form of the Taliban regime denied these women an education in Afghanistan, which they can now gain, free of the Taliban's control.

7. Although this was an isolated attitude within this study, there are other examples of young Muslims expressing this attitude, eg in studies in the United States by Peek (Peek 2003) and in Canada by Jafri (Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998).

8. This anger and frustration was mirrored by the responses of Canadian Muslim women (Jafri and Afghan Women's Organization 1998) as well as young New York Muslims who were interviewed regarding their experiences post-September 11, 2001 (Akram 2002).

9. Laughter as a strategy of resistance and emotional distancing is discussed in research into non-white Britons' experiences of racism in sport (Long 2000) and the experiences of young Muslim Australian women in a co-educational public school (Imtoual 2002).

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